



# Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign

**E-Newsletter  
Volume I, Issue II – December 2003**

Greetings Colleagues:

Thank you for your enthusiastic response to the first Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign E-Newsletter that premiered in October! Due to your participation and interest, over 200 additional professionals and practitioners have been added to our online community.

**The Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign** is surging ahead. Ten Making Connections Media Outreach Initiative sites (local public television stations and/or community organizations) have been selected for the first round of outreach grants geared toward faith and community linkages to create dialogue around Reentry.

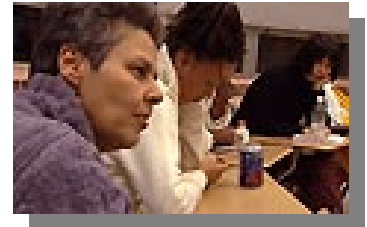
These ten sites have been selected as initial grantees and are engaged in local planning efforts for the Reentry campaign: KLRN/San Antonio; WYES/New Orleans; KET/Louisville; Milwaukee Public Television; The Metro Denver Black Church Initiative; Detroit Public Television; The Interdenominational Theological Center/Atlanta; CPTV/Hartford; WETA/Washington, DC; and KQED/Oakland. Descriptions of grant activities will be profiled in upcoming e-newsletters.

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## **WHAT I WANT MY WORDS TO DO TO YOU / Airing on PBS stations December 16, 2003**

Part of public television's acclaimed P.O.V. series, this documentary offers an unprecedented look into the minds and hearts of women inmates of New York's Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. The film goes inside a writing workshop led by playwright Eve Ensler, consisting of fifteen women, most of whom were convicted of murder. Through a series of exercises and discussions, the women, including former Weather Underground members Kathy Boudin and Judith Clark, delve into and expose the most terrifying places in themselves, as they grapple with the nature of their crimes and their own culpability. The film culminates in an emotionally charged prison performance of the women's writing by acclaimed actresses Glenn Close, Marisa Tomei, Rosie Perez, Hazelle Goodman, and Mary Alice. The film was created/produced by Madeleine Gavin, Judith Katz, and Gary Sunshine. (Check local listings.)



To complement this powerful documentary, a **Discussion Guide for Youth Audiences** has been developed and written by Faith Rogow, Ph.D. Arlene F. Lee, director of the Federal Resource Center for Children of Prisoners (Resource Center), reviewed the guide. Outreach Extensions, which collaborated on the discussion guide, will implement a community outreach campaign to support its use. Requests for the guide in .pdf or Microsoft Word format should be sent to Denise Blake at [DeniseBlake1@aol.com](mailto:DeniseBlake1@aol.com).

The discussion guide is designed to help public television stations and community organizations use *WHAT I WANT MY WORDS TO DO TO YOU* to engage young people who are facing challenges related to incarceration and help them think more deeply about the issues raised in the documentary. Together, the discussion guide and film can be used to help youth reflect on their own lives, just as the inmates did in the film, or to gain greater understanding about a family member who is incarcerated.

### **Discussion Guide for Youth Audiences: Table of Contents**

*Introduction:* The Project. The Film. Why Use *WHAT I WANT MY WORDS TO DO TO YOU*? Audiences / Partners.

*Using WHAT I WANT MY WORDS TO DO TO YOU:* Things to Consider as You Plan. Preparing the Group.

*Exploring the Film:* Youth In General (All Kinds Of Groups). Children of Recently or Currently Incarcerated Family Members. Young People Who Have Been Arrested or Are At Risk of Being Incarcerated.

*Background Information:* Demographics. The Women in *WHAT I WANT MY WORDS TO DO TO YOU*. Resources.

### **Sample Discussion Questions and Writing Assignments**

Facilitators may choose various activities to involve youth. Several options are provided within each of four categories: discussion, writing, role play, or action. The guide also provides tips for workshop facilitation and for developing goals and ground rules for discussion.

#### **DISCUSSION (FOR ALL GROUPS)**

- What new thing(s) did you learn from this film? How do you think the new insight might change you?
- The inmates talk about the death penalty. What do you think government policy on the death penalty should be? How would you convince your political representatives to make laws that reflect your position?
- Before viewing the film, talk about what your perceptions are of prison and people who are in prison. Where do your ideas come from? What kinds of images do media usually present? Do you think media images of prison and prisoners are accurate? After viewing the film, talk about whether or not any of your ideas about prison or prisoners have changed and what sparked you to reconsider.
- What, if anything, do you think might have been different in the film if these had been male, rather than female inmates?
- Cynthia Berry believes that justice will not be served until “God takes for me what I took from him [my victim].” How do you define justice? Do you think our courts, prisons, and jails achieve justice? If you could re-design the judicial system, what, if anything, would you change?

**WRITING:** Choose one of the following writing prompts that are used in the film:

- Think of a question someone has asked you that you’ve never answered. Answer it.
- Describe an experience when someone surprised you with kindness.
- Write a thank you letter to someone who has helped you.

After writing, compare what you wrote to what the women in the film wrote. What is similar? What is different?

The Federal Resource Center for Children of Prisoners (Resource Center) will extend its involvement with the outreach campaign for WHAT I WANT MY WORDS TO DO TO YOU by distributing the documentary and discussion guide to its ten demonstration sites throughout the United States. Two sites, the Families in Crisis Center in Hartford and the Community Works - Roots Program in San Francisco, will conduct outreach demonstration projects. Both agencies offer families of prisoners an array of services such as parenting programs, social service programs, and case management and after-school programs for youth. They also have extensive experience in interactive group therapy with youth. Both sites will use the WHAT I WANT MY WORDS TO DO TO YOU discussion guide and film to help youth better understand how the women in the documentary used writing for self-exploration.

The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) operates the Resource Center in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections and with CWLA's partners: the American Correctional Association and the National Council on Crime and Delinquency. The Resource Center works to create better outcomes for children with incarcerated parents through research, information, resource development, and training.

In addition, several local public television stations, along with partnering community organizations, have initiated contacts with women's groups, writing workshops, local prisons, and faith-based organizations to host screenings, discussions, and other activities for WHAT I WANT MY WORDS TO DO TO YOU. Here are examples from Detroit Public Television and WHYY/Philadelphia.

Detroit Public Television (DPTV) plans to conduct a screening and panel discussion of WHAT I WANT MY WORDS TO DO TO YOU to be held prior to the program broadcast date of December 16, 2003. In the interest of serving those who might benefit the most from this program, DPTV proposes to target the event to criminal justice students at two nearby universities, Wayne State University and The University of Michigan (UM)-Dearborn. A special invitation will also be extended to interested staff at Big Brothers Big Sisters.

Panel members will include faculty from Wayne State and UM-Dearborn as well as representatives from reentry programs such as Women ARISE and Prison Fellowship. DPTV will use the opportunity to strengthen existing ties with both universities and to become better acquainted with community groups involved in reentry services. The station will distribute resource guides to all invitees and videotapes on request. It will also promote the broadcast at the screening, on-air, and on its Web site.

On the evening of December 9<sup>th</sup>, WHYY in Philadelphia will hold a screening/discussion of WHAT I WANT MY WORDS TO DO TO YOU for a targeted audience of writers, teachers of writing, and students. They will also invite people from organizations that have a prison orientation such as Books Behind Bars. WHYY's outreach event partner is a nonprofit organization called Blue Sky, which works with writers on the development of memoir and documentary art forms, and promotes the works as a means of bridging cultural ethnic divides. The screening will take place at the Prince Music Theater, a regional theater specializing in the development of the American musical. It also has film and education programs.

### **New REENTRY Documentaries**

We are pleased to announce that two new documentaries have been added to the Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign, bringing the total to 12! We'll bring you more information on each show as their airdates approach.

### **EVERY CHILD IS BORN A POET: The Life & Work of Piri Thomas / Airing on PBS April 6, 2004**

An incendiary mix of documentary, poetry, storytelling, drama, and performance, EVERY CHILD IS BORN A POET explores the life and work of Piri Thomas, the 75 year-old Afro-Cuban-Puerto



Rican author of the classic autobiographical novel, *Down These Mean Streets* (1967). The film traces Thomas' path from childhood to manhood in New York City's Spanish Harlem, *El Barrio*, from the 1930s through the 1960s: his parents' immigrant experience, home life during the Great Depression, membership in *barrio* youth gangs, his struggle to come to terms with his mixed-racial identity, travels as a teenage merchant marine, his heroin addiction, his notorious armed robbery of a Greenwich Village nightclub, his six years spent in prison, and his emergence as a writer.

Thomas' coming-of-age story is counter-pointed with verité scenes of his on-going work of forty-five years as an educator and activist empowering marginalized and incarcerated youth. A stylized, genre-spanning production, EVERY CHILD IS BORN A POET includes rare archival footage and still photographs, and provocative mixed-media artwork, as it examines Thomas' use of creative expression as a means of confronting poverty, racism, violence, and isolation. Pulsating with an original Latin Jazz score, EVERY CHILD IS BORN A POET is a riveting portrait of a life lived through struggle, self-discovery, and transformation. The film is produced/directed by Jonathan Robinson, When in Doubt Productions, Inc., in association with the Independent Television Service (ITVS) and Latino Public Broadcasting (LPB) with major funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB).

### **A HARD STRAIGHT / Airing on PBS, 2004 TBD**

A HARD STRAIGHT, by filmmaker Gora Toshima, chronicles the lives of persons formerly incarcerated facing what may prove to be their biggest challenge—reentering society after years of incarceration. Beginning on the day of their release from prison, this one-hour documentary follows formerly incarcerated men and women as they enjoy their newly regained freedom while negotiating the difficulties of returning to an uncaring and sometimes hostile society. Of the 600,000 prisoners who are released from jail every year, 50 percent of them will return there, the majority within 90 days. A HARD STRAIGHT exposes the truth behind the statistics and sheds a bright and unblinking light on the profound experience of doing time and trying to go straight.

### **PRISON LULLABIES Campaign Activity**

Congratulations to Brown Hats Productions! Lina Matta and Odile Isralson, producers of PRISON LULLABIES, have been garnering tremendous accolades at their recent screenings of the film. In the last several months, PRISON LULLABIES has been screened at the Westchester (New York) Film Festival, the Athens (Ohio) International Film Festival, and the United Nations Association Film Festival. The film has also received several awards, including Best Documentary, Annapolis Film Festival; Gold Award, The Aurora Awards; and the Audience Award for Best Documentary, Halfway to Hollywood Film Festival.

Upcoming screenings will take place at the St. Louis International Film Festival and Female Eye Film Festival, bringing more attention to this exceptional film and the Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign.

### **PRISON LULLABIES / Airdate TBD**

Filmed at Taconic, a medium security correctional facility located in the heart of Westchester County, New York, PRISON LULLABIES follows four women over a period of 16 months, from their time in prison, through their release, and to their reintegration into society. Pregnant at the time of their arrest for drug-related offenses, the women were given the rare opportunity to keep their babies with them while serving their sentences. They live with their babies on the nursery floor, separated from other inmates. PRISON LULLABIES is the first documentary to take an in-depth look at a nursery program and its long-term effects on the women who participate. It was produced and directed by Odile Isralson and Lina Matta, Brown Hats Productions.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) is supporting the **Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign** as part of the Making Connections Media Outreach Initiative (MCMOI), which is designed and managed by Outreach Extensions. The purpose of this vital outreach effort is to link public television stations to local stakeholders, which serve various constituencies, as a means to strengthen youth and families and build effective communities.



The Annie E. Casey Foundation

The [Making Connections Media Outreach Initiative](#) offers media support to local coalitions that are part of AECF's *Making Connections*, a multi-faceted, long-term effort to improve the life chances of vulnerable children by helping to strengthen their families and neighborhoods. The Foundation's intent is to stimulate and support a local movement that engages residents, civic groups, political leaders, grassroots groups, public and private sector leadership, and faith-based organizations in an effort to help transform tough neighborhoods into family-supportive environments.

[This E-Newsletter](#) is an electronic publication intended to keep you informed about news and events relating to the Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign.

For more information, please contact:

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We welcome the names/e-mail addresses of your colleagues so that we can send copies of this E-Newsletter to them as well.



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