



**PRISONER  
SOLIDARITY  
NETWORK**

**INTRO PACK**

# INTRODUCTION

The Prisoner Solidarity Network (PSN) is a group of people committed to dismantling the criminal justice system and building a society based on collective care and love for all life. Our members include people inside and outside of prisons. Some of us are ex-prisoners and some are children, partners or friends of people inside. Many of us are survivors of interpersonal and state violence. Some of us come to this work through our values rather than direct experience of the prison system.



# PRINCIPLES

## **We believe:**

1. That crime and harm are two different things. Some people are convicted of crimes but have not harmed anyone. Others do great harm to many people but are never convicted of a crime. For example, people can be convicted of crimes for shoplifting or begging while others are celebrated for polluting the environment and exploiting workers.
2. That the concept of crime developed alongside the criminal justice system to control and punish people who are in difficult situations, to reinforce systems of class divide and racism, and to contain people who might pose a threat to existing power structures. It continues to play this role today.
3. That violence is constant and widespread in our current society. While individuals might engage in violent behaviour, this does not mean that violence is in their nature. Harm and violence are caused by dysfunctional systems and cultures in society. Therefore we cannot prevent harm and violence by locking up individuals.

4. That all people are capable of causing harm to and being harmed by others. Whether or not we have been convicted of a crime, we all have a responsibility to respect the humanity of others and to try not to cause harm. Where we have harmed others, we all have a responsibility to try to make amends and should be supported to do this by our communities.

5. That the criminal justice system does not prevent harm and violence in wider society but in fact creates more of it. Locking people up creates devastation in their lives and the lives of their families, friends and communities. While hundreds of thousands are imprisoned each year, violence and suffering in our society and communities continue, with little to no support available for those who experience it. Politicians and the media constantly use 'public safety' to legitimise imprisonment but the criminal justice system does not keep us safe.

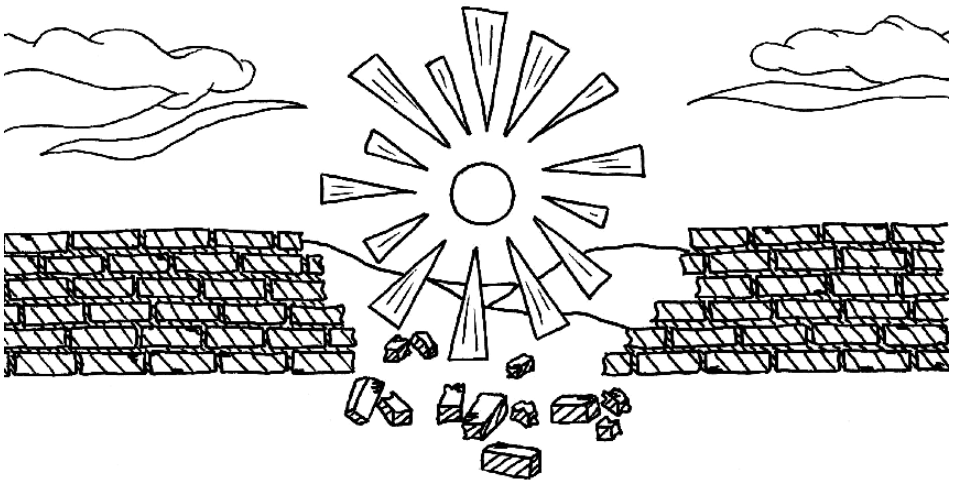
6. That nobody, regardless of any harm they may have caused to others, should have to endure the conditions regularly experienced by people in prison. These are conditions such as solitary confinement, lack of access to healthcare, bullying, physical violence and the destruction of hope.

7. That all people, regardless of their class, gender, race, religion, sexuality or dis/ability deserve access to the resources they need to live and to thrive. While people from a range of backgrounds can find themselves imprisoned, the crim-

inal justice system locks up a bigger proportion of people from working class backgrounds and from other groups that are discriminated against in wider society. In this way, the system contributes to inequalities in wider society, and must be dismantled to achieve freedom for all.

### **We want:**

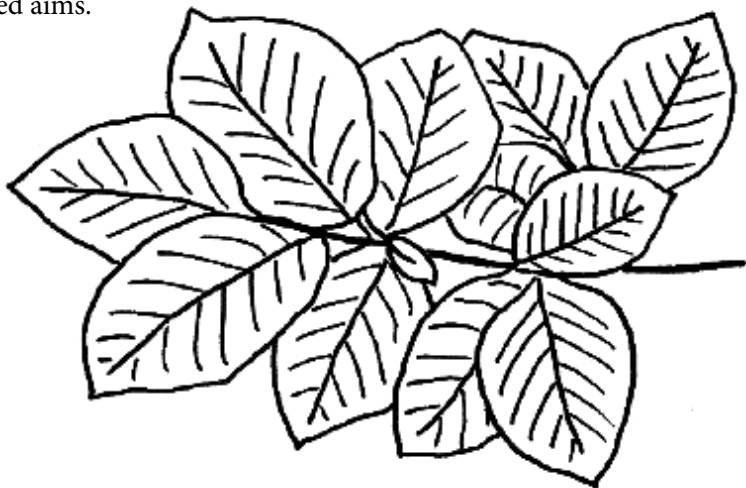
To dismantle the criminal justice system and build a society based on collective care, where harm and violence can be addressed and prevented without resorting to imprisonment and punishment, where our relationships with each other are not shaped by capitalism and we are not divided by race, class or gender.



# WHAT WE DO

We build friendship and connections between people inside and outside of prison, to help us all work together to dismantle the criminal justice system. Inside members may share their knowledge of the prison system and their skills in order to help outside members campaign, or to help other inside members with issues they are facing. Outside members may help inside members with specific challenges they are facing such as accessing legal support or being denied healthcare. Outside and inside members may campaign on specific issues by writing letters, making phone calls or holding demos.

This isn't about outside members 'saving' inside members – we are not a charity. This is a network of mutual support, where we all work together to reach our shared aims.



## **Inside members**

Some things you can do if you are a member of the Prisoner Solidarity Network inside prison:

- Regularly write to an outside member to get to know them and build a friendship.
- Write articles, stories, poems and essays for outside members to publish on the PSN website and to distribute to other inside members.
- Share information with outside members by letters or by phone about issues you are facing within the prison.
- Start a discussion group or a reading group with other people in your prison to talk about issues you are facing inside the prison and how you might work together to address them. This pack has some suggestions for readings.
- Share any expert knowledge you have on the prison system so that outside members can use this to help other members. For example, some inside members with knowledge about prison law use this to help other inside members with their cases.
- Talk to other people in your prison about the Prisoner Solidarity Network and its principles. Encourage them to join if they are interested and agree with the principles.

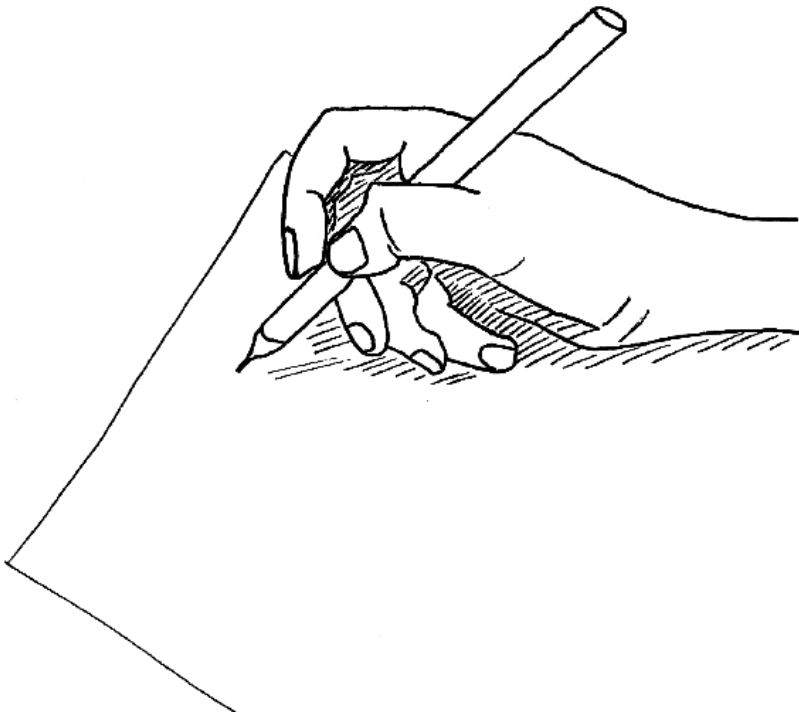
## **Outside members**

- Regularly write to an inside member to get to know them and build a friendship.
- Join one of our working groups to help out with a specific area of our work.
- Help to organise calls to action and demonstrations in response to specific issues inside members are facing.
- Help with admin such as monitoring emails, taking and writing up meeting notes and dealing with finances.
- Organise events such as talks, film nights, reading groups and other sessions to help to raise awareness in the general public of the harms of the criminal justice system, as well as ways to dismantle it.
- Organise trainings and skill shares to help members learn together about building movements and creating change.



## **Skills we need**

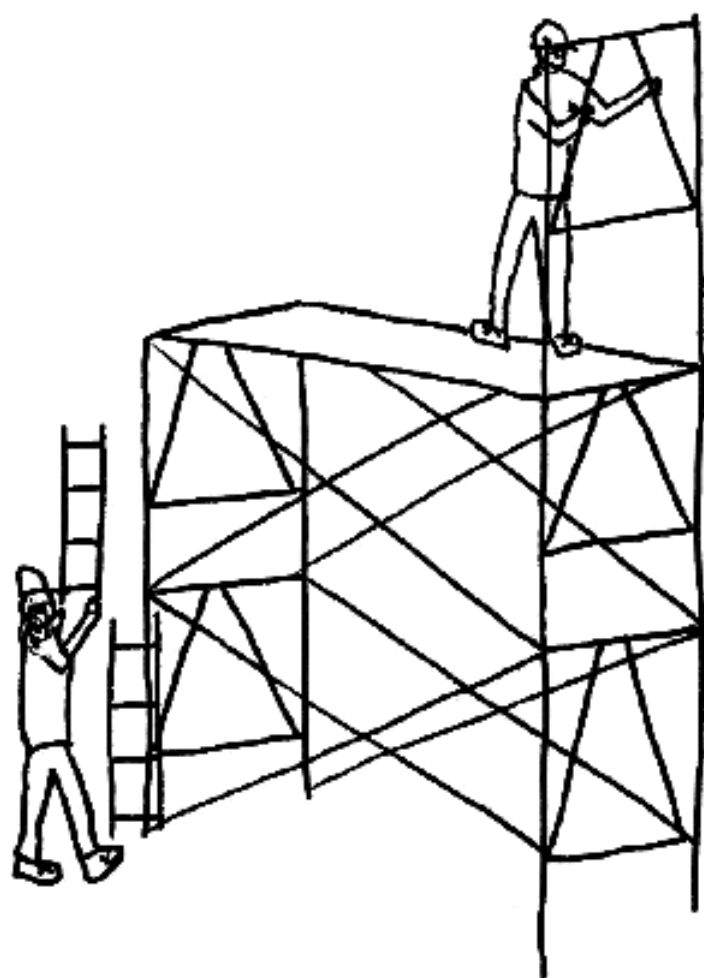
- Emotional support and social skills
- Knowledge in various areas, including housing, mental health, the benefits system and law
- Website skills
- Social media
- Writing
- Illustration, photography and other artistic skills



# TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE

As abolitionists, we do not respond to harm with harm. Rather than resorting to punishment, which simply perpetuates harm, we seek out constructive and reflective ways to prevent and address harm, creating safer conditions for everyone. We call this approach ‘transformative justice’. We don’t only apply this principle to prisons and the criminal justice system; we also apply it to ourselves. We do not claim to have all the answers for how to do this, but we are committed to the ongoing process of making our organising as safe and non-exclusionary as possible.

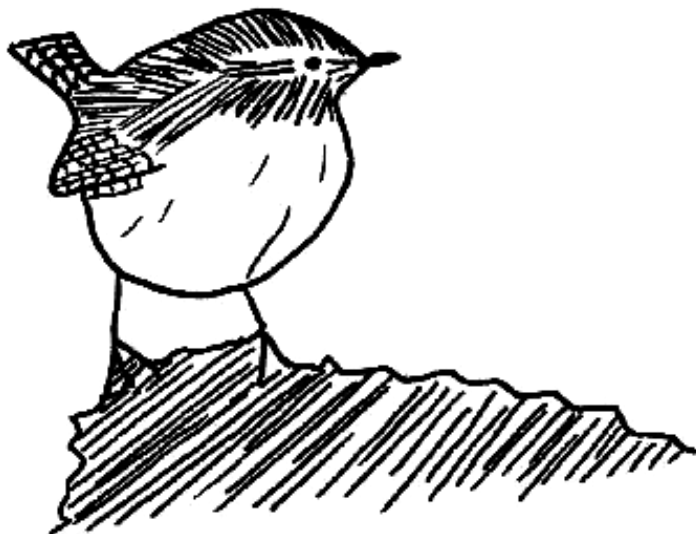
Where conflicts arise within our network, we always try to respond with positive, collective, and collaborative processes, in which the needs of those who have experienced harm are centred and those who have caused it are given support to understand their actions and make amends. We try to do this with as much sensitivity as possible to the complex dynamics that shape these situations, and to the social and structural contexts within which interpersonal harm exists. We are committed to taking all reports of interpersonal harm seriously, and to believing and supporting all those who experience it. It is important to us to be accountable to our abolitionist principles, to each other, and to the wider communities to which we belong.





We are part of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) union. As a union, IWW is an organisation made up of workers fighting together to protect their interests and make change, such as by defending workers' rights and resisting discrimination in their workplace.

Unlike most unions, the IWW also brings people together outside of workplaces, and recognises anyone who can't rely on wealth or inheritance to survive as part of the working class. This includes unemployed people, people doing types of work that are criminalised, and people in prisons. We are all 'workers'.



# THE HISTORY OF PSN

The Prisoner Solidarity Network grew out of the work of the Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee (IWOC). IWOC started in the US in 2014 when members of a prisoner support group called the Free Alabama Movement (FAM) approached the Industrial Workers of the World. FAM had been working with people inside prisons to organise work stoppages and prison ‘shutdowns’ to protest the exploitation of prisoners who were made to work for private companies and US states. They wanted to organise strikes, where prisoners would refuse to work unless their demands for better conditions were met.

The IWW set up the Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee (IWOC) and began working with FAM and other groups such as Jailhouse Lawyers Speak to organise prison strikes across the US.

The first national prison strikes in the US began on 9 September 2016 and reportedly involved 24,000 prisoners across 40-50 prisons. The main demand was the repeal of a law that allowed people convicted of a crime to be forced to work with no pay. They also had a broad list of other demands, which varied from prison to prison. These included humane living conditions, access to healthcare and education and better support for resettling in the community after relea-

se. People inside and outside prisons kept organising and a new wave of strikes took place in 2018. The strikers made a list of ten demands. These included sentencing reform, ending the targeting of black and minority ethnic people by the criminal justice system and giving prisoners the right to vote. They saw the prison system as a form of organised state violence.

IWOC in the UK was launched in 2016 by a small group of ex-prisoners and IWW members. Inspired by the 2016 US prison strikes, the group aimed to support the work that prisoners were already doing to resist the prison system and to build relationships between organisers inside and outside prisons. IWOC started writing to people inside prison and campaigning on their behalf, demanding changes such as ending solitary confinement, better access to healthcare and releasing prisoners serving Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentences.

In 2020, we decided to change our name to the Prisoner Solidarity Network. We felt that this name communicates our work more clearly and helps us to avoid focusing only on prison labour. We work on the issues our inside members feel are most important. These include getting released, accessing mental healthcare, and ending solitary confinement, among many others.



# READING LIST

## General

- Angela Davis: Are Prisons Obsolete?
- Angela Davis: If They Come in the Morning
- Prison Research Education Action Project: Instead of Prisons – A Handbook for Abolitionists
- Ruth Wilson Gilmore: Golden Gulag – Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California
- Critical Resistance and INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence: “Statement on Gender Violence and the Prison Industrial Complex”
- Eric Stanley and Nat Smith: Captive Genders – Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex
- Julia Sudbury: Global Lockdown – Race, Gender and the Prison Industrial Complex
- Corporate Watch: Prison Expansion in England, Wales & Scotland
- Carl Cattermole: Prison – A Survival Guide
- Lola Olufemi: Feminism Interrupted
- INCITE!: Color of Violence –The INCITE! Anthology



## **History**

- Project NIA: A Story of Attica
- Stuart Hall, Brian Roberts, John Clarke, Tony Jefferson and Chas Critcher: Policing the Crisis – Mugging, the State, and Law and Order
- Victoria Law: “Protection without Police: North American Community Responses to Violence in the 1970s and Today.”
- Heather Ann Thompson: Blood in the Water – The Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and Its Legacy

## **Accountability and transformative justice**

- Mariame Kaba and Shira Hassan: Fumbling Towards Repair – A Workbook for Community Accountability Facilitators
- Creative Interventions Toolkit  
[communityaccountability.wordpress.com/creative-interventions-toolkit/](https://communityaccountability.wordpress.com/creative-interventions-toolkit/)
- Community Accountability Resource List  
[communityaccountability.wordpress.com/resources/](https://communityaccountability.wordpress.com/resources/)

## **Videos, films and podcasts**

- Ruth Wilson Gilmore: Don't reform prisons, abolish them (Video)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=akirVY5Mqsg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akirVY5Mqsg)
- Victoria Law: Resisting Gender Violence without Cops or Prisons (Video)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qlozk7G-JYo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qlozk7G-JYo)
- Tourmaline and Dean Spade: No One Is Disposable (Video)  
[www.deanspade.net/2014/02/07/no-one-is-disposable/](http://www.deanspade.net/2014/02/07/no-one-is-disposable/)
- The Lockdown (Podcast)  
[www.novaramedia.com/category/audio/the-lockdown/](http://www.novaramedia.com/category/audio/the-lockdown/)
- Beyond Prisons (Podcast) <https://shadowproof.com/beyond-prisons/>
- Mariame Kaba interviewed on The Appeal (Audio, transcript available)  
[www.theappeal.org/justice-in-america-episode-20-mariame-kaba-and-prison-abolition/](http://www.theappeal.org/justice-in-america-episode-20-mariame-kaba-and-prison-abolition/)
- Eyes on the Prize, Part 12: A Nation Of Law? (Documentary covering Fred Hampton and Attica) [www.youtube.com/watch?v=V1BlbVOOH7I](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V1BlbVOOH7I)
- Ken Fero: Injustice (Documentary on deaths in police custody in the UK)  
<https://vimeo.com/34633260>





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