



The Lewisburg Prison Project

2017 Newsletter

President's Message: Farewell to Karl and Welcome New Members

This year the Lewisburg Prison Project lost our dear friend, Karl Patten. Karl's beloved wife Isabelle was one of the founders of the organization. Karl became equally dedicated and determined to secure humane conditions of confinement. Karl passed away in April, having just turned 90 on February 28. When I ponder all that he did as an activist, a poet, a professor, a father and husband, I am overwhelmed. I look to Karl when I need to focus, when I need to be sure the task of civil rights is addressed. Though I do not feel burdened, I do feel a responsibility, that we, the LPP, have a duty to work diligently toward our mission—"We are dedicated to the principle that prisoners are persons with incontestable human and constitutional rights."

2018 marks our 45th birthday. Karl was approaching 45 as he began to devote so much time and energy to the LPP. Having a 45th birthday is a reminder that we are aging as a membership. I am extremely grateful for that membership, who have accomplished so much. And yet, when I think of what the project needs to continue its mission, it is a posse of young Karls. Today I announce a campaign to make that happen. **To honor our 45th birthday, I charge our members to find 45 new members who are 45 years old or younger.** If you have a suggestion of someone we can reach out to and include, please see our website or Facebook page. Both will offer links for you to include names and contacts of possible new members. Ideally, you might also invite a potential new member or two to our annual party on January 27th at 7pm, where D. Toni Byrd will receive the Isabelle and Karl Patten Award. We will have a prize for the one who brings the greatest number of new people to our annual gathering as well as to the person who recruits the highest number of new members during the year of 2018. **Happy Birthday Lewisburg Prison Project!** —Angela Trop

D. Toni Byrd Honored With Patten Award

This year's Isabelle and Karl Patten Award honors D. Toni Byrd, a person who demonstrates the formidable qualities of the citation, to "inspire us all with their lifetime of standing up and working for oppressed people here and everywhere." Byrd is an Assistant Public Defender in the Middle District of Pennsylvania, where she has represented indigent defendants in the United States District Court and the Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit for 29 years. From 1986 to 1988 she served as a law clerk to the Honorable Malcolm Muir, United States District Judge for the Middle District of Pennsylvania. She earned her J.D. from Northeastern University School of Law in Boston, Massachusetts. She has been an essential part of the Lewisburg Prison Project since its very early existence, having written the grant proposal that allowed us to hire our first full-time lawyer and paid support staff, in 1980. For the three years following that, she was the Co-Executive Director with Brigitte Cooke. She is an active board member at the Lewisburg Prison Project, and has also served on the boards of the Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project, North Penn Legal Services, and Transitions. She is also a member of the



Evangelical Community Hospital Bioethics Committee and Geisinger Medical Center Women's Health Volunteer Leadership Council. The Patten Award is not the first time she's been recognized for her work. She has been awarded the NAACP Lewisburg Branch Service Award and the NAACP Lewisburg Branch Recognition of Leadership Award. She was awarded Bucknell's 2017 Virginia Travis Social Justice Award. We're so pleased to honor her decades of commitment and inspiring work with the Patten Award.

OIG Report on Lewisburg

In matters of truth and justice, there is no difference between large and small problems, for issues concerning the treatment of people are all the same.
— Albert Einstein

For over 7 years, the Lewisburg Prison Project has been investigating and analyzing the Special Management Unit (SMU) at the Lewisburg Penitentiary. From its inception, it has not felt right. The protocols that determine an inmate is eligible to be sent there, the workbooks used to make inmates more obedient, the double celling as a course in "how to co-exist with others," the 24 hours daily in a tiny cell with another, all do not make sense. The result of the SMU has been an unprecedented amount of violence, including several deaths.

Inmates in the SMU have reached out to the LPP with a record number of letters. Our paralegal Dave Sprout has spent countless hours interviewing these inmates, responding to them, reaching out to organizations and attorneys, questioning the Bureau of Prisons, and enlightening the public with the facts. Since the story became national news in 2016, through NPR and the Marshall Project, the number of inmates at the Lewisburg Penitentiary has been reduced by half.

As an organization long aware of some of the conditions at the SMU, we're pleased that

OIG Report cont.

the Office of the Inspector General, or OIG, from the U.S. Department of Justice, is now paying attention. An independent, non-partisan organization promoting economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in the administration of federal programs, the OIG recently made an assessment of Restrictive Housing in the federal system, specifically in relation to mental illness. In July of this year, it released its findings in the Review of the Federal Bureau of Prisons' Use of Restrictive Housing for Inmates with Mental Illness (<https://oig.justice.gov/reports/2017/e1705.pdf#page=1>). This document points out significant concerns with the treatment of inmates with mental illness in the federal system. Furthermore, the OIG presents specific and documented violations by the Lewisburg Penitentiary's Special Management Unit (SMU). Though this addresses just one aspect of our concerns with the SMU, we're relieved that the assessment requires USP Lewisburg to respond and make changes. I encourage everyone to read the report in order to have a clearer picture of what our Bureau of Prisons is doing with mentally ill inmates. Once you do, I'm sure you'll be inspired to ask your representatives if they are ensuring that changes have been made in light of this disturbing review.

I was particularly troubled to read that inmates at Lewisburg with a mental health designation have been kept in restricted housing (24 hours per day with another inmate) three times longer than other inmates. Specifically, it said an average stay for an inmate was 277 days, whereas an inmate with a mental health designation stayed an average 698 days. Worse, this data was found to be inaccurate because the Lewisburg Penitentiary was stating that inmates had completed the program and then restarted the program after an infraction. Documents showed that those inmates had never left the institution. The OIG referred to this as "Misleading Performance Metrics."

The OIG also found that the conditions of confinement, including the size and ventilation of cells, could result in harm to SMU inmates with mental illness. The Lewisburg Penitentiary gave differing facts about its 58.5 square feet cells; 80 square feet is the minimum required by the American Corrections Association. Lewisburg was also the only one of seven institutions evaluated that did not have air conditioning or proper ventilation.

We're happy attorney Jim Davy will be joining the LPP team, which will continue to work to improve conditions not only at the Lewisburg SMU but throughout the system in the middle district. —Angela Trop



Emily Paine / Bucknell University

We Thank You For Your Story

The Lewisburg Prison Project, Bucknell University, and Piper Anderson of the participatory storytelling project, Mass Story Lab, collaborated to bring 5 storytellers together on September 6 in Bucknell's Larison Dining Hall for Mass Story Lab: Lewisburg. Two hundred people came to hear the stories of local community members whose lives have been impacted by incarceration. Threaded through these stories was the theme of mental illness as both a factor leading to and resulting from imprisonment.

The storytellers included Jeannette, a Lewisburg resident whose infant and toddler witnessed her arrest at her home and spent their early years in foster care while their mother served her time in Muncy. John, who spent most of his adult life in prisons in several states, said he had been diagnosed with PTSD and schizophrenia. His story illuminated how the severe daily stresses of life inside prison create a physical and psychological hypervigilance and anxiety that does not necessarily end upon release from prison. Trevor, of Philadelphia, described the ten years he spent in Rockview State Prison and their continuing effects on his life and relationships over a decade after his release. Two of the storytellers, Chris and Walter, had not been incarcerated themselves. Rather, they described their experiences as family members who have been deeply affected by incarceration. Chris's son, who struggles with heroin addiction, had been recently released from prison. Movingly, she described the struggle to stay connected to family across all the barriers in place to keep "inside" and "outside" separate. Walter, whose son was murdered in his Connecticut apartment building by a man who was under the influence of drugs, shared his journey from consuming anger at the man who killed his son to his eventual decision to forgive him, a choice that freed Walter from the prison of rage and eventually led to a meaningful friendship with the man responsible for his son's death.

Because Bucknell had selected Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy* as the first year common reading—which meant that all new students were encouraged to read and participate in discussions about the book—early in the fall semester seemed an opportune time to collaborate in bringing Piper Anderson's Mass Story Lab to Lewisburg. In *Just Mercy*, Stevenson weaves his own story as the founder of the Equal Justice Initiative (eji.org), a law firm dedicated to defending the poor and disenfranchised, with the stories of people who have been abused and traumatized by the US criminal justice system. In this illuminating book, Stevenson connects the stories of individuals to the histories and practices that

Attorney Jim Davy Joins the Lewisburg Prison Project

We're so pleased that attorney James Davy has just joined PILP/LPP and will be working at the LPP office in Lewisburg. Jim is a graduate of Duke University and Georgetown University Law Center. He has much experience working for progressive causes and marginalized people, including incarcerated individuals. As a law student, Jim worked at Georgetown's Institute for Public Representation Clinic, helping family members of prisoners to support the Federal Communications Commission's attempt to limit kickbacks and impose caps on the usurious rates charged for interstate phone calls to and from prisons. He also spent a summer at the Southern Poverty Law Center, working with incarcerated clients to argue that a change in state law made them newly eligible for parole. Jim is presently co-chair of the Young Friends Committee of the Youth Sentencing and Reentry Project in Philadelphia, where he is a mitigation volunteer helping prisoners serving what are now unconstitutional mandatory life sentences without the possibility of parole.



Jim's primary work at PILP/LPP will be litigating with respect to the horrendous conditions at the Special Management Unit of the Lewisburg Federal Penitentiary (see, for example, <http://www.lewisburgprisonproject.org/press> and our piece about the recent OIG review). The grant supporting Jim's work was obtained by Angus Love, Executive Director of PILP, and came from Pennsylvania's IOLTA (Interest on Lawyer Trust Accounts) Board. — Steve Becker

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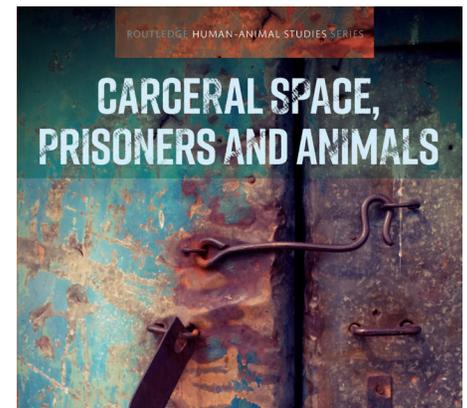
We would like to thank our supporters and all the volunteers who have worked with us this year, especially Matt Lucas, Sage Maggi, Tarik Lott, Cara English, Kyle Bloom, Hunter Frantz, Dechen Yangkyi, and Julie Friedman, with special thanks to Ella Tazuana Johnson. All you do makes what we do possible. Thank you!

Your Story cont.

have constructed and perpetuated our unequal system of justice. Mass Story Lab extended this focus on prison and amplified the voices of local people affected by incarceration.

Caroline Sullivan, a Bucknell junior who is taking a psychology course at Muncy Prison in which half of her classmates are Bucknell students and half are incarcerated women, noted that Mass Story Lab resonated with the "effects at the heart of the [prison] system and its influence" on her incarcerated classmates. She observed that, "the five stories [shared by Mass Story Lab storytellers] were all incredibly transformative in their own way. We acknowledged their stories by saying, "we see you, we hear you, and we thank you for your story," which is a message that can—and should—be directed at incarcerated people who may have been previously ignored. The phrase connected the whole room in solidarity with these stories."

Community participant Jennifer H. had this to say: "I have worked with individuals who have mental illnesses and who were also incarcerated, so I had some knowledge before attending the event. However, hearing the individuals speak about their experiences taught me so much and really opened my eyes to the problem that we have in our society. I really enjoyed facilitating the group and hearing what other people had to say about coming up with a solution. I loved that the audience was so diverse and everyone had something different to contribute. The event was truly incredible and very well done." —Deirdre O'Connor



Board member Karen M. Morin has a book coming out! *Carceral Space, Prisoners and Animals* addresses spaces and conditions of confinement not just for humans but for animals as well, creating a broad analysis of industrialized violence. In the words of Chris Philo, Professor of Geography at the University of Glasgow, "Morin composes a dark geography of relatedness, spinning together the fates of those humans incarcerated in the US penal system and those animals destined to be meat, muscle, lab rat or zoo exhibit. Utterly compelling, deeply disturbing, with chilling insights searing off every page: this book demands to be read."

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A lot of what we do starts with the mail. As of November, here are this year's numbers.

Letters to Federal Inmates:
1002

Letters to State Inmates:
675

Bulletin Orders Fulfilled
(National):
413

Save the date, because
You're Invited!

Our annual party and
Patten Award Celebration will be

January 27
7pm

**Join us! And in keeping
with our goal of 45 under
45, bring your younger
friends!**

LPP Mission Statement

LPP is dedicated to the principle that prisoners are persons with indisputable rights to justice. We strive to provide safeguards for their constitutional human rights. We are, then, concerned with conditions of confinement. We counsel, assist, and visit prisoners when they encounter problems they perceive as illegal or unfair. On appropriate occasions we litigate. We are also dedicated to educating both prisoners and the general public on prisoner rights and conditions in federal, state, and county prisons.

Volunteer Voice: Caroline Foster On Working at the Prison Project

Working for the Lewisburg Prison Project has truly been a rewarding experience and I am very lucky to have found this opportunity. I began college wanting to go to law school upon graduation, and this job has only increased my desire to pursue that path. While in the office, I help respond to prisoner letters and provide inmates with information regarding their rights while incarcerated. Before working here, I never really thought too much about the prisoner population; jails are often hidden and most people have the impression that incarcerated people deserve to be where they are, regardless of the treatment they may face while imprisoned. After working for this organization for over a year, I have come to see prisoners as people rather than monsters, and have developed a more understanding mindset. Yes, these people made poor and negative life decisions that got them imprisoned, but that does not mean that they need to face further and unneeded cruelties while they are serving their time. No human being deserves to be sexually abused, denied medical treatment, or physically harmed, even if that person did commit previous crimes that may have affected the lives of other people. The Lewisburg Prison Project provides these prisoners with information as well as a place to voice their concerns about the treatment they are receiving inside prison walls. I really enjoy this job. It allows me to gain further knowledge about our legal system through providing support to a group of the population most people choose to ignore. This job has brought to light one of the areas of law that I can pursue, and I look forward to continuing my time working for the organization. —Caroline Foster