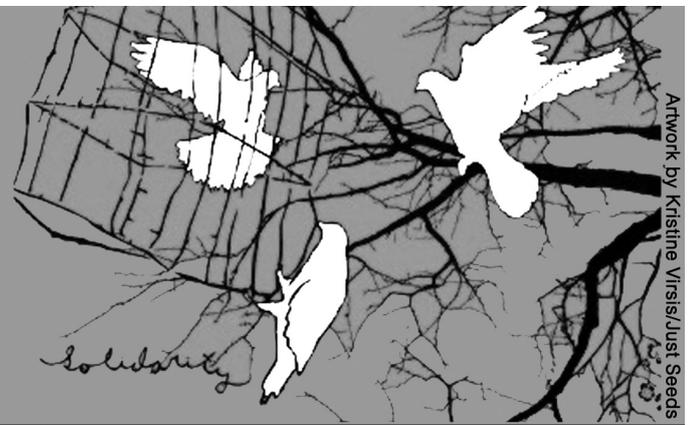


# BENT BARS PROJECT

A letter writing project for gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, gender-variant and queer prisoners in Britain.



## newsletter 4 - Summer 2012

### Welcome to the 4th Bent Bars Newsletter.

In this issue you'll find letters and articles on the theme of 'supporting each other', about experiences of being part of or organising LGBTQ support groups inside prison.

Many of you writing in to us are involved in support groups, or are wanting to find out where groups exist. Originally we wanted to create a directory so people could find out about groups that already exist or create new ones where needed. However it proved too difficult to keep an up-to-date directory of all these groups, as things change fast. So instead, thanks to a great suggestion from Big Frank, we asked for your ideas and experiences of LGBT support groups- what they've given you, how your group runs, and the successes and challenges of being part of

a support group. We hope this gives people inspiration to set up their own LGBTQ groups, and helps build stronger networks of LGBTQ people inside prison.

Once again we've included all your great poetry, artwork, and letters on a variety of themes, practical information, tips and encouragement for others, coming-out issues and personal stories.

Thanks so much to everyone who's contributed all the brilliant writing you'll find here. As usual, we also publish this newsletter in solidarity with those who've got so much to share, but who can't or feel unable to write in. We really hope you all enjoy reading Newsletter 4.

### Bent Bars Project News- Bent Bars Turns Three!

This February, it is the three year anniversary since Bent

Bars project began!

We've got lots to celebrate: Since the project started, we've been in contact with nearly 300 prisoners and have made more than 200 penpal matches. More than 250 non-prisoners have been involved in the project, whether as penpals, fundraisers, supporters and general volunteers.

We've produced four newsletters, launched a new website, and hosted events in London, Leeds, and Bristol. But most importantly we've made connections with people inside and outside prison, in ways that have generated new friendships, allies and networks of support. The Organizing Collective is reminded on a regular basis of how much Bent Bars means to people both inside and out, so a big cheers to everyone who has been involved in bringing care and energy to the project.



**Dear Bent Bars,**

A friend kindly passed me a copy of your newsletter and I am writing in response to the request for information about GBT support groups running in prisons. My name is Darren and I am the prisoner Diversity (Equalities) Orderly at my prison - and I am openly gay. When I first arrived here about 18 months ago, I was surprised to find that there was no support for gay prisoners. This was something of a shock for me as I came from a prison where I was responsible for helping set up and run their very successful support group. Prior to that I started a small group at my previous prison. In my current prison, I found there was quite a high level of homophobia towards me, mainly because I was 'different' in that I refused to hide who I was.

Within a few months of my arrival here I was asked if I would start a GBT forum! I agreed, but it wasn't until I was appointed as an Orderly that things started to come together properly.

At first we had a bit of a challenge on our hands. The prison holds only life sentence prisoners and IPP's, and therefore some of the attitudes on the landings were, shall we say, a little old fashioned. Staff too were a challenge and it took a while for people to begin to understand why we needed a group and what we were aiming to achieve. We still keep our meetings fairly low-key, but as time progresses we plan to get more visual and vocal. The idea is that we will soon be able to advertise our meeting dates throughout the prison and non-GBT prisoners and staff won't bat an eyelid (this is the level that they are currently operating at, though they started the same way as us.)

It helps that we have a proactive Equalities Team within the prison, chaired by the Head of Community and attended by members of the Prison senior Management Team. Our Diversity Lead, a Senior Officer is extremely committed to her role and chairs the group meetings on as close to a monthly basis as the regime allows. We are currently trying to contact outside agencies with a view to inviting them to our meetings to give information and advice. Simply attending the prison will be a massive boost to the morale of our group.

Finally, you might like to publish this letter (in whole or part) in your newsletter, so I thought I would offer some tips to any prisoners out there who are thinking of setting up a group in their prison:

- Start by approaching other gay prisoners on your wings; ask them if they feel there is a need for such a group and whether they would support it by attending. This will establish your 'core' group.
- Find your Diversity or Equalities officer and tell them you are willing to start a group with their support. Mention that HMCIP are keen to see groups like this get off the ground.
- Start slowly. Do not advertise your meetings on notice boards – do it by word of mouth.
- Use your notice boards to display posters about anti-bullying or anti-social behaviour, making sure that they mention homophobia and hate crime. This sends a message without forcing your group down people's throats.
- Stress confidentiality to your group - this will allow members who haven't made their sexuality widely known to feel confident attending.
- Challenge homophobia arising from mainstream prisoners regarding your group appropriately – nickings and warnings from staff are not always the way to go; sometimes mediation works.
- Slowly raising the profile of your group. Perhaps produce a news letter instead of minutes of your meetings and place copies in the prison library where people can read them if they want to. Make mention of the existence of the group in the prison Wing Reps meetings to allow them to discuss it.
- When the group feel confident enough begin to advertise your meetings to the general population.
- Above all – support each other. That is what the group is for!

I hope some of this has been useful. Good luck to anyone there who is thinking of setting up a group. It can be frustrating and you will have days where you think it isn't worth the hassle, but it is. Please don't give up!

Kind regards  
Darren



## Hayley

I was born a male but it's not how I feel,  
a girl in a male body my true self it does conceal,  
I'm coming out, bringing my true self to the fore,  
a loving female for the guys to adore,  
I've never felt like a guy always a lady,  
your friend, your lover, your honey, your baby,  
my dream for the future is to be a wife,  
and to keep my hubby happy all of his life.

A double cell I share with a really straight guy,  
I constantly wish for an active gay or bi,  
a soft touch or tender caress upon my buttocks,  
will get you in my bed for loving, fun and frolics,  
four months in a cell, unloved and frustrated,  
with an active gay or bi I'd feel elated,  
love in the night, asleep in your strong arms,  
your hardness in me, using your charms.



A long time in prison I'm expecting to spend,  
but my unloved loneliness I'm hoping to end,  
I've vaseline, oil and got condoms to hand,  
but don't have a man to use the above as planned,  
only one head on my pillow, cold and alone,  
an empty vessel requiring a bone,  
I'm here at present till sentencing done,  
then off to a new cell in another town,  
a cell for years will be my home.

### **EDITORS' NOTE ABOUT SAFER SEX:**

Just a reminder that using vaseline or oil-based lubricants (including things like skin cream, baby oil, hair gel, oil-based food) with latex condoms can weaken the latex and cause the condom to tear or break. We know that in prison it is often difficult to get the things you need for safer sex and sometimes you have to use whatever is at hand. But whenever possible, it's important to use water-based lubricants with latex condoms, or use non-latex (polyurethane) condoms instead (which are okay to use with oil-based lube).

# Dear Bent Bars,

I just saw/read your Autumn 2009 newsletter. I had never heard of you guys before, but I think you did a wonderful job. Reading some of the “coming out” pieces about what people have had to deal with was a really emotional process.

Fortunately for myself, I never had a very hard time “coming out” while in prison. I just did it. Once I stopped caring what other people thought or said, I felt great about myself.

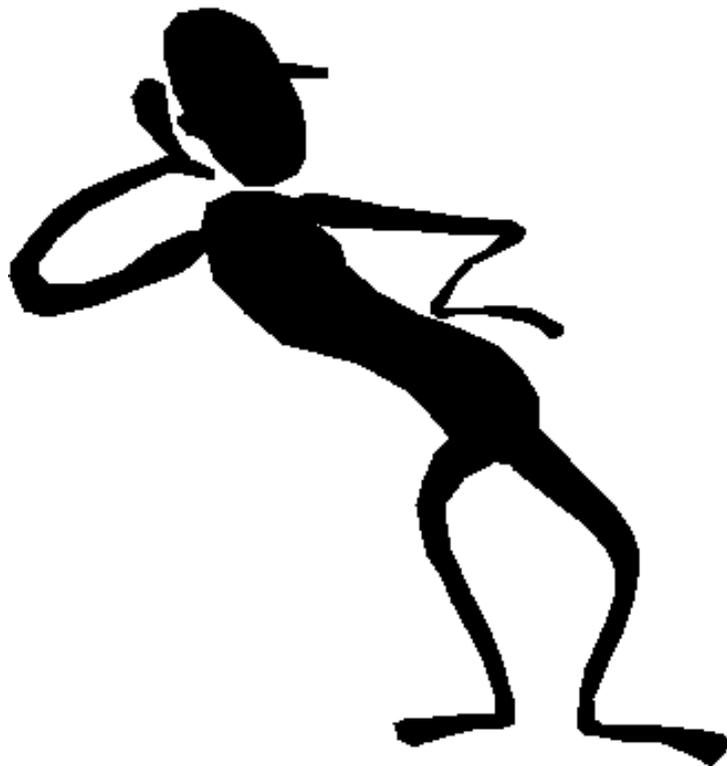
I have been incarcerated in California for quite a while. I was locked up at 16 years of age, and am serving two life sentences. It wasn't until I was 25 that I finally came out as Transgender. That was in 2008, and I've loved myself ever since.

California has what are called “sensitive Needs Yards”, which are basically protective custody and house sexual offenders, homosexuals, gang drop-outs, and other inmates who are prone to victimization. SNY's are quickly becoming the majority of the California prison system. Being gay, bisexual, or transgender is for the most part, accepted on an SNY, even though there are still some people (both staff and inmate) who discriminate.

One of the things that I felt that your Autumn 2009 newsletter was lacking, for being an issue about “coming out” was advice on how to “come out”. Many of the people whose letters appeared didn't expand upon the ways, the positive ways to come out, and that may be the reason their own coming out was filled with discrimination and abuse: they didn't know of any, because there was nobody to help them, or to consult.

**So, I wanted to write this to help some people turn what could be a screwed-up experience into an experience that is easier and less discriminatory. So here it is:**

If there are others around you who are either gay or transgender, talk to them. Let



them know how you are feeling, because while you are in prison, they are about the only people who you will be able to rely on. Build up a friendship with them, because they are your new family. Other people will see you with them, since everybody sees and knows everything that happens with the gay/transgender population. (Note: if you're bisexual, you're still half-gay, so go ahead and embrace it). These other (straight) people will either accept it or not. Guess what! Their opinion no longer matters. Just like the whites, blacks and Hispanics stick together, so do we. You are no longer considered White, Black, or Hispanic. You're not Other. It's nothing to do with gangs, it's just that we stick up for each other, and if there are gay/transgender inmates around who are worth a damn, they'll have your back.

Of course, all this is much easier on an SNY. If you are in California and on the mainline, all you have to do is head up to the program office and tell a sergeant, lieutenant, or captain that you're gay and need to go to an SNY. Since gays are not allowed on the mainline in California (at least for Whites and most Hispanics) they will have no other choice but to place you in the hole until

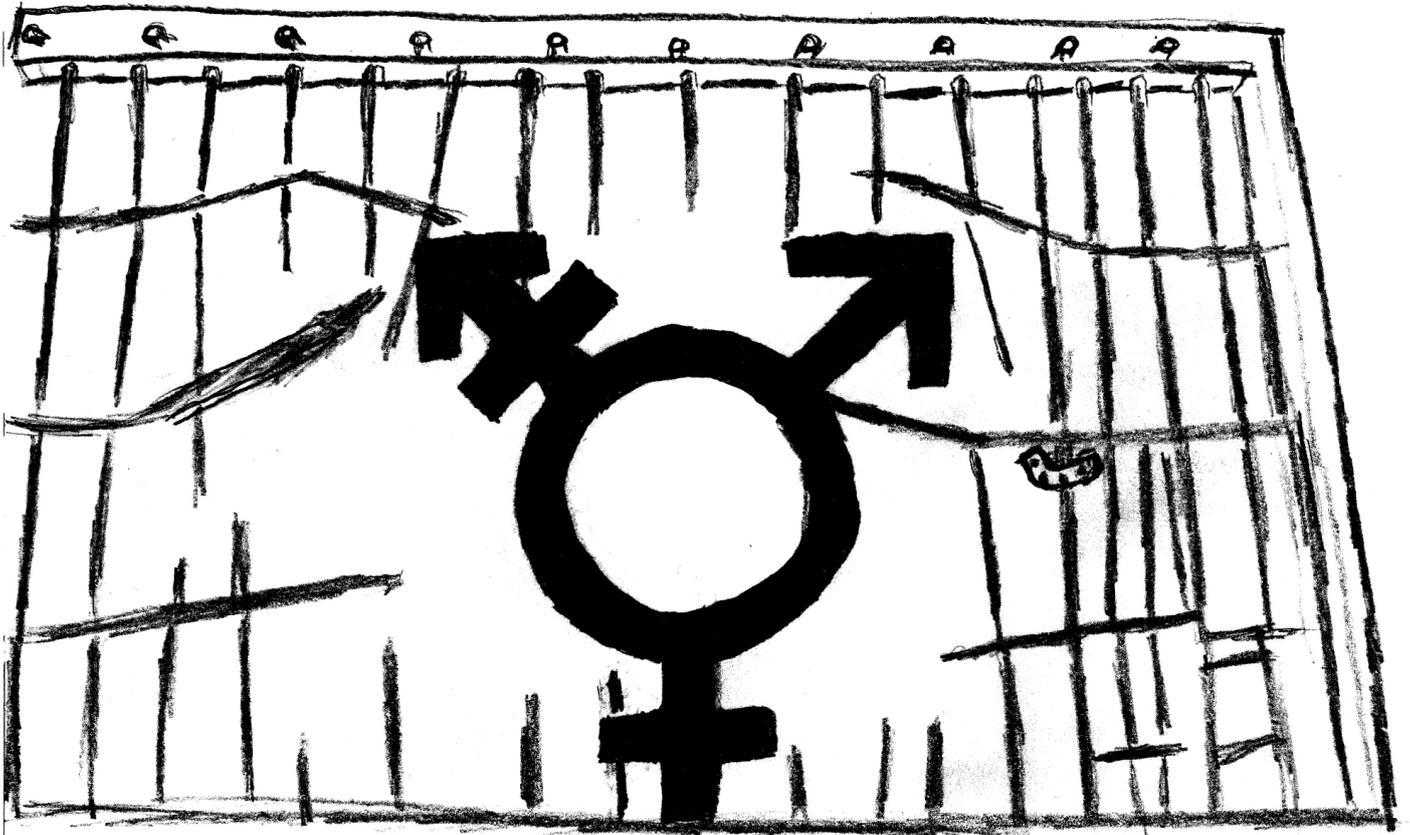
they transfer you to an SNY facility, since you will now have “safety concerns” which will “disrupt institutional security”. Easy, right! Once you show up on an SNY, find a gay or transgender and make friends.

Since I’ve never been to a prison outside of the horrible State of California, I’m not sure of the processes that are available, but it can’t be that much different. Find someone that you can talk to. Just remember- the guards are NOT your friends in this!! The further out of sight of the guards you are, the better. If you see them coming, walk the other way. You don’t need to give them an excuse to fuck with you, and just being able to see you is all the excuse they need. Once you’ve established yourself and become comfortable in your new surroundings, then you can scope out which of the guards are okay to talk to. More than likely they won’t come to you, so learn quick who you can get to help if you’re having problems.

Also, remember that just like you needed help to come out, there are others who need the same help. Don’t be afraid to do so. You may be their only friend.

My name is Gwen and I’m out and proud of it. If you happen to come across me, feel free to come up and talk to me.

**Gwen**



# Spring



*Artwork by Sidney*

I moved to this prison early November this year. Since coming here I have heard so much homophobic comments. I have been in prison for over 8 1/2 years and I have never hid my sexuality. I aint ever need to. I have set up 6 Gay focus groups for support.

I was hoping to do that here.

I was reading newsletter 3. Jason's article. I found myself relating to his story. It is sad that any of us have to not be true to ourselves.

I have wrote articles for gay magazines. I was even asked by the governor to write what could be changed to make the prison service help and support the LGBT prisoners. Which I did I don't know what happened with it.

What I wanted to say is ONLY COME OUT if it is safe to do so.

Also to end this I would like to say well done to Jason for his article-

Nuff Love + Respect

**Richard**

## **Dear Friends at BB Project**

I am in touch with my penpals and all is good.

I am trying to set a support group up for LGBT here but need LADS to send me info how groups were set up there (in their jails) and also any suggestions. If they could write to BB project.

My Diversity Rep role work load has increased, I now live on the Residential Induction unit and now soon I'll be delivering a diversity Induction to new arrivals on the unit.

This establishments diversity team are very committed and good which I am very surprised about.

I look forward to a response,

Kind Regards

**Lee**

# Wassup,

How are you? Well I hope. I appreciate this chance to share to your readers the vital importance of a routine workout regiment. It is essential to a healthy lifestyle and boosts ones self confidence and self esteem. I feel that prisoners can have a positive impact by encouraging and inspiring their loved ones and the people in their lives around them, by keeping or getting in shape.

My exercises cater to prisoners of course, but are designed so that anyone at home can do them with ease, without owning a membership at a Gym. My techniques vary from the cardiovascular to the overbearing muscle building. You will find a simple but effective way to trim fat and sculpt lean hard muscle.

**Hello readers**, ever wish to have that stunning hot bod?

I mean imagine turning the phrase “Between a rock and a hard place” on its hilt. You being the rock and the Hard place being... exactly!

Here is a day by day step to ensure this possibility.

## Monday:

I find it best to start your workouts in the morning an hour after breakfast. Jumping Jacks get the blood flowing and the heart rate up. A good signal to your stored fat cells that it's time to metabolise into fuel.

Full extensions are always key. Be sure your elbows are locked and that you bring your hands up over your head and then back down to your sides. Remain on your toes and when your arms extend outward so should your legs at least shoulder length apart. 250 of these would suffice. Immediately afterwards go down and do a push-up and explode back up to the standing position. This is the start of what should be a familiar routine. Go down and do another pushup and explode back up to the standing position. Do this 10 times. Down and up down and up, be sure you bring your chest to the floor each time you go down, and stand all the way up before you go down again. On the tenth one stay down and do 10 push-ups. Run in place for about a min then repeat for about a min then repeat this down and up procedure. But instead of 10 do 9, being sure that on the ninth one you stay down and do nine push-ups Now work your way down to 8 then 7 then 6, 5, 4 and so on to one.

That's down and up ten times (up being standing position, down being push up), and 10 push ups. Down and up nine times and nine push-ups. Down and up eight times and eight push-ups etc. If a beginner then this would have been plenty, if a lil more experience then try starting from 20. Yeah, its where I start.

## **Tuesday:**

As good a day as any Tuesday should be your rest day. Its important to allow your muscles to adjust and heal. Healthy muscles provide for a greater burn in calories.

## **Wednesday:**

After fully re-energising you should start today just as you did on Monday. With the Jumping Jacks and the up-downs.

## **Thursday:**

Today after shocking and conditioning your body its good to start on your abs. Contrary to what some people think, no matter how much ab workouts you do you won't see any results so long as you don't get rid of the flab covering your abs. The up-down routine on Monday and Wednesday will ensure visibility along with today's routine. I like to divide the abs in three parts.

The Top, The Lower, and the obliques. Crunches are great in targeting your upper abs. Crunches differ than sit ups, I find them to be better from sit ups, I find them to be better, more concentrated simple and effective. Be sure that your feet are off the ground your thighs should be pointing straight up. Cross your ankles and put your hands behind your head, not to assist you in getting your shoulders off the floor but as support to reduce straining in your neck. Now, use only your stomach muscle to bring your elbows past the outside of your knees. Do this 50 times and on the 50th one extend your legs straight to where they're only 6 inches from the ground hold this position as long as possible. This exercise doubles to target not just your upper abs but also your lower abs as well. Do 3 sets of 50.

Now for your obliques. Stand with your legs shoulder length apart Place your hands on your head and be sure that your elbows point outwards towards their right and left side. Now bend at the waist from left to right keeping your hands on your head and your elbows out. Do 3 sets of 50.

Take a second to get your breath before starting your next workout.

Squats are essential and all round a great workout. You must do squats they're important in muscle development and compliment your body. It's your foundation, and quite simple. Just do 10 sets of 40.

## **Friday:**

If you haven't done squats in a while your legs will be killing you. But a great way to relieve the stiffness is to work thru it :) Do the up-downs you learned on Monday.

## **Saturday:**

is a repetition of Thursday. Squat and abs.

## **Sunday:**

Rest.

### **From the top:**

Monday: Jumping Jacks, up-downs

Tuesday: Rest

Wednesday: Jumping Jacks, up-downs

Thursday: abs and squats

Friday: Up-downs

Saturday: Squat and abs.

Sunday: Rest

This is one of my original routines. Trust me when I say its effective. Will see results in a month.

**-Andre**



## **Am I Nobody**

by **Barrie**

What is it, they don't like  
I feel like a wheel-less bike  
That I'm put outside and left to rot  
And treated like a leper, that time  
forgot.

I'm stuck inside everyday  
Nowt to do, or to say  
I tell the truth and I tell a lie  
All the time I ask them  
Why oh why

Listen people let me say  
I'm still human even if I'm gay  
Don't say your sorry and think I'll  
be  
Happy with your pathetic  
APOLOGY

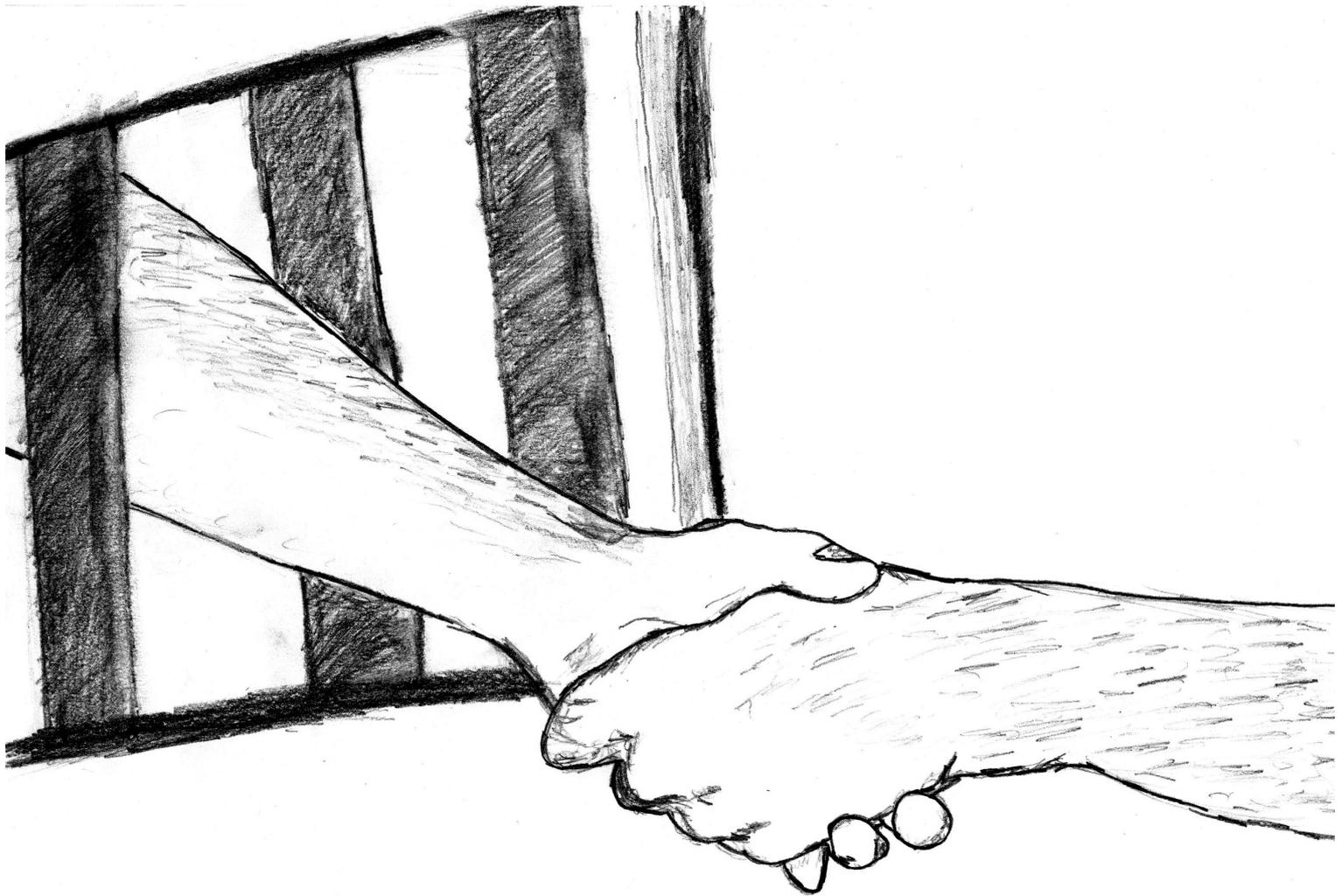
## **Time**

Today we exchange promises,  
Tonight we pray there kept,  
In the morning we wake to peace  
tomorrow with anticipation on each breath;

For the moment we accept our situation in hope they change,  
Heaven is love and hell is loneliness  
yet they both exist in our minds;

Some say friends are overrated.  
Hard to find and quick to change,  
and even I believe this true,  
until the day you came my way.  
(I hope all that read this enjoy the happiness it brings me)

**- Danny**



## Dear all the BB collective,

I went down the prison library today and looked at PSI 07/2011 Very Informative indeed. However as I'm classed as bisexual in here not as I see myself pre-op transgender 'ladyboy' I don't know if any of it would apply to me.

I haven't the guts to be all I feel and really am 'ladyboy' in prison, ie women's clothing, make up, but its good to know if I so wish they have to honour my desire to live the role I chose to. A big thank you for pointing the PSI out to me.

I guess I'm classed 'in the closet' in regards my sexuality. I'm open about being bisexual but from experience being 'in prison' I know it don't pay to own the fact and class myself as a ladyboy... sick of all the confusion from people... "Sid you'd be a bloke with tits that's all" etc etc so apart from people noticing I shave my legs, pluck eyebrows etc and in their eyes am a poof etc I dont stand out.

I would so long to have the courage to be like the people on My Transgender Summer, (especially Donna!) feminine looking but retaining male genitalia. Because that would be me really. That's how I've felt I am inside from an early age, yet I'm forced to wear this mask of how everyone expects me to be. I'm sure a lot of you there can understand what I'm saying even if most around me are confused.

The newsletter... other gay, bi etc inmates seem to know the score and good on them for standing their ground. I'm openly bi and stand my ground, but certain bits of me 'ladyboy' I'm keeping hidden from now on unless I'm writing to some other gay, bi, trans, queer etc

I was openly bi in prison for the first time ever here in 2010, got ghosted for it, loads of women screws suddenly became



interested in me, straight as well as gay etc, giving me tips on how to do my hair, "girly talks" etc and I'm suddenly moved for over familiar behaviour. I arrived in the next prison scared to talk to females in case I'm accused of anything. I stay 'out and proud' there no problems, given loads of support by staff and now back here

hearing more discrimination but as of yet all going good touch wood.

I have received a letter from the equality member of staff here asking as an openly bi male how did I feel I was supported there... have I any advice on how they can support gay people better and I sent them the newsletter asking that they copy it and put it on the wings so any isolated gay person can have a copy and can know about BB project and for them to put posters up asking if any gay bi etc inmates want to start a support group there.

I think this prison and BB project deserve a big clap on the back for giving inmates like myself a voice,

support and hope. I started to go back into my shell after all the negativity aimed at me over my sexuality but staff and the bb project gave me strength to be me. So thank you. I'll never go back to the days of self-harming over self-confusion of my sexuality. I accepted a long time ago who what I am and like some of the letters in the newsletter say, if others can't accept it that's their problem. Thank you one and all for being there. Strange as it sounds, coming out as bi in prison aint been easy but it's the best think I did. Just got to pluck up the courage to tell mum now. Help! Thank you all

**My love, Sid.**



## APPEAL FOR USED STAMPS

Please send any used stamps to:

Slade Farm  
Donkey Sanctuary  
Salcombe Regis  
Devon EX10 ONO

All contributions gratefully received.



# Hi to all the guys and gals,

Many thanks for the Autumn 2011 newsletter. It helped me endlessly not only by reading other people's experiences but helped with my daily bike ride. I'm also on the lookout for reading material to save me from reading the electronic display on the exercise bike. It's my favourite time of the day as for the majority of the week it's an empty space, time alone with my thoughts and the music thumping.

Gary - we all have days when we do not know who, what or where we are or going. Stay positive, aim to achieve one thing each day.

Matthew - can understand your frustration. Pornography was banned in my establishment, but the authorities considered Attitude and Gay Times in this bracket. In fact these magazines are lifestyle magazines and the 'straight' versions are Zoo, Nuts, Loaded and FHM.

## A few prisoners raised the issues in the following ways:

1. Via our hall committee
2. Via the mailbag in Inside Time, later picked up by the national media
3. Via the complaints procedure

The outcome – Attitude, Gay Times approved for sundry purchase alongside any other non-explicit magazine. I wish you luck on trying to change policy and people's attitude. Be prepared for a long battle, hopefully you are lucky enough to have the support of others.

Lee - posters also cause offense elsewhere but this one was a Stonewall campaign poster 'Some people are gay, get over it'. These posters were targeted for vandalism and removal by certain parties, but the management persisted and weeded out the bigots.

There are initiatives in place that tackle bullying, racism and sectarianism to name a few. Yes you can fit homophobia into these but does the issue need tackling head on, after all LGBTQ people exist amongst prisoners and staff. Who knows how many are suffering in silence.

Prisons hold a cross section of the community. It is expected that an element will be ignorant or scared, no matter the reason, a solution should be found to tackle the bigots.



Education could be the answer.

Do not allow the bigots to win, let your voice be heard, remember the pen is mightier than the sword.

Write about your experiences to organisations like Bent Bars, Inside Time... You'll discover you're not alone. Put a note in your listener box, speak to your diversity rep. Together we stand, united not divided, stronger and tougher. No matter how small your action, it'll chip away at the barriers.

**Peace be with you,  
Maurice.**

## **Ignorance/ Eyes firmly closed?**

The other day no-one would play pool with me because of 1 reason (me being gay). I had false reports put in about me because I refused to take the blatant discrimination lying down, I was placed on Gov's report 3 times, the outside Judge dismissed all adjudications as the evidence was overwhelming and it proved I had done nothing wrong.

But nothing happened to the ones who made false reports. LADS be careful don't get drawn into arguments stand up for yourself know when to quit and walk away. There's no point educating small minds, as the ones who act like that always have something to hide.

And I have been getting called fussy by a lot by inmates and staff- My name is Lee - but because I don't like it I get called it more, and the more I'm called it I get used to it.

**Don't give in, words can't hurt violence can.  
Don't put yourself in a situation.**

**by Lee**

## Dear Readers,

My name is Stephen, ever since coming out I prison I've been out and proud of my sexuality. I remember looking up at the Castle thinking this is real OH MY GOD. Plus the first another prisoner said was 'Where's those 2 poofs who's bumming each other', yes I was facing a long sentence with my partner, as I reached the door where my remand clothing was given to me was a familiar face who had just shouted those words. Yes the lad was gay and I knew him and he asked me to keep quiet about him as he was in the closet no-one knew about him. So I arrived at my local prison with my partner. It was hard for him and me, sometimes more so for him because he stood out, people took the micky out of his pad mate due to him being lock up with a gay man, some couldn't cope and beat him up because of this and

Artwork by Favianna  
Rodriguez  
(Favianna.com)



some tried it on, while one cell mate raped him and officers did nothing about it because of his sexuality and just moved him onto Rule 45. I moved onto Rule with him to look out for him and eventually we shared a cell, it took a lot of complaints and fighting the prison system because brothers, and fathers and son could share a cell even co-accused (straight) but not me or my partner. Again this did happen due to understanding Senior Officer and a promise that we wouldn't embarrass the staff or share a bed.

After being convicted and a few months sharing a cell I move prison to start my life sentence. It was not until 2001 when NOMS had to discuss gay men and sent out a policy about discrimination and condoms and also look at magazines available, this didn't happen and was delayed until 2004, which at that time all the magazines was allowed were Gay Times, Attitude, AXM, Pink Paper and other non-porn magazines, other magazines showed erect penis and full-frontal naked men plus they was more than one man on one page and it was suggestive!!

But the prison system did recognise that more and more gay, bi-sexual and transgender men and women was coming into prison. The prison officers had an association called GALLOPS but the prisoners didn't have anything. It took over a couple of years to set up the first Gay forum at that prison but 3 of us did it, monthly meetings and a great officer who we could approach, thank you. Again the main issues were health, condoms and how they were issued, also magazines, we was told no top shelf mags, but I could have Escort, Razzle and other magazines

showing full-frontal and women sharing a page and being suggestive, plus placing these pages on the notice board in your cell, this was discrimination and that still applies now nothing has changed even now in 2011 over 5 years since being able to be treated as an equal.

Getting condoms has changed and discrimination, bullying is not tolerated by prisoners but by the prison system is alright, the Gay forum is still running and more people attend so I'm told. I moved to a new prison and they didn't have a Gay forum but it was not for trying by a couple of inmates they know who they are, anyway I became involved and a few of us organized an AIDS Awareness event and carried on meeting monthly, which was great. Again we had support from staff and they were growing as a group, 4 people turned up, then 6-7. Also other events were planned - the Diversity organised a company to come and film a health DVD for prison population made by the gay forum it was a great day and is available if other prison wants a copy. I've moved again and have just had a gay day where people from the outside come in, also Mr Gay UK 06 they had a good turn out. Hoping to set up a Gay forum here and also an AIDS Awareness event with it coming up 1st December. I would like to banish myths about all gay men having HIV or AIDS and it mainly them who carry this disease. I've been trying to make prison a better and fair equal place for all gay men and women, to stop the discrimination by prisoners and staff also the prison service in general. It's been a slow process and all the gay forums are changing things in prison slowly making a difference but

we need more prisons to set up gay forums. I understand its hard to come out but if one person see that there's somewhere they can go and talk plus change prisoner attitude to gay men and women. It helps having an outlet like BB project thank you! We have a voice at last, plus to find out where all the gay friendly prisons are. If we all pull together and are one voice



they cannot fight all the gay men and women in prison and hear what we are saying because its not just about magazines, condoms. Its about equality and able to have a visit with partners and hug them and hold their hand without reprisals of name calling and a good kick-in. We have feelings as well.

**Also can I just say thank you to all who made a difference at their prison and you leave it a better place for the next gay man or woman who walks through those doors. Plus we don't forget Shawn Brown who died RIP he fought for Equality and Gay Rights in prison.**

## **It's My Dream by Barrie**

I wish I could in happiness  
Be at one with life again  
I walk right out of my sadness  
Into your arms again

Now I have to stay inside  
For the wrong that I had done  
But it's my dream to win again  
Your love 'YOU' lost, and then you won

So let me show you now my dear  
What it is I have to give  
And throughout my life my love  
It's with you I want to live.

## **Greetings Brothers and Sisters;**

Please be advised that I am a 47 year old pre-operative transsexual currently incarcerated at NY and that I am almost done with a period of 20 years in NY.

I've been to the worst maximum security prisons in the NYS. And It never ceases to amaze me how diverse these populations are. Everyone from every race, religion and corner of the world under one dome. It's a melting pot.

Every prison population always have “a few” openly homosexuals, and/or transgender prisoners. In a place that houses between 500 to 2,500 inmates, we are an absolutely small minority. “The girls” usually stick together, or spend their time with their husbands or significant other. But what kills me about the majority of both the administrative employees, and the inmates, is their ignorances.

These people act pre-historic. They still use the term faggot or sissy. In this day and age, in light of same-sex marriages and everyone considered to be a first class citizen, it is so bad to see that people are still so judgemental and biased when it comes time for these men to be released, and their next employer or PO turns out to be of an alternative lifestyle, what then? Are you going to call them a faggot? I think not.

What we need to do as people incarcerated is respect one another. Accept everyone for what

and who they are and know our place. So as not to violate one another. Isn't it bad enough that we are oppressed by the system? It's now 2011.

Also I'd like to add that after attempting to correspond with the Bent Bars Project I have very recently and finally received Newsletter #3. Being incarcerated in New York State I applaud all of the collective and volunteers for putting together such a great publication. Helping to keep our community tight knit, inside and out. I was very impressed with the togetherness.

Unfortunately I am in the box. I was put here for 2 months for sending the legendary Michael Alig A.K.A the Party monster of the Limelight Disco a Christmas card. Michael is also in the box, in a different facility. So they got me for the correspondence violation! So it's going to be depressing to spend Christmas in the box this year.

I am maxing out in 7 months and this nightmare will be over. By the way I was very impressed with both Chris and David D's letters. Anyone who actually gets released and still stays in contact through the newsletter from the outside...is a true comrade. After 3 1/2 years (on this bid)... I too am being released in 7 more months. And I found it very interesting that the newsletter I received was interested in people starting support groups in their prison as I just submitted a 20 page proposal to start a group called The Rainbow Coalition here. I did this all by myself with no help from any of the other girls in this facility. I got a HUGE amount of support from a straight brother who runs a lifers organisation here! Anyway I do hope to be able to enclose a copy of my format so that you guys can get a few ideas of how to start a group with this letter. But if not it will absolutely be in the next letter I send. In closing... I urge all of you my gay brothers and sisters to shine like the stars that you are.



**In solidarity: Miss Kitty**



# 'Ignorance is a bliss'

Why are people too scared to get in the shower with me?  
Could it be my colour, my sexuality?  
Why do people seem to think that gay people fancy everyone  
that are in trousers?

Well its not the case but what really matters?

Insecurity and a lack of understanding and a lack of education!  
These are the problems we face in this un-united nation.

The subject of sexuality should be taught at a young age.  
So it gives everybody a better chance of understanding,  
what's beyond the school gates.  
And its not all about safer sex.  
But the fact that we are treated wrong by the bigots.

**The minority stands firm and sticks together.**  
**We can make the world open up and come more closer together.**

Human rights and human wrongs.  
The law is the law and we must stay strong.  
Stronger to fight and get our rights equal.  
God loves everybody.  
Who's willing and able.

He stood for them, who were weak.  
Remember people turned on him, when he was at his peak.

**- Jason**



send me a letter

**Hi,**

Tristan writing in reply to your letter that I got yesterday. I must admit your letter was much needed.

The letters that I receive from the BB team are always a morale boosting tool to my confidence. The BB team I must admit have been a big form of support. There has been times when your letters and just been there for me have helped me some dark places. So thank you again endlessly.

You asked me if you could use extracts from my last letter for the next newsletter. I don't mind at all and in fact it is a good idea as it makes other gay and lesbian people know they are not alone.

You was right lip service and ticking all the boxes is a general problem throughout the whole prison system. Its very frustrating because I felt at times as if the support was genuine and that the prison was going in the right directions for the right reason.

However as soon as a real problem occurred it was as if nobody wanted to take a real ownership of it and deal with the situation head on. Don't get me wrong some staff are ok and some are supportive and try to be understanding to most situations. At the end of the day I know, or should I say I believe, it is all lip service. It's sad. Hopefully one day things may change.

I think people need to be educated right from the beginning. How that begins I've no idea. Maybe in time it will sort itself out. All I would say is to be careful who you trust because not everyone has the right motives. I've learnt the hard way but I've wised up.

I know without the BB team and the small group of true honest friends around me that things would have been a lot harder for me. I believe people like me need the lives of the BB team because it is important that other people in the same situation as myself know there is the right support out there, not just the people who say they want to help just for the sake of ticking a box. For that alone I take my hat off to the BB team for being real and for the true support you have given me and I'm sure many other people who find themselves in the same situation. You are like a family to me and for that I will be forever grateful.

As for the homophobic problems I'm having. I guess I will always have those issues in a prison environment. I'm just trying to find a better way of dealing with it all. I will always be true to myself and I will always be proud of the fact I am a gay man. I would not change it for the world. It's just sad that there are people in the world that judge other people for things they don't know about or understand. I have a strong heart and that will see me through to the end. And yes you are right I will become a stronger person for having to experience the things I've had to experience. I've learnt my lesson that's for sure. Anyway, I'm going now but will write again very soon. I will look forward to your next letter.

**With hugs and and love always, your friend, Tristan.**

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## **Dear Bent Bars**

Thank you for the autumn edition of your newsletter. This is the second one I've had and I thoroughly enjoyed reading them both, as I'm sure I will with future ones. The real life experiences and poems you print are very touching as I can relate to some of them. I'm an 'out of the closet' prisoner and have been for over two years now and it was the best thing I ever did. I've even come out to my family since being inside which was such a relief. Especially when they said they didnt mind as long as I'm happy. I found the courage to come out through gay friends of mine on the

wing, who were very supportive. I got the odd remark off people but they were just small minded idiots. If you have got the right people supporting you, you can do anything you want! I'm going to include a poem on the back of this that I wrote in 2009 and it is very personal to me. It's about self-harm and depression which I have suffered from for nearly ten years now and I think other readers may also be able to relate to it. If you publish it then I will really appreciate it. If you dont then that's fine.

Finally you asked for people's experiences of LGBTQ support groups. I have attended the one here and

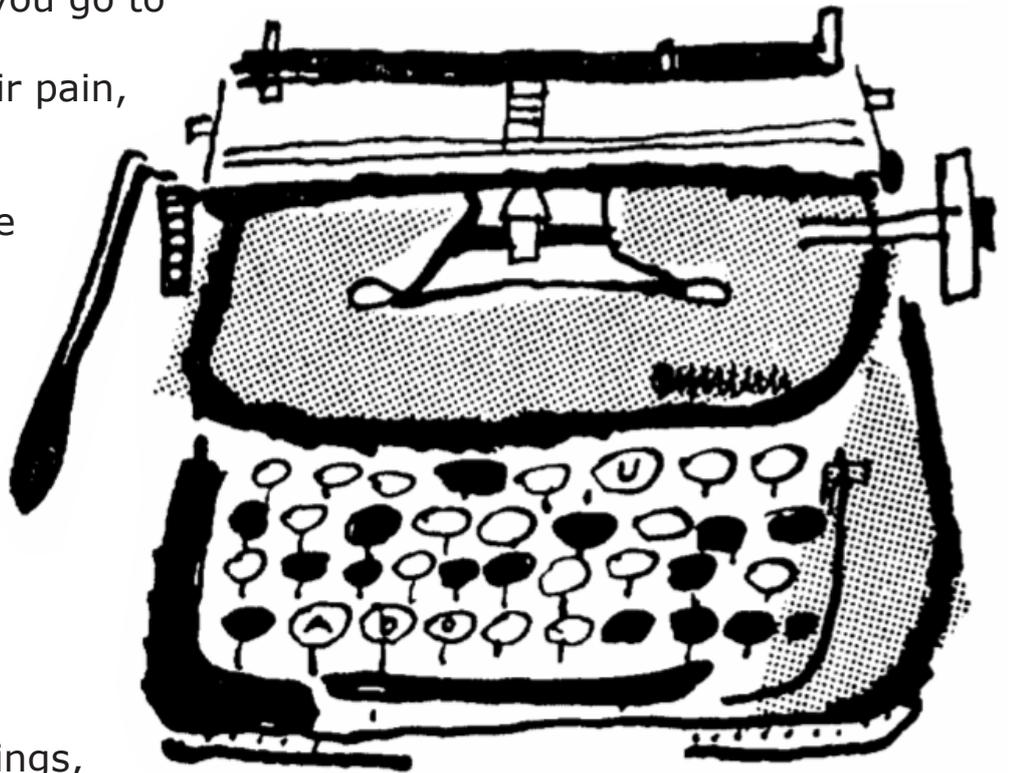
I actually found it quite pointless. People had loads of questions and suggestions, but none of these were ever acted on. Also people in the group didnt seem to take it very seriously and my personal view is that they were there to get off work but still get paid. I wish my experience was positive but I'm afraid it wasn't.

If I see some changes in the prison because of the group then I will attend again. Thank you for reading this and I hope you deem my letter/poem good enough to go in the next newsletter. I look forward to receiving the next newsletter. Keep up the good work!

**Michael**

## Scars

Why must life be so hard,  
Life's experiences can leave you scarred,  
Whether they're on your flesh or in your head,  
They'll still be there when you go to bed,  
You'll wake up and feel their pain,  
They're always there like a bad stain,  
You go to a pro to get some help,  
You talk and they see inside your scalp,  
They want to know how you think,  
But that's they're job cause they're a shrink,  
You talk and they sit there jotting,  
All the bad things they are spotting,  
They dont see any good things,  
They need to know what pulls your strings,  
They give you some meds to see if they work,  
But all these scars you just can't shirk,  
Now you realise your scars are for good,  
No-one can help but you wish they could.



**by Michael**

## Dear Bent Bars,

Newsletter 3 Autumn issue was great and enjoyable but also touched me, an article from Dwayne he may have been released from prison, hopefully still reads your newsletter.

He had lost a lot of family, loved ones within a short period but tried to take his own life twice because he was bullied for being gay. It makes me sick and upset that a human being can drive someone to that point in life that death is the only way out. As a listener in prison and a gay man it's unforgivable that other men who see this bullying happen that they don't do anything about it, most people just turn a blind eye and let it happen, there's a code in prison that you don't grass on others, alright that can make things worse and label you a grass, but if other people just sorted these bullies out in a non-violent way and stood up for each other to stop these bullies on the wing that would be a better place. No-one likes a bully. I been a listener for over 8 years and seen and listened to a lot of people over this time but this story has upset me. Do more to stop bullying in prison, its anti-bullying week from 14th-21st November, so we can promote this then. Also people don't use the listeners because of confidential issues, believe me if anyone breaks this rule they will be kicked off the scheme and will never be allowed to be a listener again, I cannot stress this too much confidentiality is important as the scheme would not work. In Dwayne's case we may have been able to help him and change his mind about what he did, again we would talk about suicide and how they/he intend to commit suicide, hopefully he then would come to his own conclusion and see it would not solve his problems in the right way and the bullies would move onto other victims.



Artwork by  
Favianna  
Rodriguez  
(Favianna.com)

I hope Dwayne has moved on and got over his experience in prison, I understand that he may never get over the bullying and what he suffered and trying to take his own life but like he says I hope some-one reads his story and it helps then in someway.

Thank you Dwayne for being honest and writing to BB project about what you suffered hope you've turned your life around, moved on and are happy,

**Kind Regards,  
love Stephen**

## Listeners by Anon

A prison listener is what I am,  
I listen to your problems cause I can,

Samaritan trained to help me deal,  
with the worries and fears of how you  
feel.

A prison listener just awaiting your call,  
a prisoner here, a listener to all.

Thoughts in your head? Things on your  
chest?

We're Samaritan trained to give you our  
best.

We're not here to judge, nor your words  
reveal,

the secrets you tell us we do conceal,  
your problems, fears, worries and tears,  
we listen to all with no barbs or spears.

24/7 we are always on call,  
into the pit of despair you needn't fall,  
with words and questions we may  
prompt,  
to save you from feelings that are  
threatening to swamp.

One on one, confidentiality assured,  
any time of day or night we await your word,  
push your cell call button, ask a Listener to come,  
you may be in prison, but you're not alone.





# Call-out for the next newsletter: Identity 'outside the box'

If you've got something you'd like to be included in the next Bent Bars newsletter, please write to us. We would really like images for the next newsletter, so please send any artwork you've drawn that you'd like to see in the next newsletter.

The theme for the next newsletter is 'Identity outside the box', so if you've got anything to say on this subject we'd love to hear from you. Suggestions for this theme could include:

Multiple identities: do you feel like you don't fit neatly into one category, how does this affect how others perceive you?

Fluid or changing identities.

Don't feel like you fit the boxes or categories 'Lesbian', 'Gay', 'Bi-sexual', 'Trans'?

Do you feel like you are either male or female, or both?

Does your gender fit with your sexuality?

How do you describe yourself?

How does your sexual identity fit with other sides of yourself?

Do you feel like other people put you in a box?

Can you move between categories?

How has your identity changed?

These are some thoughts we had, we'd love to hear from you about these ideas or about any other ways that 'identity' affects you...



## So you know...

The Bent Bars Collective aims to include the contributions we receive as they are submitted, without making editorial changes to content or style (beyond spelling and grammar corrections when necessary).

However, due to space constraints some articles are edited for length. If you've submitted something and don't find your writing or artwork in this or previous issues, we'll aim to include it in the next one. Don't be shy to drop us a line to make sure we have received it!

We will not publish any material which reinforces stereotypes or expresses oppressive attitudes towards others.

The articles in this newsletter are written by people in prison and it is read by people inside and outside of prison. It is of free distribution so if you'd like a copy, just ask.

We welcome thoughts, comments and replies to questions raised in these pages from you all.

The Bent Bars Project is a letter writing program that connects lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, gender-variant, intersex, and queer communities across prison walls. If you would like more information or would like to request a penpal, please drop us a line.

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