



Jan Lastocy (left) and Lovisa Stannow.

WHILE SERVING TIME in a Michigan prison, Jan Lastocy was raped. Not once, not twice, but three or four times a week for seven months. The rapist was an officer who supervised Jan at the prison warehouse. He assaulted her behind pallets stacked with flour and sugar, in the walk-in freezer — anywhere he felt confident no one would catch him.

Desperate to go home to her husband and children, Jan didn't report the abuse. If she did, the officer told her, he would write her up and delay her release. The warden had already made clear that she would always believe an officer's word over an inmate's.

Recently, I had lunch with Jan and her husband of thirty years, John. He visited her regularly in prison. Back then, he knew Jan was having a tough time, but not that she was subjected to horrific sexual abuse. Jan was too afraid of her rapist even to tell John.

It's easy to feel numbed by the recent Department of Justice data that *at least* 216,600 inmates are sexually abused every year in the U.S. Let's remember that behind that enormous number are 216,600 fellow human beings, like Jan. And behind each of them are their loved ones, like John.

Sincerely,

Lovisa Stannow

Advocates + Corrections Staff = Safer Prisons and Jails for All

JDI, prisoner rape survivors, and officials come together

For the longest time, U.S. corrections officials tended to downplay the problem of sexual abuse, insisting that such violence was an aberration, a crisis fabricated by advocates and prisoners. But recently, a shift began. Officials and advocates are coming together, agreeing to respect significant differences of opinion while recognizing each other's essential roles in the effort to end sexual abuse in detention. JDI's participation at the American Correctional Association's recent winter conference in San Antonio, Texas, was a milestone in that effort.

Prisoner rape survivor Scott Howard was one of JDI's panelists at the conference. His voice was strong and clear as he described his harrowing experience being raped, beaten, and extorted by a white supremacist gang while in a Colorado prison. Scott had begged officials for protection, only to be called a "whiner" and told that, as a gay man, he should expect to be targeted by one gang or another.

The audience — all corrections officials — was mesmerized by Scott's account. There was total silence, not a movement in the room; it was not clear what those listening were thinking.

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Sexual abuse in detention will only come to an end if corrections officials, advocates, and inmates join hands and work together.

New Government Report:

At least 216,600 U.S. Inmates Sexually Abused Every Year

The Department of Justice has released its first-ever estimate of how many people are sexually abused in U.S. detention in a one-year period. In 2008, the Department says, at least 216,600 people were abused in prisons and jails, and in 17,100 of these cases, in juvenile detention.

Overall, that's almost six hundred people a day — 25 an hour. These statistics reflect the number of people abused, not the number of incidents. Many of those 216,600 are abused again and again. Contrary to common stereotypes, most inmates are victimized not by other inmates, but by staff.

The Department generated this number by analyzing its own inmate surveys about sexual abuse, mandated by the Prison Rape Elimination Act. These surveys were created in recognition of the fact that most inmates do not file a complaint after enduring sexual abuse.

JDI receives letters from prisoner rape survivors every day, in which traumatized men

and women speak of having to suffer the aftermath of abuse in silence, due to shame and humiliation, fear of retaliation, or an expectation that no one will help even if they do file a formal complaint.

The 216,600 estimate stands in stark contrast to another recent publication — also by the Department of Justice — of official reports of sexual abuse filed in prisons and jails nationwide in 2008: 7,444. Of these, only 931 were substantiated. According to this report, even when authorities confirmed that staff had sexually abused inmates in their custody, only 42 percent of officers had their cases referred to prosecution, only 23 percent were arrested, and only 3 percent were charged, indicted or convicted; 15 percent were allowed to keep their jobs.

“Even one case of rape of someone in the government’s custody is one too many,” said Lovisa Stannow, JDI’s Executive Director. “Twenty-five an hour constitutes a human rights crisis in our own country.”

Welcome, New Board Members

JDI is pleased to welcome three new members to its Board of Directors: Dawn Davison, Alicia Dixon, and Scott Howard.

Dawn Davison is the first prison official to serve on JDI’s Board. Formerly warden of the California Institution for Women, she placed herself within the vanguard of reform-minded corrections managers by allowing JDI and the Riverside Area Rape Crisis Center to bring counselors into the prison to speak confidentially with sexual abuse survivors.

Alicia Dixon is a public health professional with extensive philanthropic and organizational experience. She serves as Executive Director of the Marcus Foster Education Fund. As program officer of The California Endowment, Alicia boldly gave JDI a three-year grant for its work inside California prisons.

Scott Howard is a survivor of prisoner rape and one of the country’s leading advocates in the fight to end sexual abuse in detention. He has been profiled extensively in the media and has spoken publicly about his experiences enduring repeated assaults in prison while staff looked the other way.



Dawn Davison



Alicia Dixon

ACA Conference

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Afterward, Scott described relief rushing through him as the room burst into applause. The Deputy Commissioner of a state corrections agency embraced him, saying, “Scott, it wasn’t your fault.”

“They listened, they really listened,” Scott said. “Even after what I went through, I believe that most prison staff would like to protect inmates. Today I had that feeling reaffirmed. Sadly, so many staff at my prison, even the good ones, had no idea what to do.”

For JDI, the effort to work with prison officials is not a new one. Over the past five years, JDI has helped establish pilot programs at several prisons and has trained officials nationwide in sexual abuse awareness and human rights. JDI’s programs include groundbreaking ones, such as bringing community rape crisis counselors into prisons and training inmates as peer educators on the Prison Rape Elimination Act.

“Working with JDI sometimes makes me want to pull my hair out — the little hair I have left — but it’s still worth it,” explained Jim Gondles, Executive Director of the American Correctional Association. “We need to collaborate with advocates to make our prisons as safe as possible.”

At the conference, Scott and JDI staff shared the stage with two officials from the California Correctional Institution, a large men’s prison in Southern California. There, facility staff are working in partnership with JDI and a local community rape crisis center, Women’s Center – High Desert. Health Program Specialist Jodi Ramirez and Investigative Sergeant Charles Contreras spoke about how opening up their prison has helped make it safer for everyone, and about the positive impact JDI’s presence has had on prison culture.

“More and more, we hear from prisons and jails that want our help,” said Linda McFarlane, JDI’s Deputy Executive Director. “Advocates, inmates, and corrections officials must work together to end prisoner rape, making sure that no one else has to go through what Scott did, ever again.”

Please Spare a Few Minutes To Help End Rape in Detention

CAN YOU SPARE a few minutes of your time to help end sexual violence in U.S. detention facilities? That's all it takes to use the tools available on JDI's website (www.justdetention.org) and urge the government to adopt strong national standards for the prevention of prisoner rape.

The Department of Justice has finally opened a public comment period on its draft of national standards mandated by the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) of 2003. Once finalized by Attorney General Holder, these standards will be binding on corrections facilities nationwide. The public comment period runs through April 4, 2011, and represents the last chance to weigh in on the standards.

"The Department needs to hear from a wide range of stakeholders, not just prison officials, to ensure that the final provisions are as strong as possible," explained Melissa Rothstein, JDI's Senior Program Director. "These national standards aren't just another set of government regulations; they have the power to protect countless men, women, and children each year from the horror of rape in prison."

While the Department of Justice's draft standards include several strong measures, it is, overall, a flawed and watered-down version of the standards proposed by the bipartisan National Prison Rape Elimination Commission in 2009.

JDI is alarmed by the Department's determination that the standards should not apply to immigration detention facilities (see adjacent article). JDI is also deeply concerned that the Department suggests allowing prisons and jails to place sexual abuse survivors in solitary confinement against their will, increasing their trauma. The Department's weakening of the recommendation that prisoner rape survivors be able to speak confidentially with a community-based victim advocate after reporting a sexual assault is dangerous

and ill-informed; rape survivors are much more likely to file a formal complaint if they have had a chance first to speak with a trusted advocate.

Sadly, the Department has given in to corrections pressure and removed several proposed limits on cross-gender pat searches and viewing of inmates using the toilet or shower, even as the same Department of Justice has documented that most abuse of inmates by staff is cross-gender, and that it often begins during pat searches (but then is not limited to such searches).

In one area, the Department has actually introduced a standard likely to worsen the already exceptionally limited options available to inmates who have been abused and who wish to file a grievance. It has done so by proposing a 20-day time limit on the filing of an initial grievance — a timeframe that is shorter than limits currently in place within 18 state prison systems.

No matter how strong the final standards are, they will be meaningless if they do not require detention facilities to be subject to independent, external oversight. The U.S. already runs what are widely considered the least transparent prisons in the Western world. Yet, in its recommended standards, the Department of Justice proposes allowing corrections agencies to use an internal employee for measuring compliance with the standards.

"With rampant sexual abuse in prisons and jails across the country, most of it committed by officials, it's ludicrous to assume that corrections facilities are capable of policing themselves," said Rothstein.

Please take a look at JDI's sample letter to the Department of Justice, or write your own comments using JDI's talking points, by visiting www.justdetention.org.



Immigration Detainees Must Be Protected

AS A TRANSGENDER WOMAN, Esmeralda Soto lived in constant fear in her native Mexico. Abuse and harassment were part of her daily life. While in jail in the state of Guerrero, Esmeralda was raped. Eventually, she made her way to the U.S., in search of the tolerance that had eluded her so far.

"Here, I thought I would be safe. Finally safe," Esmeralda explained.

She wasn't. Esmeralda was arrested and taken to an immigration detention facility. After three days in the custody of the Department of Homeland Security, while in a holding cell waiting to see her attorney, an officer forced Esmeralda to perform oral sex on him.

"After reporting the assault, I was treated with contempt and hostility by other officers," Esmeralda said. "They called me a snitch. Other detainees also distanced themselves from me. I felt very alone and afraid."

It isn't only transgender inmates who are vulnerable. Terrified of deportation, often sharing no language with their jailers, all immigration detainees — many of whom have not been charged with a crime — are at risk.

Because they are so vulnerable, the co-sponsor and Congressional champion of the Prison Rape Elimination Act, the late Senator Edward Kennedy, spoke of his particular satisfaction that immigration detention was *included* in the mandate of PREA.

The proposal to exclude immigration is especially disappointing as the Department of Justice itself, in its preamble to the proposed standards, states that "protection from sexual abuse should not depend on where an individual is incarcerated: It must be universal."

“The holiday cards saved my life.”

Thank You for Offering Prisoner Rape Survivors a Gift of Hope

For many of the 2.4 million people behind bars in the U.S., the holiday season is the hardest. In the letters we receive every day from inmates, all of us at JDI sense the growing desperation as the end of the year approaches. Incarcerated sexual abuse survivors write about their loneliness and isolation.

Last year, we decided to ask you, our supporters, to help us break through the desolation behind bars by reaching out to a prisoner rape survivor with a kind word — with the gift of hope.

The result was simply amazing: within days, 600 JDI supporters sent us holiday greetings, all of which we immediately forwarded to prisoner rape survivors across the country. You wrote:

“I wish you hope, healing, and support. Please know there are people fighting for you, even if you have never seen us. Know there is love.”

“May you take comfort in knowing that countless people in the free world care deeply about you and will not stop fighting for justice.”

“From one survivor to another, I send you hope for peace of mind and heart. On both sides of the bars, we give one another strength to go on.”

It didn't take long before the responses from prisoner rape survivors started pouring in,

making clear the life-changing impact of these simple notes:

“I received your letter on Friday, 12-24-10, just as I was having horrible thoughts of cutting this earth trip short. An officer said ‘Synder, you got mail,’ and that snapped me back from the edge. The holiday cards saved my life.”

“When I read your letter and the message cards my heart skipped a beat and I started to cry. Yes, this 46-year old convict was crying. The kind words of encouragement, blessings, letting me know that I'm not forgotten from total strangers from far away shattered my emotions.”

“Your message offered me more than just a ‘little bit of hope.’ Knowing there are people such as yourself out there, sending out their positive thoughts, fills me with an enormous amount of hope. And I will work hard at remaining as strong as I can.”

“I have been down since 1998 and have not had a card or letter sent to me, nor a visit. To receive those cards has totally left me speechless. Thank you, thank you, thank you.”

All of us at JDI agree: Thank you, thank you, thank you to all of you who answered our call for compassion and humanity. You may just have helped save the life of a fellow human being.



Giving the gift of hope, JDI's supporters sent 600 of these holiday cards to incarcerated survivors of sexual abuse.



By law, South African prison officials will now be required to assess whether an inmate is vulnerable to sexual abuse.

South African Law Protects Inmates From Sexual Abuse

In February 2011, the Correctional Services Act — the law that governs all prisons in South Africa — was amended to require that inmates be assessed to determine their vulnerability to sexual violence and exploitation. In prisons around the world, one of the most pivotal moments to prevent rape and abuse is during the classification process, when officials decide where and with whom to house inmates. Now, for the first time, South African prison officials will be explicitly required to include a determination of whether someone is vulnerable to sexual abuse during classification.

This reform represents a milestone in JDI's long-standing effort to help end sexual abuse in South African prisons. Working closely with Members of Parliament, especially Mr. James Selfe of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Corrections, JDI helped draft the amendments to the Act.

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