Too Many Inmates, Too Few Staff

New Report: Violence Plagues South Africa’s “Sun City” Prison

When one single officer is responsible for 400 inmates, when lights don’t work, buildings are decrepit, and gangs are allowed to run the show, it’s no surprise that violence flourishes — nor that staff morale is at rock bottom. That’s the scenario powerfully described in JDI-South Africa’s groundbreaking new research report, In Their Boots.

Focused on the situation inside Johannesburg Correctional Management Area, also known as “Sun City,” In Their Boots highlights systemic and systemic problems that endanger staff and inmates alike. Sun City is one of South Africa’s most notorious prisons and the report is based on interviews with frontline staff, managers, and inmates.

Considering the dramatic content of In Their Boots, it came as a pleasant surprise that Department of Correctional Services (DCS) officials not only attended the January 2015 launch event, but were receptive to the report’s findings. As one high-ranking official remarked, “You shouldn’t break a mirror just because you don’t like what it shows you.”

As In Their Boots makes clear, Sun City staff are ill-equipped to keep prisoners safe, lacking both resources and training. Staff speak about the twin problems of inmate overcrowding and understaffing, and about the fear and anxiety that pervade their every work shift. They make clear that they want to do the right thing, but that they have not been given the necessary tools and guidance by their superiors to succeed. “When you put on the uniform, you don’t know whether you will be going back home or you will be taken to the hospital,” said one officer.

While staff undoubtedly face hardship on Sun City, prisoners endure far worse. In Their Boots illustrates the appalling conditions in the facility. One account describes a young inmate, Obed, who was sexually abused by an older gang member over a period of several months. Staff did not have the skills to detect the abuse earlier — nor were they able to provide Obed with support once they knew what happened. One officer said, “What is it that we are going to say that will make Obed feel like a man again? I am not trained to do that.”

Although In Their Boots is sometimes scathing in its assessment of DCS, the report’s intent is not to point fingers. Rather, JDI-SA’s primary aim in issuing In Their Boots is to offer solutions and to stimulate real and enduring change inside South Africa’s prisons.

To download the report, visit: bit.ly/1uYfzrE

Standing Up for Detained Children

Thank you, JDI supporters, for taking action to help defend the rights of immigrant children.

Last month, hundreds of people like you signed JDI’s letter to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), demanding strong protections for the thousands of immigrant kids in its custody.

The letter was in response to HHS’s release of interim standards mandated by the Prison Rape Elimination Act. The interim standards are strong, but they need to be even better. By joining this campaign, JDI supporters sent a clear message to HHS that people care about the right of all children to be safe from sexual abuse.

JUST DETENTION INTERNATIONAL
3325 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 340
Los Angeles, CA 90010
Tel: (213) 384-1400
Fax: (213) 384-1411

East Coast Office
1900 L Street NW, Suite 605
Washington, DC 20036
Tel: (202) 506-3333
Fax: (202) 506-7971

JDI-South Africa
Norwood Place, 2nd Floor
66 Grant Avenue
Norwood, Johannesburg 2192
South Africa
Tel: (202) 506-3333
info@justdetention.org
www.justdetention.org

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
LOVISA STANNOW
Charity Navigator
Fast for Data

JUST DETENTION INTERNATIONAL
RAPE IS NOT PART OF THE PENALTY

APRIL 2015 | ACTION UPDATE

“Give PREA a Try — It Works”
JDI Helps Turn Miami-Dade’s Jails into a National Model

When JDI began working with the Miami-Dade Corrections and Rehabilitation Department (MDCR) to establish rape crisis services for inmates, it may have seemed idealistic to expect that the project would succeed. MDCR’s jail system was broken, sexual violence widespread. Worse still, some officials did not think it was their job to address the problem. “Many staff thought sexual abuse was just part of being in jail,” explained Lieutenant Wynnie Testamark-Samuels.

That was in 2011, when JDI and MDCR started working together, with funding from the Department of Justice’s Office for Victims of Crime (OVC). Fast forward to today and MDCR staff paint a different picture. “This project has brought a new focus to our work. It has made everyone look at themselves in the mirror. We were not asking the right questions before, not noticing obvious signs that someone might be at risk of abuse,” said Lieutenant Jan C. Smith. “We are not just guards, we are professionals, and we must behave as professionals.”

It wasn’t easy in the beginning, however. “Many of the jail staff considered us adversaries simply because we were outsiders. At first, some officers were overtly hostile,” said JDI Deputy Executive Director Linda McFarlane. “But MDCR’s leaders recognized that the old way of doing things wasn’t working. Pretty soon, line staff also started to see that inmate safety and good corrections are one and the same.”

See Miami-Dade Jails, continued on page 2

To download the report, visit: bit.ly/1uYfzrE

Executive Director

Lovisa Stannow

Two senior MDCR staff members — Captain Enrique Rodriguez (left) and Assistant Director Daniel Junior — show compassion for rape survivors by writing holiday cards.
I n 2014, former Texas Governor Rick Perry rejected the PREA standards. To justify his decision, Perry argued that the standards would never work in Texas.

Today, JDI is proving that Perry was dead wrong.

In Texas’s Bexar County, JDI joined forces last year with the sheriff’s department to protect jail inmates from sexual abuse. The partnership’s success shows that, contrary to Perry’s claims, PREA compliance is not a pipe dream. All it takes is some hard work and common sense.

With JDI’s help, Bexar County has adopted pivotal reforms that are having an impact on staff culture and improving the safety of its jail. Most notably, the county set up a free, confidential hotline for inmates to get help — one of only a handful of counties nationwide to have done so. Last year, Bexar County passed its PREA audit.

With JDI’s help, Miami-Dade County has been replacing the mindset of criminalizing inmates with a recognition that inmates are human beings, but the JDI team wouldn’t let us. JDI shocked us, molded us, and praised us. And it worked.”

THE DEEP CHANGE THAT HAS OCCURRED IN MIAMI DEPENDS ON A COMMITMENT FROM THE TOP. WHEN FACED WITH DATA SHOWING VERY HIGH LEVELS OF ABUSE AT ITS JAIL, MDCR’S NOW-RETIRED DIRECTOR, TIM RYAN, DECIDED TO BET ON PREA. “PREA HAS SET THE STAGE FOR MUCH-NEEDED REFORM. USING THE PREA STANDARDS AS A BASELINE, MDCR WORKED WITH JDl TO CREATE A HOTLINE FOR INMATES TO REPORT SEXUAL ABUSE, AND TO SET UP CONFIDENTIAL CRISIS SERVICES FOR SURVIVORS — PROVIDED BY COMMUNITY-BASED COUNSELORS. JDI HELPED TRAIN MDCR STAFF ON EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION WITH INMATES WHO ARE LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER. POLICIES AND PRACTICES WERE UPDATED THROUGHOUT THE JAIL SYSTEM.”

Corrections officer Pamela Stewart, who works in classification, described how PREA has made her and her colleagues change the way they do their jobs: “We had to train staff to slow down. In the past, the guy you were interviewing may have been crying, but you didn’t notice, because you never looked up. You never looked at the person sitting in front of you.”

The shift in staff attitudes helped pave the way for much-needed reform. Using the PREA standards as a baseline, MDCR worked with JDI to create a hotline for inmates to report sexual abuse, and to set up confidential rape crisis services for survivors — provided by community-based counselors. JDI helped train MDCR staff on effective communication with inmates who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. Policies and practices were updated throughout the jail system.

Through JDI’s help, Miami-Dade jails continue to be safe, in all detention settings. Even one sexual assault is one too many. Having said that, it’s especially exciting to see large, complex agencies, like the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department, commit to PREA,” said Lovisa Stanmann, JDI’s Executive Director.

JDI’s project with Bexar County is one of many trailblazing partnerships nationwide. Last year, JDI worked with the Callam County jail in Washington, the state prison system in South Carolina, and the Los Angeles Police Department. In 2015, JDI is collaborating with an equally diverse mix of agencies, launching projects in jails in Maricopa County (Arizona), Los Angeles County, and throughout West Virginia, as well as state prisons in Virginia.

Whether working in a tiny jail, like the one in Aspen, Colorado, or one of the largest jail systems in the world, like the one in Los Angeles, JDI emphasizes that dedicated corrections officials can — and must — keep inmates safe. “Every single inmate has a right to be safe, in all detention settings. Even one sexual assault is one too many. Having said that, it’s especially exciting to see large, complex agencies, like the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department, commit to PREA,” said Lovisa Stanmann, JDI’s Executive Director.

The deep change that has occurred in Miami-Dade depends on a commitment from the top. When faced with data showing very high levels of abuse at its jail, MDCR’s now-retired Director, Tim Ryan, decided to bet on PREA. “PREA has set the stage for a new world,” he said. “Miami-Dade is part of that new world and proud to hold hands with others on the same path.” Testmark-Samuels echoed Ryan’s sentiment: “Give PREA a try — it works. Miami-Dade runs the eighth largest jail in the country. If we can do it, so can you.”

Today, MDCR’s PREA program stands as a nationwide model. JDI, with OVC’s support, is producing a resource guide to help other communities replicate Miami’s success. “Project partners have told JDI that they feel more alone at this time of year than at any other. Through JDI’s Words of Hope campaign, however, survivors have reclaimed the holidays as a time for celebration. This remarkable campaign is simple and powerful, and it is based entirely on the compassion of people like you. Since 2011, many JDI supporters have written countless holiday greetings to survivors who are locked up, as part of Words of Hope.”

This year, you proved yet again that you care deeply about survivors, writing thousands of Words of Hope messages. The kindness and warmth in these greetings meant everything to the people who received them. One survivor, Milo, explained that the cards provided a sense of comfort that had been long missing from his life inside an Idaho prison. He wrote, “I received the cards and learned that people from all over have come into my heart, without even knowing me, to share their love, encouragement, and strength. You could not have known, my dear friends, how alone I have felt, but your cards came as a wonderful present, a gift of true love and friendship.”

Many other survivors echoed Milo’s feelings. Rafael, a survivor in a New York prison who has been getting Words of Hope cards since 2012, was filled with gratitude for your messages. He told JDI, “Every year, I feel like a child who awaits anxiously for Christmas Day to open his present. I am extremely grateful for all the encouraging words — words that bring tranquility, energy, and inspiration. You and your supporters have become family to me. Thank you for setting me free and making me feel worthy.”

Another survivor who expressed profound appreciation for the cards is Winter. A transgender woman held in a men’s prison in Pennsylvania, Winter was raped by another inmate, her sense of worth shattered. She was disconnected from the outside world — until she got your messages. She wrote, “I cried like a baby when I received all of the beautiful cards from all of you. Throughout my incapacitation, I have been estranged from my family and just knowing I have your love gives me hope and strength to achieve my goals and help others who have become victims of sexual abuse.”

Through the Words of Hope holiday card campaign, JDI supporters made a profound difference in the lives of prisoner rape survivors. Among the many survivors whose lives you touched are (clockwise from left) Milo, Cindy, Winter, and Rafael.

The map below shows JDI’s partner agencies in the U.S. over the past year.
PREA in Action, Even in Texas
Culture Change Key to Creating Safe Prisons and Jails

In 2014, former Texas Governor Rick Perry rejected the PREA standards. To justify his decision, Perry argued that the standards would never work in Texas. Today, JDI is proving that Perry was dead wrong.

In Texas’s Bexar County, JDI joined forces last year with the sheriff’s department to protect jail inmates from sexual abuse. The partnership’s success shows that, contrary to Perry’s claims, PREA compliance is not a pipe dream. All it takes is some hard work and common sense.

With JDI’s help, Bexar County has adopted pivotal reforms that are having an impact on the inside and common sense. All it takes is some hard work and cooperation, even in Texas.

Today, JDI is proving that Perry was dead wrong. The shift in staff attitudes helped pave the way for much-needed reform. Using the PREA standards as a baseline, MDCR worked with JDI to create a hotline for inmates to report sexual abuse, and to set up confidential rape crisis services for survivors — provided by community-based counselors. JDI helped train MDCR staff on effective communication with inmates who are transgender and gender non-conforming.

In Aspen, Colorado, or one of the largest jail systems in the world, like the one in Los Angeles, JDI emphasizes that dedicated correctional officials can — and must — keep inmates safe. “Every single inmate has a right to be safe, in all detention settings. Even one sexual assault is one too many. Having said that, it’s especially exciting to see large, complex agencies, like the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department, commit to PREA,” said Lovisa Stannow, JDI’s Executive Director.

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Miami-Dade Jails
continued from page 1

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Today, MDCR’s PREA program stands as a nationwide model. JDI, with OVC’s support, is producing a resource guide to help other communities replicate Miami-Dade’s success. In Miami, the fear of outsiders has been replaced by a desire to work with local organizations. Staff see the value of having a sense of comfort that had long been missing from their lives inside an Idaho prison. As Ann, a survivor in Idaho, wrote, “I cried when I received the cards and learned that people from all over have come into my heart, without even knowing me, to share their love, encouragement, and strength. You could not have known, my dear friends, how alone I have felt, but your cards came as a wonderful present, a gift of true love and friendship.”

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Thank you so much for sharing your compassion with Milo, Rafael, Winter, and so many others!
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Considering the dramatic content of In Their Boots, it came as a pleasant surprise that Department of Correctional Services (DCS) officials not only attended the January 2015 launch event, but were receptive to the report’s findings. As one high-ranking official put it, “What happened in Sun City is sometimes startling in its presentation of DCS, the report’s intent is not to point fingers. Rather, DCS’s primary aim in issuing In Their Boots is to offer solutions for the problems in its custody.

The letter was in response to HHS’ release of interim standards mandated by the Prison Rape Elimination Act. The interim standards are strong, but they need to be enforced aggressively. As JDI’s President, he built a national movement of people committed to ensuring that no person ever have to suffer as he did. The pinnacle of Tom’s activism was the passage of the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA), which called for the creation of national standards that are changing the culture of prisons.

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