

## ACTION UPDATE

MARCH 2020

**W**HEN I JOINED JDI's Board of Directors in 2002, we had just opened our first office in Los Angeles and had two part-time staff members. Two years later, I agreed to serve as Acting Executive Director for four months. Needless to say, that's not how things worked out!



Now, after 18 amazing years, I have decided to step down as Executive Director at the end of June. What we have built together at

JDI is the pride of my professional life. Today, JDI has three offices, 25 staff members, dozens of volunteers, and excellent Boards in the U.S. and South Africa.

We also have a strong network of supporters, like you, who make all our work possible. Thanks to you, we are bold, strategic, and visionary. Your compassion for survivors of sexual abuse in detention has made us the indisputable global leader in the fight to end this violence.

I know this is the right time for me to make way for new leadership at this remarkable organization. Many nonprofit leaders overstay in their jobs. I don't want to be one of them.

The Board and I are deeply committed to working together to ensure a successful transition — after which I look forward to remaining a committed supporter, cheering JDI on as it achieves the many victories that I know lie ahead.

With love and gratitude,

Lovisa Stannow  
Executive Director

## Together, We're Making a Difference in the Lives of Kids in Custody

*A new government report shows how far we've come in making youth detention facilities safer — and how much work is left.*

**B**ACK IN 2010, Troy Isaac gave an interview to National Public Radio about the horrific sexual abuse he endured in a juvenile hall. During the segment, Troy was asked about an astonishing new government report showing that more than 12 percent of kids in youth detention were abused over a one-year period. "It did not surprise me, because this stuff happened when I was a kid," Troy told the reporter. "The juvenile justice system doesn't believe in trying to prevent something before it happens — and they don't like dealing with it when it does happen."

Because of courageous survivors like Troy, JDI had long known that sexual abuse was

rampant inside U.S. youth detention facilities. But the data from this study, conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), gave us rock solid proof.

Armed with these findings, we ramped up the pressure on the Department of Justice to finalize its Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) standards to address this violence. The study also helped us make the case to youth corrections officials that, unless they took bold steps, they would continue to fail the kids in their care.

Our approach worked. With your support, we fought for, and helped secure, strong PREA standards — which we then used as a tool to bring safer policies to juvenile detention

*See Making a Difference for Kids, continued on page 2*



*While the juvenile justice system is safer overall, some facilities continue to fail the kids in their care. At Ohio's Circleville Juvenile Correctional Facility, pictured above, roughly one in six youth were sexually abused in a single year. (Photo by Jonathan Quilter/Columbus Dispatch)*

# Where's the Data?

*The New Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) Report Omits Findings that We Need to Protect Kids*

**W**Henever BJS releases a new report on sexual abuse in detention, it's a big deal for advocates. The BJS studies draw on anonymous surveys of thousands of people in detention about sexual abuse in their facilities. Crafted with input from JDI staff and survivor advocates, the surveys shed light not only on who is at risk for this violence and where it happens most frequently, but also the conditions that make some facilities more dangerous than others. There are no other reports like these anywhere in the world.

The latest BJS report, which was released in December and covered youth facilities, was especially significant. It had been nearly six years since the previous report on sexual abuse in juvenile detention came out. In addition, this was the first survey of detained youth since the release of the PREA standards — a set of binding commonsense measures aimed at detecting, preventing, and responding to sexual abuse. PREA is a game-changing human rights tool but, without data, it's been difficult to assess its implementation.

On the morning the new report came out, JDI staff rushed to the printer, eager to pore over its findings. This data would shape our efforts, serving as a kind of roadmap that guides our work to ensure the safety of children who are locked up.

Our first reaction to the report was positive. The overall rate of sexual abuse in youth facilities decreased (see *Making a Difference for Kids*). But as we thumbed through the report's pages, that excitement turned to confusion. The study was much thinner than expected. It soon became clear why: huge chunks of data were missing. This was a roadmap with most of the street names removed.

Perhaps the most glaring omission involved the data on LGBT youth. The prior BJS studies showed that LGBT kids were far more likely than their straight peers to be sexually abused in youth detention. This finding matched what we were hearing from kids, and

affirmed our view that the effort to stop rape in youth detention had to target homophobia, or it would fail.

There are other gaps in the report. It contained nothing on youth with a history of sexual victimization — a group that previous studies had shown was extremely vulnerable. Nor was there any data at all about staff perpetrators. Indeed, one could read this report cover to cover and have no inkling that officer sexual misconduct has long plagued the juvenile detention system.

Immediately following the report's publication, JDI pressed BJS to account for the gaps in the report. So far, BJS responded in the media, but their answers have been evasive, and included only vague promises to release the findings at a later date.

That's simply not good enough. They have the data, and there's no reason at all to keep it under lock and key. JDI will continue to demand that BJS share what they have, and we won't stop until they do.



*JDI Survivor Council Troy Isaac knows that sexual abuse in youth facilities is completely preventable. He won't stop fighting until every kid in detention is safe.*

# Making a Difference for Kids

*continued from page 1*

facilities. While we could see the change on the ground, there wasn't any concrete data to point to. Until now.

In December, the BJS released a new study showing that our juvenile justice system is in fact safer, with 7.1 percent of youth reporting abuse. A few percentage points may seem insignificant, but it amounts to many hundreds of young people who were protected from life-shattering abuse.

And yet, the new numbers aren't cause for celebration. No child should ever experience sexual abuse in custody. Our goal isn't to get to lower levels of sexual abuse — it's to get to zero. And while we have seen plenty of progress, there are some facilities where this type of violence is still the norm, such as the Florida facility where more than a quarter of the kids reported being abused in the preceding year alone.

What the report does affirm, however, is that sexual abuse in youth detention can be stopped. Roughly a dozen youth facilities have virtually eradicated sexual abuse, including two in Florida. A juvenile justice system without abuse isn't a utopian vision — it's completely within our grasp.

After this latest BJS report came out, Troy Isaac reflected on its meaning. Troy's expertise goes beyond simply having experienced sexual abuse while in juvenile hall. As a member of JDI's Survivor Council, he's been on the front lines of the effort to make sure no one lives through what he did.

"I'm thrilled that the system is doing better by the kids in its care," he said. "But this isn't the time to pat ourselves on the back. It's the time to keep fighting. There are far too many kids who are still unsafe. We're on the right path. Now we just need to finish what we've started."

## “Thank you for bringing hope to our prison”

*Holiday Card Campaign Reaches Survivors at a Time of Need*



Students at the Episcopal School of Los Angeles — whose beautiful Words of Hope cards are displayed above — were among the JDI supporters who sent their compassion to incarcerated survivors.

IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING that prison life is isolating. Separated from friends and loved ones, inmates feel a sense of disconnect from society that can be hard to fathom. But for prisoner rape survivors, the sense of alienation is especially intense. Survivors not only have been robbed of their dignity, but many have no safe outlet for their pain. Carla, a survivor of staff sexual abuse, was punished when she tried to come forward — leading her to feel even more despair. “I’m losing my faith in humanity,” she told us.

Through our annual *Words of Hope* campaign, we asked our supporters to write comforting notes to survivors like Carla. The response was overwhelming: warm greetings poured in from all over the globe. Overall, we received more than 20,000 messages, which we bundled up and delivered to incarcerated survivors nationwide.

Your compassion reached Carla at the perfect time. The bullying from staff was taking a toll, and she desperately needed a lifeline. “Admittedly, I was a little blue,” Carla told us. “But that was quickly changed with your package. Thank you for bringing hope to our prison.”

Lilly Anne also was in a dark place when your holiday messages arrived. “Broken and overwhelmed,” is how she described her emotional state after another difficult year. It seemed

like no one cared at all about survivors like her — until your kind notes reached her. “I read and reread them,” she told us in a letter. “Thank you for the love and encouragement that I so desperately needed.”

These sentiments were echoed by scores of other survivors. John told us that your greetings “made me feel like family.” Daniel said that you helped him “find strength to fight on.” Leo\* talked about the “good feeling of knowing people are out there who care about our safety.”

In their thank you letters, survivors highlighted the obvious care that was put into crafting the holiday cards. At card-writing meetups, JDI supporters channeled their inner artist, creating warm, colorful backdrops for their compassionate messages. “I have participated in *Words of Hope* since 2016, and every year the experience is meaningful,” said Martina, an advocate who has organized card-writing events with colleagues and groups of youth volunteers. “Writing these cards seems like a small act, but it gives volunteers like me a chance to have an impact on the lives of incarcerated people nationwide.”

We can say for sure that Martina’s words had an impact. Just ask Carla and Lilly Anne, and the scores of survivors who continue to send their thanks for your *Words of Hope*.

*\*This name is a pseudonym*

## Help Celebrate our Anniversary!

JDI’s 40th birthday is right around the corner. On May 20, we’ll be commemorating the founding of People Organized to Stop the Rape of Imprisoned Persons (POS RIP) by a prisoner rape survivor named Russell Dan Smith. While the name didn’t stick, POS RIP’s mission — to fight prisoner rape — had incredible staying power. Today, four decades later, JDI is still the only organization dedicated exclusively to ending this violence.

Throughout May, we will be honoring the people who have made JDI the human rights powerhouse that it is today. On our website and on social media, we’ll be sharing remembrances from longtime JDI allies, current and former staff, and prisoner rape survivors.

But no celebration of our history would be complete without recognizing the contributions of you, JDI’s supporters. You have stood up for the dignity and safety of people who so often are ignored and forgotten. As we reflect on our 40 years, we want to hear why you care about sexual abuse in detention, and what JDI’s work means to you. We’ll be posting these messages online starting May 1, including on our new Instagram page.

If you’d like to share a message about why you care about prisoner rape, please send it to [communications@justdetention.org](mailto:communications@justdetention.org). Thank you, JDI supporters, for everything that you’ve done — and that you continue to do — to protect the rights of people in detention.

JDI's now on Instagram!

Follow us today at

@justdetentioninternational





## “I Feel Welcome and Safe”

*JDI's Rape Crisis Hotline Provides Healing to Incarcerated Survivors in Michigan, and now Vermont*

**A**FTER BRIAN WAS BEATEN in a Michigan prison, he was taken to a nearby hospital. Though badly hurt, he at least felt protected — far away from the men who had assaulted him. But this respite was only temporary. He knew that, before long, he would have to return to the prison. “I thought that I’d rather die than go back there,” he told us in a letter. “I’m just not strong enough to face any more time.”

Brian’s fears were understandable. His assailants were part of a powerful gang, and Brian had little faith that the staff would keep him safe from further harm. He also distrusted mental health officers, after one had told him that he should have tried fighting back against his attackers.

For a while, though, things seemed to be looking up for Brian: the gang mostly left him alone, and he held out hope for an early release. But the trauma from his assault did not go away. Brian was often depressed, his days were shrouded in heavy fog.

Then something remarkable happened. Brian found out about *An Inside Line*, JDI’s confidential hotline for prisoner rape survivors in Michigan’s prisons. Funded by the Office for

Victims of Crime, *An Inside Line* is the first-ever hotline that’s just for inmates. A survivor of childhood sexual abuse and of sexual harassment in prison, Brian first called the line not long after it launched, in 2018, and he now checks in regularly. “I don’t need to hide my emotions anymore,” Brian told us. “The voice on the line, the voice at JDI, has a compassionate ear and an open heart. I feel welcome and safe.”

Today, *An Inside Line* is a fixture in the lives of survivors in Michigan’s prisons. “It’s clear that prisoners find a great deal of comfort calling the hotline, and that’s not a small thing,” explains Linda McFarlane, a JDI Deputy Executive Director who worked closely with the Michigan Department of Corrections officials to set it up. “Let’s face it — the corrections field has previously been wary, and sometimes even hostile, to the idea of confidential communication between prisoners and outside advocates. But Michigan officials were willing to be bold, and their support for the project has been unshakable.”

It was always JDI’s hope that other agencies would follow Michigan’s example, so we were thrilled when, in December, the Vermont Department of Corrections agreed to make *An Inside Line* available to people in its prisons. There is strong need in Vermont for a prisoner hotline. The state’s only women’s prison has been plagued by staff sexual abuse; the culture at the facility was so toxic that prisoners and staff alike were too scared to talk.

The flurry of calls that came in from Vermont after the hotline became operational shows how desperate prisoners there have been for a safe place to get help. “When a scandal like this hits, corrections officials often bury their heads in the sand. But that didn’t happen here. Strong officials stepped up and invited outside help. That kind of courage deserves to be applauded,” said McFarlane.

Meanwhile, Brian continues to make progress on his road to healing. “You all help so many hurting people who are hanging on by a thread,” he told us recently. “Thanks for giving us a hand to hold.”



*JDI Program Officer Edward Cervantes fields a hotline call from a prisoner.*

## An Issue of Basic Decency

In 2002, the late Senator Ted Kennedy gave a stirring speech before the Judiciary Committee. Ending prisoner rape “is not a liberal or a conservative issue,” he told his fellow Senators on the committee. “It is an issue of basic decency and human rights.”

In today’s political climate, that kind of bipartisanship might seem like a relic. But Senators Brian Schatz (D-HI), and John Cornyn, (R-TX), are proving that when it comes to protecting prisoners from rape, the ideological divide isn’t so vast. With input from JDI, the two Senators sent a powerful letter to the Federal Bureau of Prisons urging the agency do a better job ensuring the dignity of the people in its custody.

JDI applauds the two Senators for their courage, and is proud to be working alongside them in the fight to end prisoner rape.

### JUST DETENTION INTERNATIONAL

3325 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 340  
Los Angeles, CA 90010  
Tel: (213) 384-1400

East Coast Office  
1900 L Street NW, Suite 601  
Washington, DC 20036  
Tel: (202) 506-3333

JDI-South Africa  
Norwood Place, 2nd Floor  
66 Grant Avenue  
Norwood, Johannesburg 2192  
South Africa  
Tel: +27 (11) 483 0989

[info@justdetention.org](mailto:info@justdetention.org)  
[www.justdetention.org](http://www.justdetention.org)



CHARITY NAVIGATOR  
★★★★ Four Star Charity