

# JUST DETENTION INTERNATIONAL



ACTION UPDATE

FALL 2024



## GET SERVICES TO INCARCERATED SURVIVORS!

In September, the Sexual Abuse Services in Detention Act (SASIDA) was introduced in the House of Representatives. Endorsed by a JDI-led coalition, SASIDA would fund community rape crisis centers to do the vital work of helping incarcerated survivors heal. The bill would also create a resource center to help advocates and corrections officials make sure people behind bars can get confidential services. If SASIDA becomes law, countless survivors will get a lifeline. But the bill needs support — and that’s where you come in. On JDI’s website, you can take action by asking your Representative to endorse SASIDA.

*Incarcerated survivors need your support! Take action today by asking your representative to endorse SASIDA.*

[WWW.JUSTDETENTION.ORG/SUPPORTSASIDA](http://WWW.JUSTDETENTION.ORG/SUPPORTSASIDA)



Vusi Skosana, a member of JDI-South Africa’s Survivor Council, holds artwork he created at a workshop that offered LGBTQ+ people a safe space for exploring their identities and processing trauma.

## LANDMARK SENATE HEARING

In September, Congress held its first hearing focusing on sexual abuse in prisons and jails in more than two decades. JDI National Advocacy Director Julie Abbate was among the experts who testified at the hearing, which was held by the Senate Subcommittee on Criminal Justice and Counterterrorism. The hearing examined the Prison Rape Elimination Act’s legacy and the work that remains to achieve its goal of ending this crisis, once and for all. A theme of the hearing was the need to pass SASIDA. As Julie noted in an exchange with Senator Cory Booker, who chaired the meeting, “When you cut people off from outside support from trained counselors, that can be devastating.” Other highlights were the testimony of two survivors — Breana Wingfield and Bonnie Hernandez — and Kenneth James, a South Carolina corrections official and longtime JDI ally.

## HEALING AND ADVOCACY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Just Detention International–South Africa is creating spaces for survivors to cope with trauma — and support one another on their healing journey

**F**or many survivors, one of the most effective ways to process the horror of sexual abuse is to talk about what happened to them. But the reality is that speaking out is often dangerous. “Survivors don’t tend to

talk about it,” said Vusi Skosana, a survivor activist in South Africa. “But it haunts them afterwards.”

Vusi knows firsthand how rare it is for survivors to feel safe sharing their experiences. He was raped in a South African prison, targeted for being

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Watch a powerful short video on JDI-SA’s workshop, featuring Vusi and others creating art and talking about what it means to express themselves in this way.

**VISIT: [SOUTHAFRICA.JUSTDETENTION.ORG/THE-HEALING-POWER-OF-ART](http://SOUTHAFRICA.JUSTDETENTION.ORG/THE-HEALING-POWER-OF-ART)**

# The team at JDI-SA knows that every survivor follows their own path to healing. Creating art can be a safe way to explore trauma.

CONTINUED FROM COVER

openly gay. When he tried to report the abuse, staff ignored him. After his release, he opened up to his sister and a crisis counselor — a turning point in his healing.

Helping survivors like Vusi is a priority for Just Detention International-South Africa (JDI-SA). We help get them counseling and support their growth as activists. In Vusi's case, we connected him with a filmmaker for a short documentary about his time behind bars. To date, the documentary has been viewed nearly 90,000 times — an astonishing number for a film about a subject that has long been taboo.

Vusi's journey has been extraordinary, and it is thanks to the determination and courage of survivors like him that even more people feel safe talking about their experiences. Many of these survivors have spoken directly to officials about the harm they suffered, demanding action to stop the same violence from happening to others. Some of them, including Vusi, now make up JDI-SA's newly-formed Survivor Council.

## OPENING UP ABOUT TRAUMA

The team at JDI-SA knows that every survivor follows their own path to healing. Creating art can be a safe way to explore trauma. The profound impact of making art was on full display in May, when JDI-SA organized a workshop for people who are LGBTQ+, including sur-

vivors. "Art provides a space to reflect on past experiences," said Prince Nare, Co-Director of JDI-SA. "Many people find it helpful, transformational, and even healing to use art as a tool for expression and creation — and also just to celebrate who they are."

Vusi was one of the survivors who participated in this art workshop, creat-

ing pieces for an exhibition called the "Healing Power of Art." The exhibition coincided with JDI-SA's celebration of its ten-year anniversary. And while there is still a long way to go to keep incarcerated people safe from sexual violence in South African prisons, thanks to JDI-SA's advocacy there are policies in place specifically to address sexual abuse behind bars, and officials now receive training on how to recognize, prevent, and respond to this abuse. JDI-SA staff also offer support services for survivors, including trauma-informed art workshops, providing help and healing to those who need it most.

Holding up a painting of a weeping eye that he created at the workshop, Vusi said, "The teary eye represents our nation in despair because of sexual abuse." He then held up his second painting. "The other art piece I created is a window with bright flowers. I call it a 'Window of Hope,' meaning that there is actually light out there."

## A GLOBAL MOVEMENT

Through the support of JDI-SA, Vusi and his fellow survivors are forging a path forward where there wasn't one before. We are so proud to have a sister organization like JDI-SA that is growing the movement to end sexual abuse behind bars. This is a global crisis — it is not limited to the borders of any one country. Thanks to incredible partners like the dedicated staff in South Africa, we are moving toward a world where everyone, regardless of their identity or incarceration status, is free from abuse.

"There are people who are willing to spread the word and ensure that justice is being served for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated survivors," says Vusi. "It gives me the courage to continue doing the work." ■



## THE HEALING POWER OF ART

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Odwa Mbane, a JDI-SA Survivor Council member, at work creating a piece; Prince Nare, JDI-SA's Co-Director, opening the art workshop; JDI-SA staff with participants of the art workshop, which coincided with JDI-SA's 10-year anniversary



## SURVIVOR'S PERSPECTIVE

# I Want To Be a Voice

When she was 12, Tebogo was arrested after being falsely accused of stealing a cell phone. In the piece below, excerpted from the JDI-SA audio documentary "Tebogo's Story" she opens up about the nightmare that followed — and finding relief in speaking out.

I always felt like a girl growing up. While my parents are not quite familiar with gay people and trans people, I always felt very confident in my school years. I used to dress up a lot. I had a love for makeup, and a passion for becoming a makeup artist. My friends were very supportive, as were my teachers. I found much more happiness outside of home than I did at home.

One day after school, I picked up a SIM card, hoping to get some free

airtime. I think I was a bit immature. I was 12 years old. (The owner of the SIM card found Tebogo and, thinking she had stolen his phone, he and his friends took her to a police station.) At the station, the police didn't give me a chance to explain how the SIM card got into my phone.

One officer pulled up my sweater and started beating me, shouting, "Where's the phone?" Then he said, "Are you gay?" There was a sound of disgust in his voice. They just put me straight into the cells with older people. There was one guy who was taking care of me, but then everything broke loose when he was released. It was late one night, and I felt somebody pulling the blanket. He whispered into my ear, "You're gay, right?" He was taking everything that I had regarded as

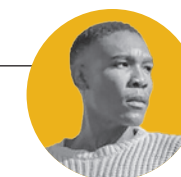
my dignity. Then it was two, then three, then four guys. I was quite powerless.

This happened on Friday, on Saturday, and on Sunday. On Sunday the social worker came to release me. I didn't tell anyone. I was fearful for my life, as well as my family. To this day, I don't like noise, because when you scream at me, you take me back to what happened.

Two years after the assault, I went to a clinic to check my health and take some tests. My HIV test came back positive. It was devastating. Knowing how all this transpired, how I actually got the virus, it just took me back to that experience in the police cell. I isolated myself from everything else and everyone, and I had these anger issues and suicidal thoughts. The justice system let me down.

My hopes for the future are that I've always

wanted to be a makeup artist. I would also like to actually engage more with people and socialize a lot. I want to be a voice to gay and transgender people who don't want to speak up. It gives me a great sense of freedom speaking out.



## MEET THE SURVIVOR

Tebogo Mokobori is a member of the Just Detention International-South Africa Survivor Council. Tebogo recently launched Thee Champions, an after-school program for children in her community. You can listen to "Tebogo's Story" at: [www.southafrica.justdetention.org/tebogo](http://www.southafrica.justdetention.org/tebogo)



NOTES FROM THE FIELD

# Out of the Shadows

## Bringing healing art workshops to a prison's most invisible population

Last year, we learned about the deplorable conditions at the California Institute for Women's housing unit for people with mental illnesses. The people held in the prison's Psychiatric Inpatient Unit are incredibly isolated. Indeed, the unit is so separated from the rest of the prison that unless you knew to look, you would miss it entirely. When our Mental Health Program Director, Vanessa Sapien, visited this unit for the first time, she discovered a grim, filthy environment. Residents had almost no access to basic programs

and services. When she asked the residents what they most needed, their response was unanimous: programming, led by people who care.

Vanessa immediately reached out to mental health staff at the facility to offer our art workshops. Although some staff were skeptical that residents with mental illness would be able to participate, Vanessa was confident that the program could make a difference. In June, she launched the unit's first art workshops with six participants, none of whom had been able to join a program like this before.

**"At the very first session, I asked participants to make something that represented their 'happy place.' To my surprise, when it came time to share, they had all coordinated and agreed on a theme—handprints on paper plates. They told me they had recently watched Castaway, the Tom Hanks movie where he is stranded on a remote island. In the film, the main character creates a friend — 'Wilson,' a volleyball with his handprint on it — to fight off loneliness. The residents decided to make their own 'Wilson,' so that when they went back to their rooms, their feelings of isolation would be less intense. They also went out of their way to make a 'Wilson' for me. As one of them said, 'Teacher, we want you to have one too, because now that you're here we don't feel alone anymore.'"**

## A CHAMPION FOR SURVIVORS

Vanessa Sapien, JDI's Mental Health Program Director, runs programming inside CIW's housing unit for people with mental illnesses.



## FROM THE ARTIST

The "Wilson" volleyball handprint that a participant made for Vanessa





By Linda McFarlane

# Honoring a Legendary Activist

The movement to end sexual abuse behind bars has a long and impressive history, with many landmark moments to celebrate. Last September, we at JDI marked the 20th anniversary of the groundbreaking Prison Rape Elimination Act with a briefing on Capitol Hill. This May, Just Detention International-South Africa held an extraordinary event to commemorate its 10th year since opening its doors. There was another recent milestone that deserves recognition. Thirty years ago in June, Dee Farmer won a case before the

Supreme Court. Dee, who is a transgender woman, had sued the Bureau of Prisons for failing to keep her safe from sexual abuse. Dee was the first transgender plaintiff ever to bring a case before the Supreme Court — a fact made all the more remarkable because she was incarcerated at the time. But the case wasn't merely symbolic. *Farmer v Brennan* stands today as a bedrock legal principle that helps incarcerated people everywhere get justice.

Today, Dee is a leader in the movement she helped create. She is a member

of our Survivor Council and serves as the Executive Director of Fight4Justice, a nonprofit she founded that focuses on LGBTQ+ rights. Reflecting on the legacy of her Supreme Court win, she recently told a journalist, "I feel more of the weight of what needs to be done than what was accomplished with *Farmer*. And that just might be because that's my job."

Here's to Dee and to 30 plus years of fighting for what's right — and to many more victories in the work to ensure the safety and dignity of incarcerated people.

# RAPE IS NOT PART OF THE PENALTY

Just Detention International is a health and human rights organization that seeks to end sexual abuse in all forms of detention.

Rape is Not Part of the Penalty



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## WE ARE HERE TO HELP

All survivors of sexual abuse deserve support and compassion. JDI's online Resource Guide lists service providers in all 50 states that can help incarcerated survivors. **To view the Resource Guide, visit [www.justdetention.org/resources/survivor-resources/find-local-services](http://www.justdetention.org/resources/survivor-resources/find-local-services)**

Sexual abuse behind bars is absolutely preventable. You can help end it.

**JUSTDETENTION.ORG/DONATE**

Scan this QR code to donate today!



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# An Incarcerated Survivor Makes History

For rape crisis advocates, a highlight of every year is the National Sexual Assault Conference. It's a gathering for people committed to ending sexual violence — a space to share ideas and set the direction of the movement.

This year's event was no different, except in one key way: for the first time ever, it was opened by a survivor of sexual abuse in detention. Speaking at the plenary

session, Jonas Caballero, member of JDI's Board and Survivor Council, shared his journey to healing after being sexually abused by staff while incarcerated at Rikers Island. Each time Jonas mentioned one of his triumphs — his victories in court, another year of law school in the books, a new milestone in his sobriety — hundreds of advocates broke into applause.

"Let's face it, incarcerated people haven't always been welcomed by the movement

to end sexual abuse," said Cynthia Totten, JDI's Deputy Executive Director who was with Jonas on the stage. "But seeing how advocates embraced Jonas is a sign of how much things have changed."

Jonas used this platform to speak on behalf of incarcerated people. "I made a promise to the folks that I met on the inside that I would continue to be a voice for them," he said. "Remember them as you do the amazing and beautiful work that you do."



Jonas Caballero made history by becoming the first survivor of sexual abuse in detention to open the National Sexual Assault Awareness Conference.