



## **HOPE LIVES FOR LIFERS PROJECT**

The Hope Lives for Lifers Project is a collaborative partnership between faith communities and criminal justice practitioners to improve criminal justice outcomes by integrating the concepts of Faith, Hope, and Enduring Beliefs with evidence-based practices.

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

The Project is committed to helping those incarcerated in prison with life, long-term or life-without-parole sentences establish lives based on Faith, Hope, and Enduring Beliefs. By Faith we mean the ability to trust sufficiently to be able to commit to what we love. Hope is the vision a person has for him or herself of a better set of circumstances, and Enduring Beliefs are the framework of values on which a person depends to help them interpret and act on the world in a meaningful way. These may include specific religious beliefs, a personal philosophy or confidence in a transforming power.

We believe that these ends may be accomplished through experiences that allow people to reclaim their dignity and power, increase their sense of self-efficacy, and through positive programs that connect incarcerated people to the world beyond the walls.

### **PROGRAM OUTLINE**

From our communications with lifers, long-termers and those serving life without parole, we have learned that long-term confinement presents special stresses and amplifies the deprivations of imprisonment into major problems. Hope Lives for Lifers proposes an adjustment strategy that addresses the special stresses of long-term confinement as described in several general categories:-

External relationships. Maintaining external relationships is vital to coping with long-term imprisonment. Loss of contact with family and friends outside the prison is a source of stress for all those incarcerated, but for the long-timer the fear that these relationships will be irrevocably lost creates unique concerns.

Prison Conditions. Environmental survival concerns the ability of the prisoner to sustain his/her well-being given the rigors of prevailing prison conditions. Adjustment to the reality of imprisonment does not mean mere acceptance of the fact that one will be confined for an extended period of time and therefore to become accustomed to such a condition. To adjust is not to merely endure. True adjustment entails a struggle to establish a sustainable relationship between the prisoner and the prison setting. A sustainable relationship is one in which the prisoner is able to make adjustments in his behavior as well as make improvements in his/her environment. Both the personal adjustments

Indeterminacy. For the person sentenced to a long-term of imprisonment, the burning question is how to deal with what appears to be an overwhelming amount of time. Where and how does one begin to tackle the problem of serving such a sentence? How does one break it down into manageable proportions so that it does not overcome one's ability to plan a course of action.

World of the prison provides few opportunities to practice effective coping. In an environment where there is an abundance of time to kill and limited opportunities to fill it, and that limited personal choice in the restricted definitions of themselves by others, that it can be difficult to mark time include the fact that the incarcerated are routinely offered unfavorable deterioration. The features of the prison that provoke these concerns are often obsessive and highly self-conscious about outward signs of concern with deterioration is another source of stress. Long-termers

often return to the streets. Continuity is a good-times that await him upon return to the streets. Continuity is a boisterous short-temper whose conversations center on triumphs and releases. Unlike the situation of the short-termers, who can "wait it out", there is no satisfactory way for the long-termers to resolve the dilemma of prison friendships, and many long-termers begin to develop a more solitary lifestyle after a while. Those of "commonality" and "continuity". The long-termer, especially an older long-temper, may have little in common with the younger, within the prison is often troublesome and raises problems identified as those of "commonality" and "continuity". Relationships within the prison are developing personal relationships

Our strategy for coping skills is based on providing long-termers with a sense of purpose and direction. It must be remembered that freedom for the long-timer is decades away and is not a meansingful behavior goal, and life without goals is purposeless and monotonous. The challenge then is to build highlights into problem solving can be fostered or encouraged in groups (long-timer imprisonment, things to aim for and to take pride in when achieved. organizations and/or study groups) in which long-termers can share the problem with programmatic implications. In such groups, mutual support networks can be created and community program and service providers can be presented with requests for supports.

The "here and now" perspective can be seen to have two distinct objectives; first, it attempts to assist long-termers to develop meaningfulness in the present; second, it attempts to use this meaning as a bridge to the future, encouraging purposefulness and the maintenance of Hope. Men live out their lives in specific settings and it is there, in the crucible of interaction, that potentialities are sealed off or released. The micro-world is the world of the here and now; if a long-termer's future is to be affected, that future should have a dynamic, existential connection with the experience present.

Key elements of the "here and now" perspective are maturity, predictability of action, and the "prison sense" that comes from a critical awareness of one's imprisonment. This perspective has behavioral implications that may be highly functional in enabling the long-timer to cope. These behavioral manifestations include avoidance of "trouble" and attempts to use time profitably rather than simply serving time.

This perspective is reinforced through affiliation with life and long-termer organizations. This perspective is re-enforced through uncertainty and ambiguity about the future. Doing time that reduces uncertainty and ambiguity towards life and long-termers advocates a "here and now" central attitudinal perspective that reduces uncertainty and ambiguity about the future. Hope Lives for Adjustment to the prison setting involves adoption of a perspective that

as well as the improvements in the prison setting are for the purpose of sustaining the well-being of the prisoner.

Those serving life without parole (LWOP) have the most time to fill, the least hope, and who are most in need of credible incentives in order to cope. Much of the program content for those serving life without parole should be focused on enhancing their coping skills and developing opportunities to earn for themselves improvements in the conditions of their existence. The principle objective of programming for LWOP should be to foster involvement in constructive endeavors, and to maximize the choice is important to foster not only the illusion of control (which is a basic human need) but also to allow real opportunities for lifers without parole to design their futures and chart their development. Second, the concept of a meaningful life in prison should guide programs for lifers without parole. "Meaning" refers to the opportunity to contribute positively to one's environment and to others, to make linear progress toward realistic and important goals, to engage in activities that foster a sense of personal worth. The third objective of program development for LWOP is to sustain a measure of permeability of the prison walls. That is, efforts must be made to reduce the social isolation of those serving LWOP from family and friends as well as other positive role models in the free community.

Hope Lives for Lifers would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to detail aspects of our project. We would also appreciate the opportunity to learn of specific community involvements that the department of corrections has identified as helpful in addressing the needs of those serving long-term sentences.