

RESPECT YOUR ELDERS
(Unless they're prisoners!)

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[This article ran in the ADVOCATE, a respected prison advocacy publication, on 8/27/09. On June 10, 2010, without provocation, or explanation the prison administration ordered the Senior Affairs Committee to disband ceasing and desisting all activities of assistance to the elderly and disabled. On June 22, 2010 the cell of the committee chairman was ransacked and the committee records removed without explanation, or receipt. Twenty four plus (24+) memorandums, and multiple formal grievances stand unanswered, as to why the elderly and disabled are denied human dignity. The chairman of the Lifer's Support Group, rather than defend this worthy committee, folded like a cheap lawn chair, acting as the prison's errand boy assuring closure of the committee.]

Civilized societies have always respected their elders while some cultures actually revere them. However, for those senescent folks unfortunate enough to land in California's prison system; all bets are off.

California's insatiable appetite for more and longer punishment has produced an alarming increase in geriatric prisoners. Prison officials are packing these timeworn so called 'menaces to society' into an overcrowded system designed for much younger prisoners.

Our guardians of the public trust through budget restrictions, indifference, or by simple ignorance, are morphing society's good intentions into shameful dimensions. Old men and women are needless victims of violent assaults, standing in brutally long lines in extreme weather, forced to compete with much younger prisoners, and are stripped of what little dignity an aged person should have in their final years.

One's first thought might be, 'well they broke the law so they deserve what they get.' However, its not that simple, this enhanced punishment of the elderly comes full circle to punish the taxpayer also. The vulnerable aged prisoners' medical costs are twice that of the younger social menace. With estimates of up to \$100,000. per year, per aged prisoner, compounded by over 20,000 prisoners 55 years and older, California has a recipe for fiscal disaster. Until legislators decide to stop this runaway monetary drain train, the financial manacles and chains of the taxpayer will continue to grow heavier.

At Mule Creek State Prison, in California, shining through the smoke of burning tax dollars and dark clouds of administration indifference, an intrepid group of elderly and altruistic younger prisoners are making a difference. Ignoring the old proverb 'Prophets go unrecognized in their own lands,' these pioneers in prison humanity have inaugurated a committee to advocate for elderly and disabled prisoners.

With the support of prisoner Richard **** Chairman of the LIFERS SUPPORT GROUP, Tom **** an altruistic younger prisoner, who's institutional veneer cloaks a passionate man, co-chairs the SENIOR AFFAIRS COMMITTEE. This committee with older prisoners is balanced with younger Tom ****, and John **** a prisoner young enough to be the grandson of the forgotten men he champions. Unlike the older men on the committee these young men enjoy no tangible benefits other than the intuitive rewards of their compassion for the aged and disabled.

Prison is a place generally austere of the milk of human kindness. Although California's prison budget is close to 11 Billion Dollars a year, an indigent prisoner goes without the basic dignity of a toothbrush, toothpaste, deodorant, shampoo, and other simple life necessities. Through donations, the Senior Affairs Committee established a toiletries assistance program, quarter mastered by prisoner Robert ***** who also translates for the ultra-forgotten Spanish speaking elders. Tom **** can be seen hurrying across the prison yard with a pair of shower slippers for an 85 year old menace to society forced to shower barefooted. John **** can be seen helping a 75 year old pariah who suffers from the embarrassment of incontinence.

Other committee members help guide the needy through the confusing labyrinth of paperwork demonically designed to discourage prisoners from filing grievances. Jim ****, an older committee member who knows the horror of being attacked by a younger cell-mate, monitors to prevent others from suffering the same fate. Cliff ****, works at trying to get elders out of their cells to socialize in game tournaments such as checkers, dominos, and chess. John ****, and Grant ****, stand sentinel on specific days at canteen to assure the elderly and disabled are not bullied out of their access to the store, or their property. John ****, makes sure ADA signs are in place, and abuses are reported. This team of dedicated men expose themselves to ridicule from insensitive guards, a thankless prison administration, and ignorant prison yard bullies. Yet, they forge on with energy, inspiration and ethic that one would not expect in a person who society doesn't want. As they break new frontiers in their prison philanthropy, they need your help and support.

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18 April 2012

California professes "REHABILITATION" in their prison name. However, in true hypocrisy "REHABILITATION" is used as a rhetorical device, like expensive wrapping on a cheap present; punishment is the underlying impetus. Prisoners were learning and exercising altruism and philanthropy through the Senior Affairs Committee at no cost, or problem, to prison operations, however the prison administrators see expressions of humanity a threat. Since the crushing of the Senior Affairs Committee, on 10 June 2010, no assistance program exists for the elderly and disabled prisoners of MCSP. Repeated written and verbal requests to establish a humane program for this class of vulnerable prisoners falls upon deaf ears.

Discouraging and preventing prisoners from performing socially redeeming behaviors is blasphemous toward the cannons of "REHABILITATION". Such policies only prove to make bad men worse, and good men bad.

Change will come only when taxpayers demand a return on their investment in "REHABILITATION". Legislators have to be e-mailed, or faxed, demanding reform to a system behind its time. Accountability can be easily measured by the recidivism rate, which is currently 70%; a dismal failure by any measure.

*The worst sin toward our fellow creatures
is not to hate them, but to be indifferent
to them: that's the essence of inhumanity.*

-George Bernard Shaw