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About WPA:

The Women's Prison Association (WPA) is a service and advocacy organization committed to helping women with criminal justice histories realize new possibilities for themselves and their families.

WPA offers gender-responsive services to women at any stage of contact with the criminal justice system to help them weather crises, achieve stability, and meet longer-term goals on the way to lawful community life.

WPA’s History:

WPA is the nation’s first organization dedicated solely to working with criminal justice-involved women and their families. WPA established the first halfway house and vocational training program for female ex-prisoners in the United States.

WPA was founded in 1845 to investigate the conditions facing incarcerated women in New York. Six months later, Hopper Home, a residence for criminal justice-involved women was established in Manhattan on 4th Street near Eighth Avenue. Hopper Home later moved to 191 Tenth Avenue in 1874 and later to 110 Second Avenue, its present location.

DID YOU KNOW?

Nearly 85% of women sent to New York prisons are there for non-violent offenses. Few have any history of sustained legal employment.

Incarceration rates for women also reflect tremendous racial disparities; 1 out of 100 black women in the U.S. is now incarcerated, nearly 3x the rate for women overall.
The Need for WPA’s Services:

There are now 200,000 women in prison or jail in the United States, a figure that represents an increase of over 750% in the last three decades and nearly twice the rate of increase that men experienced. New York State spends a staggering $2.8 billion per year on corrections; nationwide, one out of every 15 state general fund dollars is now spent on corrections. Despite this significant investment of taxpayer dollars in corrections, programs inside of prisons rarely prepare those incarcerated to address their needs and successfully reenter the community.

Women’s criminal offenses and their pathways to crime differ substantially from men’s. Women are less likely to engage in violent crimes than men. Criminal justice-involved women are more likely than their male counterparts to have histories of sexual abuse or other trauma, substance abuse issues, and diagnoses of serious mental illness.

Incarceration is not only expensive in financial terms, it is tremendously destabilizing for the families and communities left behind. Mass incarceration has contributed to the intergenerational cycles of poverty that devastate too many families and communities.

WPA creates opportunities for change in the lives of women, families, and communities directly impacted by the criminal justice system.
WPA’s Programs:

Alternatives to Incarceration:

**JusticeHome** is a unique, community-based program designed specifically for women who are facing a minimum of six months of incarceration as a result of felony charges. WPA staff assesses a woman’s specific risks and strengths, promotes healthy coping strategies to address histories of trauma, and employs evidence-based cognitive behavioral group interventions. The program features additional opportunities to benefit families and communities including intensive home-based interventions, ongoing assessments of child and family well-being, and the promotion of positive parenting skills. All of these efforts lead to increased family stability and cost much less than sending a woman to prison. The program builds upon WPA’s years of experience in providing intensive home-based preventive child welfare services under contract with NYC Administration for Children’s Services.

Children and Family Services:

**Sarah Powell Huntington House** is WPA’s homeless shelter for formerly incarcerated women and their children. Since 1993, this unique residence has given recently reunified families the chance to access services designed to promote long-term health, stability, and self-sufficiency. WPA staff work with families to achieve goals such as securing safe and stable housing, enrolling in school, seeking employment, finding a healthcare provider, and managing the full range of day-to-day household and family challenges.

**The Family Treatment Rehabilitation Program** provides intensive home-based preventive services for families at risk of having children placed in foster care due to family instability related to Mom’s drug use and/or mental illness. The program aims to strengthen families by working with Mom to treat mental illness and get drug free while managing her children’s needs and day-to-day home life. These services are based in East New York and Brownsville, neighborhoods characterized by societal barriers that impede successful family connectedness, stability and functioning, such as low educational attainment and high rates of poverty, unemployment, and drug use.
WPA’s Programs:

Reentry Services:

**HIV Services** ensure that women have access to HIV testing, healthcare, and the information they need to protect themselves and partners.

**Emergency Assistance** includes emergency food, hygiene supplies, emergency shelter assistance and Metrocards for travel to critical services.

**WPA Law Project** staff offer on-site legal services, primarily in family law, including child custody cases. WPA also offers assistance in understanding and navigating other civil legal issues clients may encounter, including employment and housing discrimination and domestic violence.

**Case Management** staff work collaboratively with women to define their short- and long-term goals and create action plans to achieve them.

**WomenCare** pairs WPA clients with volunteer mentors from the community. By strengthening women’s networks, the program helps participants successfully return to their communities and establish law-abiding lives.

**Hopper Home Transitional Shelter** is a 38-bed homeless shelter for women with or at risk for criminal justice involvement. The program provides transitional housing and case management to help women identify permanent community housing. WPA staff help women achieve long-term stability through access to mental health services, education, sobriety, stable housing, employment and reunification with their children.

Public Policy and Advocacy:

WPA supports policy changes that will produce better outcomes for all criminal justice-involved women. WPA’s Executive Director, Georgia Lerner and Board Vice President, Piper Kerman make regular public appearances to ensure that women are represented in criminal justice reform discourse. As a complement to our direct services, the Women’s Advocacy Project (WAP) is WPA’s leadership program where formerly incarcerated women can harness their experiences to work for change by learning to craft policy recommendations and advocate for rational systems reform.
Success Story: Abria

**JusticeHome** helped me with my emotions, relationships, communication skills, parenting skills, friendship development, and gave me a great support system. I learned that my life matters.

Being involved in the criminal justice system could have destroyed my life and my children's lives. JusticeHome gave me the keys to improving my situation. I came to JusticeHome guarded, angry, and with no goals. As time went on, I opened up, stopped using drugs, and started to feel grateful for the second chance I was given. I started to plan for my future. I registered for school and I have dreams of a good career in a field that I enjoy.

My attitude changed completely. As I attend my groups and was surrounded by so many positive peers, I let my guard down and became more positive. Networking and sharing in group really helped me. I learned I was not alone. Talking about my trials and tribulations made me feel strong and gave me more ambition to become a better person and a better mother. I gained the ability to control my anger. Our group discussions taught me about emotion. My emotions always got the best of me, but I learned techniques to change my thoughts and behavior.

It also helped me with my mental status. Being able to talk to a counselor every week helped me with situations I thought I couldn't control. She helped me address my trauma without judging me. She made a major impact on my life. These women allowed me to open up to them, forgave me for my mistakes, and never judged me. They supported me when I had nothing to offer them. They helped improve me and taught me about self-love. If not for JusticeHome, I would have been lost. I am thankful for JusticeHome giving me a second chance.

"These women allowed me to open up to them, forgave me for my mistakes, and never judged me. They supported me when I had nothing to offer them."
Who We Are:

Georgia Lerner, Executive Director

Ms. Lerner leads WPA's efforts as they continue and build upon the original mission. WPA assists women who have been arrested and incarcerated to address their concrete and interpersonal needs, and our work has expanded to include a focus on intensive, home-based partnerships with women and families to keep families together in the community and to avoid criminal justice involvement. Ms. Lerner has advocated for the use of gender-specific evidence-based assessments and interventions, and has participated as an advisor, trainer, and panelist at numerous local, state and national symposia to promote the use of sensible responses to crime that can improve public safety by reducing the chances that an individual will engage in additional criminal behavior.

Piper Kerman, Board Vice President

Piper Kerman is a vice president at Washington, D.C.-based communications firm, Spitfire Strategies. She is the author of Orange is the New Black, an insightful look at her year spent at a women’s federal correctional institute. She is a graduate of Smith College and lives in Brooklyn. She joined the Board of Directors in 2010 and serves on the Program Committee.

So many people are just doing the best they can when they end up in prison or jail, which is not to excuse the crimes they commit. It’s just to say that as a society, we wait until we catch people screwing up, then we punish them, and then we expect them to be fixed. The truth is a lot more complicated. - Georgia Lerner, ELLE Magazine 2016
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Members In Action:

WPA’s Board Vice President, Piper Kerman, testifies before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights: “Reassessing Solitary Confinement II: The Human Rights, Fiscal, and Public Safety Consequences.”

Miss America, Kira Kazantsev, on her win, domestic violence, and her work with WPA on HuffPost Live.
When Tamika was arrested and charged with assault, her world came crashing down. “How did I get here,” she asked herself, “and what am I going to do now? What about my kids?”

Tamika had found herself in an abusive relationship. Worse, that abuse had gone public. She was on the street with her armed abuser when he started a loud and violent argument. When a passerby got hurt in an attempt to intervene, Tamika and her abuser were arrested for assault. “I’m not a violent person,” she recalls, but in a terrifying and heated moment she had defended herself and, as a result, her circumstances were about to get even worse. Tamika was facing jail time, the loss of her children, and an overwhelming legal process.

Luckily, in court, Tamika was introduced to WPA and the opportunity to participate in WPA’s groundbreaking alternative to incarceration program, JusticeHome. This is a unique, community-based program designed specifically for women facing felony charges and at least six months of incarceration. For Tamika, JusticeHome meant keeping her children, leaving an abusive relationship behind her, and learning to believe that many new and positive possibilities awaited her. Today, Tamika lives at home with her children, she’s in school, and she believes that she can achieve great things for herself and her family.

WPA is the first place for a woman to receive a second chance and to believe that she deserves it.

“\nIt has changed my life eternally. I’m thankful that there was a program like this to help women stay with their families.”
WPA helps women achieve what is most important to them. Women come to us to:

• Find safe and affordable housing
• Prepare for job interviews and obtain employment
• Reunify with their children
• Comply with criminal justice mandates and live safe and law-abiding lives
• Access addiction, health, and mental health services
• Gain peer support from other women
• Learn household budgeting and skills for daily life
There’s really no way to do this kind of work without it opening me up personally to these issues. So, as I’ve gotten to know the Women’s Prison Association; people who are working on alternatives to incarceration and working with women who are transitioning from prison back to civilian life, they are really finding value in the show [Orange is the New Black]. It’s giving the population a name and a voice. I think that’s incredibly valuable. - Taylor Schilling, New York Times Talk, 2014
Where to find WPA online:

www.wpaonline.org

READ: bit.ly/WPANewsletters

WATCH: bit.ly/WPAVideos
WOMEN’S PRISON ASSOCIATION