

WHAT KIND OF HELP DO LIFE SENTENCED WOMEN NEED?

Based upon my experiences, (I have been asked to assist in many different ways), the suggestions below are not limited to the kinds of assistance that arise.

Many have expressed needs in these areas:

Current information on case law, assistance to file pro se appeals (copying and fees) and pro bono legal work

Financial assistance for personal items not provided by the state

Educational opportunities

Geriatric specific activities

Media assistance to tell their story

Management, public speaking and persuasive writing development

Mental health advocacy

Medical Advocacy

Assistance to appeal for compassionate release and support for commutation

Visits and pen pals

Assistance with communicating their needs to prison officials

Expert level needlework lessons

Victim and offender mediation

Guest speakers specific to their needs

Attention from state officials to reexamine sentencing policies specific to women's trauma and abuse before offending

Reuniting with family

Rehabilitation strategies specific to women

Expansion of visiting hours

Nutrition specific to women's bodies

A chance to redefine themselves!



WHO ARE THEY?

There are approximately 200 women serving life; some were sentenced as teenagers and some were commuted from death and many are in their 4th decade of imprisonment. Women have been routinely denied commutation over the last 30 years and most have abandoned their only hope of release. Terminally ill women have also been denied Compassionate Release to live their last remaining months alive close to family. It has been confirmed that life sentenced women have developed such extreme coping skills in which their influence is greatly relied upon by the Department of Corrections to assist those who will be returning to their families and communities. If these life sentenced women have such a profound effect on all Pennsylvanians, then why deny them the chance to prove their remarkable life changes and rehabilitation in the free world? Until then, life sentenced women have in many cases, exhausted their resources in the free world and need help from new friends, community groups and schools.

WOMEN SERVING LIFE WITHOUT PAROLE IN PENNSYLVANIA ARE DESERVING OF MEANINGFUL ASSISTANCE AND A SECOND CHANCE



SCI MUNCY AND SCI CAMBRIDGE SPRINGS

Women prisoners are incarcerated far from family, friends and support groups. Many life sentenced women are in their geriatric years, decades behind bars and desperate for meaningful assistance: please consider offering your resources.

How to begin to assist life sentenced women:

Contact the Muncy or Cambridge Springs Inmate Organizations and Superintendents

Contact the chaplain at the prisons

Join the PA Prison Society and become an Official Visitor

Start with one woman, that's all it takes to make a difference and meet other women

Most importantly, establish a consistent connection with your group or organization to establish long term goals and long term relationships.

Contact local state officials to end life without parole sentencing

Once you have developed a sense of what is needed and what is successful, share this with other groups to spread the message and encourage them to create their own unique programs with the women and institution.

This pamphlet was created by Ellen Melchiondo, an Official Visitor with the PA Prison Society. For up to date information about women serving life without parole in Pennsylvania go to:

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Sharon-Wiggins/116006545258924>

Email: ellenmelch@gmail.com for more information

On cover: Marie Scott OO4901

Right: Heather Lavelle OK8736

Center: Tequilla Fields OK2327

Numbers of life sentences is from 2015

SCI Muncy and Cambridge Springs: A brief history with long suffering

BEFORE WOMEN WERE SENT TO A MAXIMUM SECURITY PRISON

in Pennsylvania, they were sent to The Muncy Industrial Home which opened in 1920. In 1953, the Bureau of Corrections took over and created SCI Muncy. Not until 1969, did Muncy house a death sentenced woman. In fact there was no death row as we know it today. Sharon Wiggins was sentenced to death at 17 and the facility had to confine her in isolation to a Restricted Housing Unit, in the hills behind the property. Literally, out of sight and hopefully, out of mind was the intention for her imprisonment. But, miraculously, that didn't happen because two out of the three judges who condemned her to death reconsidered and resented her to life.

Although still a tragedy, Sharon grew up to be an extraordinary humanitarian, embraced education and lead by example until she died in her cell in Bethune Unit at the age of 62 in 2013. Today, in 2015, SCI Muncy has created The Sharon Peachie Wiggins Achievement Award and Penn State University now houses The Sharon Wiggins Biographical Materials in The Paterno Library.

THERE WAS A TIME WHEN THE WOMEN

attended classes at the local community college, graduated with Associates Degrees from Penn State University, went shopping in the local mall, went sledding during winter, grew vegetables during the summer and life sentenced women enjoyed an annual picnic with their families without a wall or razor wire wrapped fencing on the property. All of that has since ceased. Today, Muncy confines 166 life sentenced women and many are wives, mothers, grandmothers, sisters, aunts, and a friend who desperately need contact with the outside world to continue their journey in an environment that deems their lives are not worth living.

SCI Cambridge Springs couldn't be further from the families of the confined women. Located just south of Erie, Cambridge Springs opened in 1992 at the former site of the Polish National Alliance College and is considered minimum security with 37 life sentenced women. At both prisons the women have the same needs and give of themselves the same way inside the prison.



Contacts:

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SCI Cambridge Springs 451 Fullerton Ave
Cambridge Springs, PA 16403

Switchboard: 814-398-5400

Inmate Locator: inmatelocator.cor.state.pa

Free accommodations close to Muncy: Project Impact and Bridge Haven 570-326-2081