Dear GCN,

I would just like to say thank you for the PenPal Listings of prisoners that you sent to me. I have written to 6 of them so far, now all I'm waiting for is the replies. As I was reading the enclosed letter, I read where you were running on limited funds for GCN. I would love to make a donation on behalf of me and all gay inmates. It's organizations such as yours that help not only the gay and lesbian community, but gay and lesbian prisoners as well. Being gay is one thing, but being gay and a prisoner is another! It is such a lonely life behind bars and not being able to be yourself and in touch with your gay brothers and sisters is very hard. But organizations such as yours makes it possible for us who are locked up to stay in touch with the gay community on the outside. Thank you for your hard and dedicated work on behalf of gay and lesbian people.

Sincerely yours,
James Wright

SUPPORT GAY PRISONERS

Dear GCN,

You provide a forum for gay prisoners to reach out to the gay community and that is something that is sorely needed. We are all aware of the homophobia and discrimination encountered in a free society, and the gay community has worked hard to set up support systems, rights activist organizations, and political/legal coalitions and task forces to insure that our rights are protected and our dignity untrampled. But, I have to say that as a gay prisoner, and I'm sure I speak for the vast majority of gay prisoners, I feel left out, ostracized, forgotten. Prisoners in general are outcast, pushed to the fringe of society, for gay prisoners it is even worse. We have no support from our free brothers and sisters, no coalitions or rights activists to help guard our rights, no contacts who will assist us when we face discrimination of violations of our rights. We have no voice, and this means no power.

There is this misconception among straight inmates that because someone is gay they will have sex with anyone who comes along, like you have no choice in the matter. I'll tell you an account of an event that occurred last year and affected me personally.

I was involved with a young transgender man who went by Diann. We were in love and the relationship was serious. We had entered a mutual agreement marriage and were happy to have found each other in this dark place.

One morning last May Diann was the victim of a sexual assault. He told me what had happened but would not tell me who because he didn't want me to react with violence. He went to his counselor and reported it.

For using the system as it is set up, he was again victimized—by the prison authorities this time. He was locked up in protective custody (the hole), an investigation was made and since he was an "out homo," the staff decided it was his fault for being a "Queen." Since they didn't want any more problems from him, he was put on a transfer list and sent to another institution. Had he been a young straight inmate the whole situation would have handled differently. He remained in the hole for over three months before transfer.

I wrote to many gay rights groups and activists. Diann had been treated unfairly in this, he was made out to be responsible for another inmate's act of violence and then punished for using the system. Out of all the letters I wrote and all the organizations I contacted only one responded—Covenant Station in New Jersey.

We had no one to help protect our rights or preserve our dignity. No one marched at the gate of this prison to bring attention to the discrimination and hatred Diann and I experienced. We were just two helpless faggots in the joint.

Well, anyone can end up in prison at any given time, and if you're gay, it's going to be the worst nightmare you can imagine.

Sincerely,
Rick O'Hara

Dear GCN,

I was diagnosed with HIV in 1988. Back then, there weren't enough support organizations to help indigent people pay for the drug AZT, and because I am allergic to Bactrim and Dapsone (drugs to prevent pneumocystis pneumonia) I had to be given a special breathing treatment called pentamidene to ensure I would not get a fatal lung infection. Because of the lack of funds and not wanting my family to know about my illness, I committed various robberies to enable me to pay for medicine. After awhile, I got caught, so that I could get to prison. Prison gives free medical services to those that have terminal and chronic illnesses. I've been a prisoner since January '90. In 1995 my T-cell count went to 3 and my viral load was over 200.000. But in 1997 the protease inhibitors became available to the inmate population here in Ohio. These cocktails do work if you take as prescribed. Since I've been on this medication, my viral load has dropped to below 400 which is undetectable now. My T-cell count has leapt to 269. I have never experienced any life threatening illnesses caused by AIDS, but I keep myself stress free, which plays an important role in my staying healthy.

Now I am coming up for parole in July and I fear not having any support. I would like to know how to file for social security and what other benefits are available to people with AIDS.

Sincerely,
Xavier Harrison