

Dear friends,

I hope this note finds you as well as possible. I know that some folks are probably melting in the heat. I know that some prisons are not providing appropriate ventilation, air conditioning, and fans. Please know that you are being thought of during the summer heat.

As you go through this month's magazine you will see a continuation of stories from people about the Orlando shooting. The process of grief can be long. I imagine we will have stories, letters, and poems about Orlando for months and even years to come. As was noted last month, and in the post card that went out, there are not enough spaces inside prison to do the needed healing when tragedies like the Orlando shooting occur. Our magazine can, hopefully, be an outlet for some of that healing work. Hopefully you can feel a sense of connection as you write your own responses and read the responses of others. Grief and anger are powerful and we need to turn that in to action. There is much we can all do to help our world heal.

I have been thinking a lot about substance use and drug addiction lately. The War on Drugs is one of the leading causes of incarceration in the United States. This is especially true for Black, Latin@, and American Indian/Indigenous people. I realize that we do not talk enough about drug use and struggles in the newspaper. It is something we discuss lots with formerly incarcerated and court-involved people who are on the outside. There is often a lot of work to be done to support sobriety when folks are on the outside. There is also, however, some support and space that we should make for people on the inside.

As an open family, Black and Pink does not have any judgment about people choosing to use any kind of substance. The truth is that we all use mind/body altering substances. If you eat candy, drink soda, or have coffee, then you're using substances that alter your mind/body. Caffeine and sugar are both strong substances that impact our mood, energy, and attention. Some of us even get addicted to these substances. Have you ever had a headache because you had not had your morning coffee? I know I have. While almost all of us use some kind of mind/body altering substance throughout the day, the truth is that some substances carry more stigma and consequences than others.

I have been in recovery for almost 8 years. My drug of choice was alcohol. I used to binge drink and black out regularly, making really bad choices for myself and impacting others around me. Not drinking at all is the best solution for me. I remember when I tried moderation. I would try to just have one or two drinks and stop, but that never worked for me. I know some people who are good at drinking in moderation and alcohol can add to an experience, rather than take away from it. I marvel at them.

What has been your relationship to mind/body altering substances? Do you struggle with addiction? What is your drug of choice? In our survey report, "Coming Out of Concrete Closets," Black and Pink made clear our commitment to decriminalizing all drugs. We do not believe making substances illegal makes any one's life better. Our strong belief in decriminalization does not mean we ignore the problems certain substances can cause in someone's life. Some people make choices to use substances because life feels too challenging at times and it is really important to have a break. Other people use substances to make a fun night even more fun. There are those who use substances because they feel too much pain without them. As an open family we are not trying to get everyone to stop using all substances. Our dream is for people to have access to the support and resources they need. Substance use can be a really important coping mechanism. It is key that we do not take anyone's coping mechanisms away without being sure they have plenty of other coping mechanisms to replace it with. It is equally important that we remove temptations/triggers from people who have made a decision that they want to give something up. If someone wants to stop using heroin, it is our responsibility as a family to make sure they have all the tools they need to do that. We need to make sure they are not put in a place where they have to be tempted.

The US prison system is not helping any of us truly deal with the harms that can be caused by addiction. As an open family we must work together to create the solutions we need that honor people's

right to make choices about their bodies while being sure everyone has access to treatment and care that they need. We need to keep coming up with new answers knowing that once there were no prisons, that day will come again.

In loving solidarity,

Jason