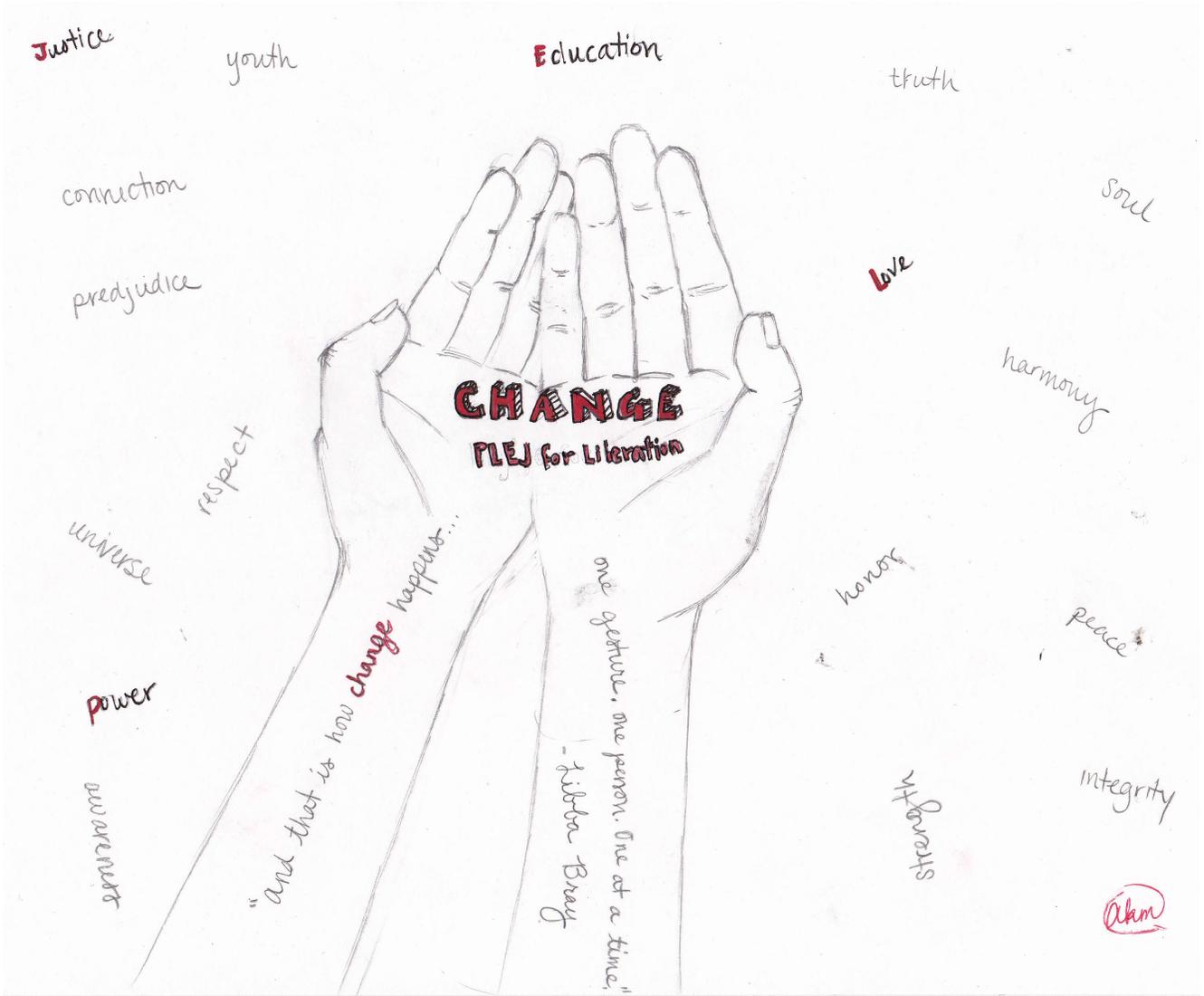


P L E J

(Power, Love, Education, and Justice)



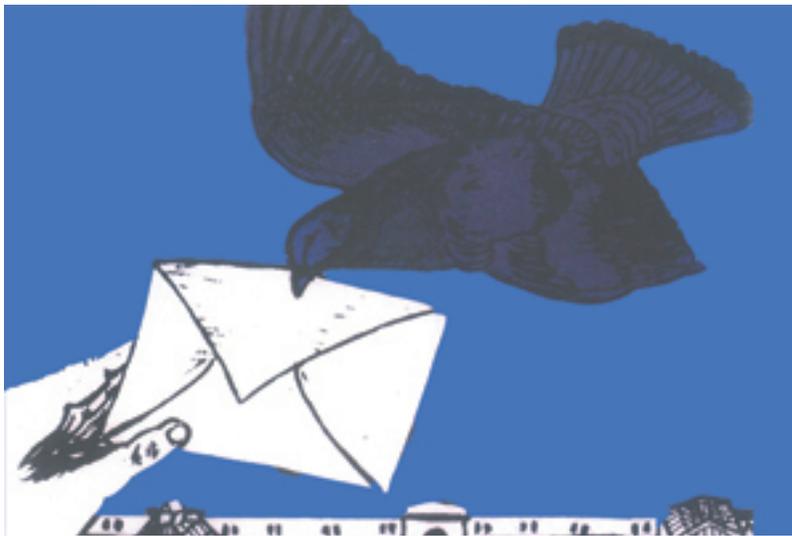
for

LIBERATION

WHAT IS THE PLEJ FOR LIBERATION?

PLEJ (Power, Love, Education and Justice) for LIBERATION is an innovative project that brings together social justice educators in the community with imprisoned educators in California's solitary confinement cells. The goal of this project is to create a justice-oriented, people-centered curriculum about the prison system for teenaged youth and young adults.

PLEJ for LIBERATION is a project of the Human Rights Pen Pal program. The Pen Pal program is based on the belief that all human beings have human rights; and that solitary confinement is torture. The program facilitates correspondence between people, inside and outside the prison walls, who share the same fundamental values. We offer an opportunity to people to develop mutually respectful and educational dialogues by letter. *We believe that the power of pen and paper can transcend prison walls.*



HOW MIGHT THE PLEJ FOR LIBERATION WORK FOR YOU AND YOUR STUDENTS?

The Human Rights Pen Pal program will match you, a community-based educator, with an imprisoned educator, in a pen pal relationship. You will work together to create a general educational program appropriate for your students or after school group. As the community educator, you will frame the topic of the prison system for your students, and perhaps suggest some basic readings (such as Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*).

The imprisoned educator will introduce him/herself in a letter to you, the community educator, which you will make available to your students. The students will then be encouraged to each write their own letter or greeting to the imprisoned educator. The student's letter might introduce her/himself, and the student might ask questions of the imprisoned educator concerning his/her life and experience of being in prison. As a community educator, you will supervise all student letters.

All the students' letters or greetings will be bundled together and mailed to the imprisoned educator. The imprisoned educator will then respond to the community educator in a letter that addresses both common questions and each student's questions and comments.

Using this pen pal exchange as a basic curriculum, the community educator will frame weekly topics for classroom discussion, homework, individual and small group projects, and perhaps selected service learning activities for the class. PLEJ for LIBERATION will be happy to provide additional educational resources, if requested.

MUME'S JOURNEY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE RECONNECTING WITH OUR YOUTHS, EDUCATORS, AND COMMUNITIES

I am not a writer by design but by choice due to circumstances (prison confinement) that have been in place for decades. I was 19 years old when I came to prison and spent decades in solitary confinement up until recently thanks to three major hunger strikes that drew national and international attention and support. While in prison I became a well-known jailhouse lawyer providing legal assistance to prisoners of all races, plus an advocate for better prison conditions.

During my educational transformation – culturally, politically and socially – I have always had this desire to work with youths in hopes of saving them from finding themselves in prisons. Many other prisoners have also reflected on their past mistakes and expressed that desire to give back to their communities, if ever given the chance.

I have always been a firm believer that through the “power of unity” we prisoners are the solution to ending senseless violence, rebuilding our communities, and helping to rebuild our schools by uniting with teachers and connecting with the students who are the present and future.

Sharon Martinas informed me in December 2013 that a teacher named Natania Kremer contacted her through the Human Rights Pen Pal Program, with the idea of inviting a prisoner to share with her students about the hunger strikes and solitary confinement. When I was asked if I would like to talk to students via letters, I didn't have to think about it because it was something I have wanted to do for many years.

I have always known our children and youths were very smart and fast learners. But over the last several months I have been blown away seeing our youths becoming activists and organizers fighting for social justice to improve the quality of life for their communities, schools, and teachers.

I started corresponding with Ms. Natania Kremer's 10th grade students who created a “Think Tank” in three groups, calling themselves Leaders in Today's Society, Limitless Leaders, and Social Shakers. Honestly, that put tears in my eyes. It made me realize I have a responsibility to these students who could be my little brothers and sisters.

I was amazed at their questions, artistic skills, poetry, and their commitment to improving the quality of life for everyone, which, in my opinion speaks volumes of their teacher Natania Kremer's love and dedication to her students. I and many other prisoners want to be part of the solution in uniting with a social movement that can only improve our communities and schools.

Students hold a great deal of Power, Love, Education, and Justice with a united voice within the school system for students, teachers, and schools. I strongly believe this booklet called PLEJ for Liberation will allow educators to see the real value and power of creating a similar opportunity for their students through the Human Rights Pen Pal Program. The outcome of linking student voices with the voices of those who are incarcerated is powerful for everyone involved.

I recently read multiple meanings of “accountability” by Sharon Martinas, and I find one in particular most fitting as I reflect on my sincere commitment to PLEJ for Liberation. I wish to paraphrase it as I bring this to a close. A group of social or radical justice activists may hold themselves accountable to a particular social justice movement. In this meaning, accountability combines general agreement with the political praxis (analysis, practice, evaluation, goals, and vision) of that movement; as well as with the implicitly or explicitly shared cultural values and norms of the movement. When this meaning of accountability is experienced, participants often use the term “community” to describe the participation in that movement.

I pray and hope as each of you are reading this booklet that you will be inspired to share it with your students for their feedback and input. Ask if they would like for you to implement a program like this, and seek the approval of your administration to make it part of your curriculum. I would suggest that you have your students write a brief note for you to incorporate with your request for approval.

In solidarity, Mume (Paul A. Redd Jr.)

STUDENT REFLECTIONS ON PLEJ FOR LIBERATION:

In my new role as the Director of Service Learning at Brooklyn Friends School, I am developing a 10th grade class that is focused on social justice and service learning. This year, my students identified criminal *in*justice as the issue they wanted to explore and better understand. We discussed the efforts of the Hunger Strikers in California and learned about the Human Rights Pen Pal Program. The opportunity to connect and correspond with our pen pal, Mume, was incredibly powerful for my students and for me. I facilitated the exchange of letters and included the responses, drawings, poetry, reflections, and questions from my students. Mume thoughtfully and generously wrote back to each of us. Mume's letters supported us to create a "Think Tank" at Brooklyn Friends School, which culminated in students organizing workshops to raise awareness and inspire action about solitary confinement, Stop and Frisk, prison labor and treatment, juvenile justice, LGBTQ rights in prisons, and a range of other issues related to equity, justice and collective liberation. Our correspondence with Mume has allowed my students to experience service learning in the truest sense through relationship building, reciprocity, ongoing authentic dialogue, accountability, and intentional efforts to take on and dismantle institutional oppression.

It is a privilege to share some of my students' reflections and I look forward to collaborating to expand PLEJ for LIBERATION in schools worldwide.

In solidarity,
Natania Kremer

"I really enjoyed writing to Mume this semester. I think it is a valuable experience to have this interaction with people who have had experiences that we have not. I found it very interesting to know what experiences Mume had in solitary confinement, and following his story. I remember hearing when he was offered the opportunity to get out of solitary confinement and go to a regular prison, and reflecting on my emotions when I found this out. Writing to him has been the most fun thing about seminar this year, it is the element of this class that I will take with me for longer than any other." -HK, 10th grade

"I appreciated our classes' experience in pen paling with Mume. As a result of this experience, I learned a lot about what we as citizens are being told about the justice system, versus what I learned about the truth of the justice system. Through Mume's letters, I learned about the psychological punishment that is solitary confinement. As a result of this pen pal experience, I have learned more about solitary confinement and have enlarged my passions by introducing a new topic that I never thought about. I believe that other schools and students will benefit from this pen pal experience. Everyone, especially kids, should know from early on the injustice in the justice system in order to grow up and try to reform it. I am also thankful that Mume was willing to share his story with us, and we were able to hear from him first hand about the injustice system." -MM, 10th grade

"I think that writing with Mume was an amazing experience. I loved hearing about his life and hobbies, particularly when he talked about how he was sent to prison and how he got the other inmates to join him on the hunger strike. I think that other students from other schools should get an opportunity to do something similar to this because it offers insight into a very unique experience of people in solitary confinement; an issue that is very rarely discussed amongst students my age. I hope that other students get the chance to do a pen pal project similar to the one that we did with Mume." - AR, 10th grade

“Pen paling with Mume through my teacher Natania Kremer has been a rewarding and interesting experience for me. I am so grateful that I had the opportunity to embark on a pen paling journey with an incredible and inspiring man. When my teacher first introduced him to my class, I did not know that I was going to be corresponding with a man that achieved and continues to achieve great things beyond the walls of prison. He inspired me because he made me realize that if he can achieve great things inside prison, I can do so many things out in the world, and especially in my school. Mume has been in prison in California since 1976. His background that he grew up in is similar to many other young men that are incarcerated. He was innocent of the crime that he was convicted for. One extraordinary event that Mume initiated was the Hunger Strike in Pelican Bay Prison. This event happened July 8, 2013, where over 30,000 prisoners in California prisons initiated a hunger strike because of the unfairness, injustice, and uncooperativeness from higher officials in and out the prison system. The strike lasted about 60 days and it was successful because their demands were complied with and the legislators agreed to hold public hearings so their concerns could be voiced. Our class asked many questions about the hunger strike, how it started, and the effect that it had and it was great to hear about people who had been faced with injustice working collaboratively and coming together to stand up for what they truly believed in. There are many qualities that I admire about Mume that he made evident through his letters to us. He is compassionate, genuine, a role model, full of forgiveness, wise, hard working, self-motivated, and driven to accomplish all that he sets out to do. With every letter that we would send him from each class, he would respond to each and every single person without hesitation. He was very open and not afraid to tell the truth, admit to his mistakes if he made any, and tell us what he learned from it and how it made him the person he is today. I was really amazed by the openness and the willingness he had to answer every question that we wrote in the letters because I had this assumption that he would not want to be open and talk about his past and his experiences in prison, but I was totally wrong about that. I am so grateful to have had this opportunity and thankful to my teacher for setting it up.” -JP, 10th grade

“After pen paling with Mume I thought it was an amazing experience. It is not often that you get to communicate to someone who is in prison and is a stranger but yet they’re so willing to open up to you and tell you their story. I don’t really know of anyone who is in prison and is facing a serious amount of time so getting to correspond with him was very interesting. I felt that I truly benefited from this experience because I am now more aware of issues involving criminal injustice and what I can do to help try and put an end to these issues. All of his letters were very touching and seeing how just a letter from us can make someone so happy is an amazing feeling. I enjoyed the time spent writing with Mume. Hearing Mume’s response to some of the questions I found really inspiring. It just opened my eyes to the fact that there are so many kids who are smart and can be somebody in life but all because of their surroundings it’s unlikely for that to happen. Instead of the next generations CEO’s you have the next generation’s prisoners. This was probably what had the biggest impact on me in his letters was seeing how much potential he had but yet he ended up in prison for years. In fact he was probably smarter than most kids in private schools but because he didn’t receive the same surrounding as the private kids he was basically just placed in prison.” -NC, 10th grade

PLEJ FOR LIBERATION – SAMPLE COURSE DESCRIPTION

10th Grade Service & Justice Seminar:

This student-centered, collaborative course provides a foundation for students' service experiences in 10th-12th grades, introducing key elements of service learning for social justice and developing students' skills. Students will take leadership in identifying a range of social justice issues and selecting areas of focus. They will explore the intersectionality of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, age, religion, and nationality. They will investigate multiple perspectives, examine root causes, appreciate differences, understand power dynamics, and connect systemic issues to their lives.

The course will culminate in a student-led Global Youth Service Day forum to raise awareness and inspire action. Delving into the concepts of C.A.R.E. - community, accountability, reciprocity, and equity - students will learn to break down barriers and mobilize around the struggles in their own communities, working in solidarity with those most affected by inequities. Ultimately, students will build on their experiences in this course to plan and implement their personal Creativity Activity and Service (C.A.S.) programs for the 11th and 12th grade years, taking action to address community needs.

During the 2013-2014 school year, students selected issues related to criminal injustice as the focus of their studies. Building on this interest, we organized the following:

Guest Speakers:

Jeffrey Cox (September) *intersectionality and group dynamics*

Dr. Eddie Moore, Jr. (October) *"We the People" - exploring progress toward equity & justice*

Jamie Utt (October) *connections between LGBTQ youth and homelessness/incarceration*

Chris McConnell (November) *homelessness and the shelter system*

Julie Weber and Shokry Eldaly (December) *teaching students in the juvenile justice system*

Liz Cuprill (December) *working with formerly incarcerated people on parole*

Manny Cuprill (January) *working as a member of the NYPD - Stop & Frisk*

Jesse Phillips Fein (January) *impact of incarceration on family and friends*

Central Park Five assembly for the Upper School (April)

Korey "King" Wise (April) *wrongful arrest, conviction and incarceration for 13 years*

Readings: *The New Jim Crow*, "My Night in Solitary," "New York State in Deal to Limit Solitary Confinement," "City Accused of Dragging Its Feet on Settling Suit in 89 Jogger Rape Case," "More Talks Expected in Rape Lawsuit," "The Untold Real Life Story of the Prison in *Orange Is the New Black*"

Service/Advocacy Opportunities:

Human Rights Pen Pal Program: corresponding with Mume (Paul A. Redd, Jr.) at Pelican Bay State Prison (<http://prisonerhungerstrikesolidarity.wordpress.com>)

Making Holiday Cards for men incarcerated at Sing Sing

(<http://bfsservice.blogspot.com/2014/01/10th-graders-reflect-on-criminal.html>)

Higher Ed for All Month - Education from the Inside Out Coalition (*sample included on the next page*)

Writing letter to Mayor de Blasio in support of economic justice for the Central Park Five

Writing letter to Parole Board on behalf of Mume's parole

Global Youth Service Day experience:

(<http://bfsservice.blogspot.com/2014/04/bfs-global-youth-service-day-2014-upper.html>)

Group preparation (*personal inventory, problem tree, gathering information about a community need, who is helping?, taking action, service learning proposal*), partnering with community organizers/guest speakers, presenting workshops

Reflections: Large and small group discussion, writing, drawing, poetry, and digital art

During #HigherEd4All Month, students shared a statement about what access to higher education means to them (<http://bfsservice.blogspot.com/2014/02/upper-schoolers-advocate-for-higher.html>):



“Higher education is the gift of freedom and opportunity. Higher education has given me hope that I can be whoever I want to be. No one should be denied that feeling.”

- We are high school sophomores in Brooklyn, New York working for social justice.

These students chose to have their voices heard in order to help effect policy change and raise awareness. Their advocacy efforts are helping to spread the word about why we need to increase access to higher education for students during and after prison. We have learned that access to higher education transforms lives, reduces recidivism and poverty, increases employment, and strengthens communities.



“Because of higher education, everyone can have the right to better themselves, become a productive member of society, and gain knowledge and the tools needed to fight injustice.”

10th Graders at the Brooklyn Friends School

Access to higher education is a human right!

Restore federal Pell Grants and the Tuition Assistance Program for formerly and currently incarcerated people.

#HigherEd4All



The Education from the Inside Out Coalition is a nonpartisan collaborative of advocates whose mission is to remove barriers to higher education facing students in prison. The Coalition seeks to remove statutory and practical educational barriers for individuals with criminal justice involvement by educating policymakers and advocating for policy change around funding for education in prisons and criminal history screenings on college applications.

PLEJ for Liberation Frequently Asked Questions:

This document includes responses to some frequently asked questions that community educators have raised about the PLEJ for Liberation program. Please note that PLEJ can be incorporated in a range of ways into college, high school, middle school, and after school curriculum, so there is no one “right” way to participate. These responses are based on experiences with a cohort of 10th grade high school students who piloted the program in 2014. If you have any additional questions specific to your context, feel free to contact Sharon Martinas (cws@jgc.org) or Natania Kremer (nataniakremer@gmail.com).

1) What preparation might a teacher want to undertake for a PLEJ focus in her class? Most important is developing a strong pen-pal relationship with an imprisoned educator before planning a unit and initiating PLEJ for Liberation with your students. Additionally, we suggest undergoing an anti-racism education/organizing workshop in your area (e.g. People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond Undoing Racism training) to ensure a clear analysis of power and privilege, which will strengthen your capacity to explore the intersectionality of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, age, religion, and nationality. Another exciting new resource is "[Incarceration’s Witnesses: American Prison Writing](#),” a massive, open, on-line course on the edX platform offered by Professor Doran Larson (dlarson@hamilton.edu). It is entirely free and launched on March 2nd, 2015. “Incarceration’s Witnesses” offers a history of the American prison through the writing produced by incarcerated people. Its premise is that no one has ever understood the prison as well as imprisoned people themselves. No one but the imprisoned writer can tell us the full human cost of the current legal order. This is a literature that reaches from the gallows confessions of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, to the latest broadcast from Mumia Abu-Jamal. Reading and understanding this work is essential to a full understanding of the American experiment itself. “Incarceration’s Witnesses” includes videos, text, maps, interviews, on-line discussion groups, and links to primary and secondary sources in the history of prisoner writing and prisons. There are no costs to participants. There is simply an opportunity to join others as we follow what incarcerated people have written throughout the troubling history of the prison system in the U.S.

2) What books, articles, lessons, might be most effective *before* the direct dialogue with imprisoned educators begins? In addition to reading parts or all of Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, we encourage utilizing the book’s free accompanying study guide, the Teaching Tolerance free Teacher’s Guide at <http://www.tolerance.org/publication/teaching-new-jim-crow> and reading articles about the efforts of the Hunger Strikers in California posted on <http://prisonerhungerstrikesolidarity.wordpress.com>. Additional resources to draw from include: [The Beautiful Prison](#), *Studies in Law, Politics, and Society* (2014); [Fourth City: Essays from the Prison in America](#) (Michigan State UP, 2014); [The American Prison Writing Archive](#) (May, 2015). Inevitably, there are relevant current events being covered at the local and national level that are worth incorporating before and during the pen-pal experience as well. For example, during the semester that PLEJ was first launched in New York City, these current articles were incorporated into the class with students (“My Night in Solitary,” “New York State in Deal to Limit Solitary Confinement,” “The Untold Real Life Story of the Prison in *Orange Is the New Black*”). Furthermore, the 25-year commemoration of the wrongful arrests and incarceration of the Central Park Five occurred during this time and students met Yusef Salaam, Kevin Richardson, Raymond Santana, and Korey Wise, and read and responded to related coverage of their case in New York City. Please contact us for a comprehensive packet of recommended resources and readings.

3) What might be effective activities to accompany the actual exchange of letters with the imprisoned educator? We recommend bringing local communities members into your classroom to speak with students about their work related to the criminal justice system. Ideally, include students' parents, coaches, alumni, faculty, and staff who have a range of personal and professional experiences related to law enforcement, the juvenile justice system, journalism, incarceration, and parole. Also reach out to local organizations doing work related to criminal justice. The goal of these experiences is for students to better understand multiple perspectives, examine the root causes of issues, appreciate differences, understand power dynamics, and connect systemic issues to their lives. Furthermore, incorporating a range of reflection opportunities is crucial for student learning. Reflection may take place through large and small group discussion, writing, drawing, poetry, music, dance, and digital art.

4) How does PLEJ for Liberation work within a service learning model? Service learning is an experiential approach to teaching and learning that incorporates meaningful service experiences with instruction and reflection. Students can engage in action through direct service, indirect service, advocacy, and research. Through PLEJ for Liberation, we encourage students to see themselves as agents of change, partner with incarcerated educators, as well as local organizations and leaders in the community, and use the experience of service and civic engagement to address and respond to inequities and injustice. In addition to the reciprocal exchange and relationship building that takes place through PLEJ via pen-paling, there are many ways in which PLEJ allows for advocacy in support of human rights.

5) What kinds of advocacy activities might be appropriate for high schoolers to support the imprisoned educator, or others who are incarcerated? Some examples of advocacy activities that high schoolers have undertaken through PLEJ include: participating in Higher Ed for All Month with the Education from the Inside Out Coalition, writing letters to Mayor de Blasio in support of economic justice for the Central Park Five, writing letters to the Parole Board on behalf of Mume's parole, and partnering with community organizers and guest speakers to prepare workshops to inspire action in their school community. Students have their voices heard in order to help effect policy change and raise awareness.

6) What is your advice for how to respond to skittish school administrators or concerned parents? We recommend that you respond to school administrators and/or parents by listening, clarifying any concerns they may have, and sharing models and student reflections from other schools (included in this brochure) to demonstrate the potential positive impact of the program. Our pen-pal, Mume, also recommends allowing students to speak for themselves and advocate for the experiences they want. Share ways that PLEJ could become a deterrent to the typical school-to-prison pipeline, especially for working class students of color, and how it might strengthen a class or school's efforts to use restorative justice as a method of addressing conflicts. Reassure parents and administrators that you will be facilitating all communication and that participation is optional. No student should be forced to correspond.

7) How can I bring this kind of justice curriculum into a school that only focuses on 'teaching to the test' because that's the only way my school can get publicly funded? This crucial question speaks volumes about how governments value the minds, spirits and creativity of low-income youth of color. Nevertheless, incorporating this kind of curriculum does not require extensive class time nor does it compete with tests. If anything, when students are engaged and inspired to participate in PLEJ, their written correspondence and advocacy efforts take place voluntarily and supplement and enhance classroom learning experiences.

PLEJ FOR LIBERATION CO-FOUNDERS
Brief Biographies and Contact Information:

Natania Kremer

Natania Kremer is an educator, clinical social worker, and community organizer committed to equity and justice. A graduate of Swarthmore College, Bank Street College of Education, and Columbia University School of Social Work, Natania is currently the Director of Service Learning at Brooklyn Friends School. She can be reached by email at nkremer@brooklynfriends.org or by phone at 718.852.1029 ext. 511.

Paul A. Redd, Jr./Mume

Paul Redd/Mume is a California State Prisoner and Jailhouse-Lawyer committed to social justice. He is one of the Pelican Bay State Prison Hunger Strike Representatives, 2011-2013; and he is a co-founder of PLEJ for Liberation. After decades in solitary confinement, Mume was finally released in May of 2014 and transferred to 'general population' at SATF/CSP-Corcoran. Thanks to the 30,000 prisoners who participated in the Hunger Strike to help end long term solitary confinement. His contact information is:

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Sharon Martinas

Sharon Martinas is a grassroots, racial justice, solidarity organizer. She is the co-founder of the Human Rights Pen Pal program, which was created in January of 2013 as a project of the Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity Coalition (<http://prisonerhungerstrikesolidarity.wordpress.com>). Sharon's email is cws@igc.org. Her 'snail mail' address is:

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