

Northside Chicago Prisoner Letter Writing Coalition

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Northside
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#FreeThemAll

#FTP2021

Who we are...

Northside Chicago Prisoner Letter Writing Coalition (NCPLWC) is a network of individuals who collaborate together on mailing and political education projects across prison walls and revolutionary abolitionists community organizing in the neighborhoods of Uptown, Edgewater, Rogers Park, Albany Park, and Archer Heights. Our fundamental point of solidarity as a network is the desire to abolish all forms of systemic state and interpersonal violence, which we see as embodied in the institutions and culture of the Prison Industrial Complex (the PIC). We are an action-oriented network, but we leave room for members to move at their own pace. We serve anybody barred from access to basic needs due to criminalization and incarceration, however our grassroots fundraising efforts and open mutual aid initiatives consistently serve and prioritize Black, Brown, and Indigenous residents who are food-insecure and housing-insecure in our respective neighborhoods.

Elements of our collective work include: solidarity letter writing and prisoner correspondence nights; circulating abolitionist zines and cash funds across walls; the creation of street-side distros serving meals and PPE; attending local actions in solidarity with family and loved ones of incarcerated people; connecting with and moving resources to residents who are formerly incarcerated and/or on house arrest; phone zaps with friends of the coalition; and making abolitionist political education on social media when possible.

We promote an idea of these projects as hyperlocal and place-situated, occurring block by block—an insurrectionalist proliferation of solidarity, care, and aid, but also of refusals, defiance, and confrontations with power and violence. It is in the connecting of peoples everyday, sincere acts where we see such resistance scale up to large-scale processes of transformation and deep structural-level challenges to the existence of the state. *While* engaging in life-sustaining actions and building community survival programs, we aim to foster a *simultaneous culture shift* in the movement going forward. There is no abolition of the prison industrial complex without changes to our social relations, and such changes take place through both the everyday internal work among our respective communities and at an interpersonal level as much as larger attacks on the infrastructures of state, capital, and the prison regime.

How to get involved?

We want holistic and total abolition of this oppressive plantation society. And this means ending nothing short of ending the world as it exists. If you are interested in supporting our work, you can reach out to us several different ways. Some of these include: showing up to our events; donating funds when you can; donating winter clothing; volunteering on a project; cooking or making refreshments; helping establish a local streetside distro in your neighborhood; participating in our virtual letter writing nights; or joining our network all in!

of Chicago revolutionary abolitionist organizing circles. We want to encourage other family members and loved ones of people locked up in Cook County Jail to attend these weekly demos when they can. When visitation services (currently closed) start back up, we plan to pass out flyers and connect with everyone waiting in the lines out front the jail on Sundays during and prior to these demonstrations. Until then we will be continuing to conduct phone zaps when needed, building with other groups attending these weekend demonstrations, and will prepare for the year ahead.

This year, we will be hosting prisoner solidarity letter writing nights twice monthly, with an emphasis right now keeping tabs on several people imprisoned for their actions in Chicago and nearby cities during the George Floyd uprising. Our letter writing nights when held in person typically passed around the NYC Anarchist Black Cross political prisoners address book, but the majority of our correspondence work stems from connections built while facilitating True Leap's zine-to-prison distro.

Many of us have friends and loved ones who are locked up in carceral sites ranging from Federal detention centers to local jails. We try our best to put money on peoples commissary when needed, and help formerly incarcerated people and family members of incarcerated people access resources as various needs and asks arise. We plan to outreach to more formerly incarcerated people in these Northside neighborhoods, to folks on house arrest, and to survivors. We plan to build infrastructures of support, love, and care formed in opposition to the institutions, culture, and practice of policing.

What we've been up to

In the Spring of 2019, NCPLWC began as an informal gathering of friends that met twice monthly in the Rogers Park neighborhood, under the name "Rogers Park Prisoner Letter Writing Coalition." These gatherings were held at the P.O. Box Collective by of the Morse Red Line station, and gave us the opportunity to collectively write letters to political prisoners and prisoners of war from Black liberation and Native sovereignty struggles and to connect incarcerated people with new pen pals among our contacts. At these gatherings, we would mail packets of zines out for a number of different abolition study groups behind bars, including members of Dreaming Freedom Practicing Abolition, Jailhouse Lawyers Speak, and the W.L. Nolen Mentorship Program. Most of these inside study groups however are informal, sometimes even just two people sharing ideas and zines back and forth. Importantly, these study groups have all been *self-organized*, and we mail materials from True Leap Press (Chicago/NYC/Ithica) and the South Chicago ABC Zine Distro (Homewood). All of this work is of course decentralized and the relationships that form between participants in our projects seem to range as widely from pen pals and care work, to people grouping up with imprisoned correspondents and looking for ways to strengthen, amplify, and embolden collective prisoner action.

In the latter months of 2019, we began to collaborate with a radical group of queer college students who invited us to their campus. Every few weeks, we would pack into a student center's back room to write letters and package zines for prisoners requested from True Leap Press. Stevie Wilson (@agitateorganize on Twitter) would call in every night and dialogue with students for the time allotted by the state, and we

would be left with take-away questions to return with for the following convening. Once the coronavirus shut down all of our in person letter-writing activities, attention shifted among various members of the project to phone zap actions in solidarity with prisoners facing the plagues spread in prisons, detention centers, and jails. We lent intentional solidarity to Illinois jails and prisons with these zaps, and spent our time heavily defending individual prison organizers, many whom we had developed relationships with over the previous years.

Changes Moving into 2021

Throughout the pandemic collective work facilitated the distribution and further circulation of zines, and in October 2020 our project reconsolidated and renamed, now as the Northside Chicago Prisoner Letter Writing Coalition. Since August of this year, we have held down a distro table under the Bryn Mawr red line station. It began as a point to pass out hand sanitizer, masks, and waters to people walking on the street. Alongside the protection we would also pass out abolitionist and other radical literature, mostly written by imprisoned people, always on topics of abolition or anti-oppression. Many of the zines are authored by prisoners we have worked with or continue to directly work with. The streetwise table component of the project has taken on a life of its own, now as the “Bryn Mawr Warming Station.”

The Bryn Mawr Warming Station has been in many ways a collaboration from the start with the Black Autonomy Federation-Chicago Local Organizing Committee. Every week we are out there distributing some combination of warm clothing apparel, winter cold and flu medicine and remedies,

warm breakfasts, hand sanitizer bottles, packets of face-masks, household cleaning supplies and disinfectants. Some weeks that we are able to fundraise and prepare, we have even distributed cash directly to food and housing insecure neighbors and residents who attend the warming station regularly. We are accumulating more and more outdoor heaters, which as the winter gets colder we are dragging out there as well! Alongside Black Autonomy Federation C.L.O.C. we have also distributed countless tents in preparation for the winter.

The Bryn Mawr Warming Station is a “No Cop Zone” while we are set up, and a chance for many of our neighbors who are the most impacted by police violence get a chance to meet up with our local CopWatch, report, and discuss. We hope to grow and expand these tabling efforts to wherever anyone in our network sees the need for one. Whether that means we fundraise more, or move and shuffle resources around to get things started, the idea of this project is to foster the conditions of abolitionist revolt in the neighborhoods of Uptown, Edgewater, and Rogers Park. However don't let the name fool you. Our group's membership spans the entire city, and related we are participating in various initiatives surrounding Cook County Jail, and established a tabling presence in Archer Heights by Midway Airport. We also are building solidarity with other mutual aid projects from other parts of the city and into nearby suburbs.

Every Sunday we go out and supporting the family members of people locked up in Division 10 and other facilities at Cook County Jail. We bring food, coffee and other drinks, and energy and are outreaching constantly to get people out there. The idea is to make these Sunday gatherings increasingly a hub of solidarity activity in the year upcoming, and a regular feature