



Brooklyn Daily Eagle

August 5, 2009

Community News



Hotline Opened for Women With Husbands in Prison

by Caitlin McNamara (Caitlin@brooklyneagle.net), published online 08-04-2009



Marcella Tillett

By Caitlin McNamara

BROOKLYN HEIGHTS — If your husband were incarcerated, you might not want to talk about it. You might feel uncomfortable, or vulnerable, or feel like talking about it wouldn't help much anyway. As a result, you might feel alone and isolated.

This issue was observed by women at the Osborne Association, an after prison services organization with offices on Remsen Street. Through an evaluation of their female clients, they deduced that women whose intimate partners are incarcerated need emotional support and flexible access to good information.

In response, Osborne has set up the state's first hotline designed to support and empower such women. Marcella Tillett, a Prospect Heights resident who helped to create the hotline, says that they anticipate serving many Brooklyn women who have previously been clients of Osborne services.

The hotline will be staffed by four women — three are Brooklyn residents — who understand what it's like to have a loved one in prison. Three of the women are married, one is engaged; three of their partners are currently incarcerated and one was just released.

Tillett says that the idea for the counseling service developed as an outgrowth of another program. She joined Osborne in 2006 to work with an HIV prevention program called Get On the Bus, in which they take women together on a bus to visit their incarcerated partners, and on the way, give

information about sexual health and relationships. The one-on-one prep sessions before the ride, in which the women could ask questions and be given referrals for services, usually turn into counseling sessions lasting anywhere from 30 minutes to two hours.

Even those women already in counseling elsewhere often avoid discussing this part of their lives with a person they felt they had to educate about the complexities of imprisonment, or they hold back out of fear of judgment.

“They don’t have those barriers at Osborne,” says Tillet. “This is what we do.”

As with the other hotline staff, volunteer Renette Benn believes that her experience will help her connect with callers because, as she says, “It’s always good to have somebody that you know who identifies with what you are going through.”

The hotline number is 1-800-344-3314. It will be open Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays from 5 to 9 p.m.

* * *

Questions? Comments? [Sound off to the Editor](#)

© **Brooklyn Daily Eagle 2009** All materials posted on BrooklynEagle.com are protected by United States copyright law. Just a reminder, though -- It’s not considered polite to paste **the entire story** on your blog. Most blogs post a summary or the first paragraph,(40 words) then post a link to the rest of the story. That helps increase click-throughs for everyone, and minimizes copyright issues. So please keep posting, but not the entire article. [arturc at att.net](mailto:arturc@att.net)
