

MUSIC INSIDE/OUT

Dear Friends,

Welcome to Music Inside/Out! Now that you have agreed to contribute energy, time and skill to the work of this project with women in prison we would like to share with you some of the overall needs of the project, and specific guidelines for you to follow in going to the prison.

We are an infant organization consisting primarily of six women who are committed to bringing music to women imprisoned in the California Institution for Women, located in Riverside County, 60 miles east of Los Angeles. The project is an outgrowth of a statewide tour of women's music produced in 1976 by Women on Wheels. Enclosed is a flyer describing the process of this tour--we encourage you to order and read this pamphlet before your trip to the prison so that you will have a thorough understanding of the project's beginning history and struggles. The six of us who are now working together to get this project off the ground include: two former coordinators of the Santa Cruz Women's Prison Project, which brought political education and cultural events to women inside from 1972-75; a singer/musician whose music has brought much joy to women in the prison; a woman formerly employed as a counsellor at the prison; a woman who counsels drug and alcohol abusers and who has had considerable direct contact with women inside; a woman who herself was a prisoner at CIW and who knows better than any of us the importance of supportive contact between outsiders and insiders. We are a multi-ethnic group, and one of our fundamental commitments is to develop a project that recognizes and respects the cultural diversity of women locked up. Included in this commitment is a battle cry against the racism which for centuries has militated against harmonious and unified experience between women of various ethnic and cultural heritages. We are all lesbians, and we are concerned that this project work to lessen the need of lesbians in this country to hide their sexuality. At the same time, we expect this project to embrace the needs and concerns of all women and to respect the reasons for our differences even while bringing us all closer together. Finally, our project is grounded in a knowledge of the criminal justice system in America and the functions it serves in maintaining a capitalist economic system which exploits and discriminates against people on the basis of race, class and behavioral non-conformity. Implicitly and explicitly through our work we stand opposed to our society's institutionalized injustices, of which the prison is a prime example. The primary medium for our work is the music and the teaching and the personal contact which we aim to develop together with women locked up.

As a group we are suffering from birth pangs. A promise for a music project was made to women at CIW as early as December 1975. Due to persevering obstacles presented by the prison administration, the project was cancelled in its first promising start. Now, a year later, we have another chance to make it happen. And we are dependent on you for our success. All six of us have regular jobs and family and school commitments which make it very hard for us to find the time and energy to be creative and well-organized with one another. We are actively recruiting new women, especially Third World women, to join in the organizational work of the project. We are in the process of incorporating and gaining non-profit status, and we have begun to search out funding possibilities. We hope to receive a grant which will provide a salary for a full-time coordinator so as to significantly increase the organizational efficiency of our group. In the meantime we must plead that you be patient and understanding with us, and do everything you can to be supportive. We welcome your advice and suggestions; we resist judgement and blame. We are learning how to work with one another. We are learning how to work cooperatively with a prison administration that experiences us as a nuisance at best, a threat at worst. We have and will make mistakes; with your support and encouragement we can learn from our mistakes, and improve our work style.

