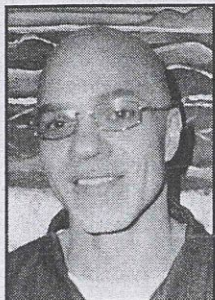


Opinion: Views & commentary from around the community

Paying Homage

By Matthew Hattley



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During the past 23 years of my incarceration I have met, corresponded and interacted with some exceptional people. However, there is one who shines brighter than a star in the darkest night — Sharon Content.

Sharon is the founder and president of the Brooklyn-based non-profit organization, Children of Promise, NYC (CPNYC). What she and her experienced staff have been able to accomplish in a mere eight years can only be described as miraculous. She is a pioneer in her own right, setting the bar at a level not many are willing or able to meet and/or exceed. I commend her on her dedication and desire to succeed.

Over the past 3+ years I have received various written material regarding CPNYC. I am never disappointed. With each new endeavor they embark on I am left in awe. It's really amazing how one organization has the ability to positively impact so many children and family members in several communities. I am talking about genuine change.

CPNYC's mission is to embrace children of incarcerated parents and empower them to break the cycle of inter-generational involvement in the criminal justice system. Their holistic approach enables children of incarcerated parents to obtain the necessary means to discover new pathways, recognize possibilities and realize their full potential.

The following are only a tiny fraction of the valuable services that CPNYC provides: Academic Enrichment, providing educational engagement that supplies school day learning; One-to-One Mentoring, which pairs children with adult mentors who provide opportunities for children to have a meaningful relationship with a trusted adult and role model; Mental Health Support, addressing the emotional trauma and profound psychological effects of having a parent in prison; and Family Connections, which encourages family bonding between children and their incarcerated parents through letter writing, phone calls and prison visits.

In 2009, CPNYC served 145 children and families annually with an operating budget of \$720,000. Today they serve 700 children and families with an operating budget of \$3.5 million. One can only imagine what could be done with \$10 million, which we should also note equals a minuscule percentage of the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision's operating budget.

CPNYC is able to provide the children free summer day camp, mentorship programs, academic assistance, recreational activities, math and reading tutoring, correctional facility visits, therapeutic services, and field trips.

"All children need and want appropriate adult supervision, affirmation and validation; it is the definition of love for children," reads their mission. "CPNYC provides guidance and support to all of our participants, along with a safe place to heal and grow."

In October 2012, Sharon was awarded the Post Liberty Medal for her leadership. "She saw a group of children she felt were 'forgotten, invisible to society,' and stepped forward to help kids who have a parent in prison," read the medal's commendation. "In 2007, Content founded the Brooklyn non-profit Children of Promise, NYC, that offers after school programs, summer day camp and therapeutic services 'for children dealing with the shame, the stigma and for many, the secret of having a parent in prison.' The program annually serves 200 kids, ages 6 to 18, helping them 'deal with the issues, the loss, the depression, the anger.' And each weekend she arranges a van to shuttle them to a different correctional facility."

I chose to enlighten you regarding CPNYC, because Sharon can always use reliable and dependable volunteers who are willing to help the children "break the cycle and create brighter futures." Unfortunately I was only able to discuss a small fraction of what CPNYC is currently offering the children. However, if you are interested in joining Sharon's team, or just want to know more about her organization, simply contact her at Children of Promise, NYC, 54 MacDonough Street, Brooklyn NY 11216, call her at (718) 483-9290 or visit www.cpnyc.org.

And let Sharon know that Matthew Hattley made you aware of CPNYC.

I congratulate Sharon on her various accomplishments and wish her continued success. She personally inspires and motivates me to never give up hope; do everything to the best of my ability. I will continue doing everything in my power to assist her in reaching even greater heights — she deserves nothing less. I sincerely hope you feel the same way. For this I am paying homage to an exceptional woman, mentor and leader. Peace.

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