

# Long Island Volunteer Hall of Fame

## Archive Project

### *Inception to Induction*

#### **PRISON FAMILY ANONYMOUS (PFA)**

**Year of Founding:** 1974

**Issues Addressed:** Families and Friends of Criminal/Juvenile Offenders

**Induction Category & Year:** Family Support, 2003

**Founder:** Barbara Allan

**Personal Quote from Barbara:** “Erasing the stigma, restoring dignity.”

**History:** Barbara Allan, afraid and very uncertain of the future for herself and two young daughters, began attending Al-Anon meetings as a mean of support and comfort after her husband pled guilty to murdering his own father and was sentenced to serve over seven years in prison. She became actively involved in working with The Fortune Society, an organization that assisted former and current incarcerated individuals in becoming productive members of society. Barbara herself began to reach out and network with families and friends of offenders in the criminal justice system, experiencing difficulties with the entire process.

In 1974, she founded Prison Families Anonymous in Nassau County, Long Island. The nonprofit organization serves to bring families and loved ones together to discuss and express their thoughts, emotions and concerns. The meetings provide an open platform for each person to voice himself/herself without scrutiny and judgment from an outside stigmatizing society. Prison Family Anonymous seeks to provide its members with a plethora of information, resources and tools within the judicial system as well as educate them on methods or steps to approach their relative’s case once arrested, as many are anxious, unsure, and confused as to “what to do next?”

**Board of Directors:** PFA is governed by a 10-12 member Board of Directors elected from among the general membership and operates according to an established set of By-Laws. An Advisory Board of individuals from several different professions is also in place. Barbara Allan serves as Executive Director of the all-volunteer organization.

**Agency Mission:** PFA strives to not only shine a spotlight on families in the criminal justice system but also to change the culture of the system to recognize the family left behind as a valuable entity. Currently this organization is unfunded and remains closely tied to the Long Island community. “Long Island needs us,” is Barbara’s sentiment regarding her focus. Most meetings are closed and restricted to individuals who are actually friends or relatives of those involved in the criminal or juvenile justice system. This ensures confidentiality and avoids chastisement from others. Community members are welcome to contribute their expertise at the invitation of the group. PFA hopes to secure a main office that would serve as a central location for the agency to function.

**Population Served:** Prison Family Anonymous serves quite a dynamic population and that population in turn represents “every type of criminal offenders imaginable.” These offenders range from individuals who have served a few months in jail to those who have been imprisoned for decades. PFA recognizes the need for children to congregate and have their experiences addressed in a group setting and is in the process of reestablishing its children’s group. While PFA mainly accommodates the Long Island community, they welcome persons from all over the country to join them so long as they meet the guidelines as a member.

**Scope of Activities:** Every 2nd and 4th Tuesday of the month, PFA holds regular meetings at the Community Presbyterian Church, on 1843 Deer Park Avenue in Deer Park. (Revised summer hours: The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of the month). They also have meetings every first Tuesday at St. Anthony's Hall of St. Brigid's Parish in Westbury. They gather to openly share and discuss their emotions and exchange information and resources available to them within the judicial system.

In addition to these meetings, Barbara often with a panel of PFA members and constantly addresses the public through religious, social and educational platforms. She often lectures, and has also made her causes known through publishing in the Long Island Press. She also sits on the board of New Yorkers for Alternatives to the Death Penalty.

**Volunteer Involvement:** The organizers, Board of Directors (PFA members) and advisory board (community members) are the primary volunteers working with PFA. Because this agency operates on a small scale where meetings are the central focus of obtaining information, there is not much room to involve volunteer participation yet. PFA hopes that this changes once they obtain an office location and are able to expand the organization's services. Historically, PFA has had a volunteer presence in the courts and in both the Nassau and Suffolk County Correctional Facilities. They would like to reinstate these programs.

**Funding Source:** Other than donations from individuals, Prison Family Anonymous at the present has no funding source.

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