

"THE THINK TANK CONCEPT"

The Think Tank Concept evolved out of the People's Party and their efforts to establish the Green Haven Prisoner's Labor Union, which was eventually denied recognition as public employees by the Public Employees Relation Board in December 1972. In September 1972 a dialogue was held at Green Haven Prison comprised of prisoners, prison administrators and thirty community representatives. This meeting was the first step towards bringing about a needed change in the traditional policy of viewing prisons as private enclaves, operated as the sole responsibility and authority of the state. A series of small community prisoner meetings followed, providing the structure for the Think Tank Concept: a highly active group of prisoners who work to bring forth changes in both the prison and the community. Since its inception, in addition to creating the Malcolm King Harlem College Extension and other prison based degree courses, the group established a community re entry agency field office within the prison (Project Second Chance); contributed to the development of a family counseling service in Harlem for the families of prisoners; developed a counseling and training program using prisoners on work release with the Division for Youth at the Goshen Center for Boys; did consultant work with over 50 agencies and organizations around the state; assisted in the development of a Health Assistant training program; established the Think Tank Concept Annual Awards Program for outstanding community leaders and sponsored numerous seminars and conferences on crime, education, "corrections" and juvenile justice. In 1975 the Think Tank was awarded a national citation for voluntary service to the community from the National Center for Voluntary Action. Their president, Roger Namu Whitfield, was selected as one of the Outstanding Young Men of America for 1975 in spite of being a prisoner. Presently the Think Tank publishes Voices for New Justice, a state wide alternative newspaper which focuses on critical social and criminal justice issues. The Think Tank Concept has become an institution, providing vital and needed service to the New York State community.

Excerpted from Dasil Velez, "Think Tank Concept" 1976, Greenhaven Prison, Stormville, New York