YEAR-END HIGHLIGHTS

About a year ago, we were still settling into our new home at Rainbow Bookstore Cooperative in downtown Madison, WI. We had our corner of the basement freshly dusted and the book donations arranged, but we had a huge backlog of letters to respond to. Things started coming together in the first six months of 2014, as we shared in our last newsletter, but so much more has happened in just the last five months that we wanted to tell you about it. Read on for more details, but here are some of the highlights:

- Over 10,000 books sent to LGBTQ-identified prisoners across the country. Our volunteers have eliminated the backlog and we are currently able to respond to people in less than two weeks.
- During our Fundraising Drive, we raised close to $12,000 to help us respond to every prisoner who writes to LGBT Books to Prisoners. Contributions from many new monthly supporters mean we will be able to continue this work as long as it is needed.
- NYT bestselling author Janet Mock started a new partnership with us.
- Two of our organizers, Melissa Charenko and Irene Toro Martínez, received an award from the Wisconsin Network for Peace and Justice.
- We increased our visibility in the community by tabling at the Dane County Farmer’s Market, Madison Print & Resist, Madison Pride, and events at UW-Madison. Added to more visibility online through our Facebook page, Twitter account, and website, we are able to reach more people.
- Continued participation in the Dane County Jail Working Group.
- Grants from New Harvest Foundation and Madison Community Cooperative help continue our work.
- And we have an enthusiastic (and growing!) core collective, many new volunteers, and lots to come in 2015!

2014 NUMBERS – THE QUIZ

Think you know what a donation-funded, all-volunteer collective can do in just eleven months? Guess our 2014 numbers (from January 1st to December 5th; we're still finishing the end of the year strong!). You’ll find the answers on p. 2 along with a map to give you a sense of where the packages go. On pp. 3-5, you can read prisoner letters to see what it all actually means for each person to receive a package of books from LGBT Books to Prisoners.

1. How many packages did LGBT Books to Prisoners send from January 1, 2014 to December 5, 2014?
   a. 707       b. 1008       c. 1631
2. How many states did LGBT Books to Prisoners send packages to in 2014?
   a. 49       b. 45       c. 50
3. How many different prisons did LGBT Books to Prisoners send to in 2014?
   a. 1004       b. 300       c. 569
4. How much did it cost to mail all of the packages?
   a. $10,089.86       b. $3,422.12       c. $6,645.31
WHERE DO ALL THE PACKAGES GO?

Based on the map, you might have figured out just how many packages we’ve sent and where they’ve gone. Here’s a summary in case you haven’t quite been able to connect the dots (quiz answers in parentheses): From January 1, 2014 to December 5, 2014, we’ve sent 1631 packages to LGBTQ-identified prisoners in 45 states and 300 prisons. We did not receive letters from prisoners in CT, ME, MT or VT this year, and HI does not have any prisons. It has cost $6,645.31 to send packages in 2014.

WHY ARE SO FEW BOOKS BEING SENT TO TEXAS?

LGBT Books to Prisoners aims to send books and other resources to every LGBTQ-identified prisoner across the United States. In early 2014, we had to stop sending books to Texas. This was not because prisoners in Texas receive great support from educational programs, prison libraries, or other books to prisoner organizations, or because the state has done well housing its LGBTQ inmates. Instead, we realized that LGBT Books to Prisoners’ volunteer capacity and financial situation could not meet all the demands from prisoners across the country. Since prisoners often receive less than $1 an hour for their labor and many have lost contact with other support systems, they often have trouble affording the writing supplies to communicate with organizations like ours. Rather than having letters go unanswered or having to throw away letters as they became out of date (prisoners often move between institutions, meaning that prompt responses are needed), we wanted prisoners to use their resources in the best way possible. About half of the letters we received were from Texas, so we decided to stop responding to prisoners in that state and let those in our database know that we would no longer be able to serve them while they were housed in Texas. This means that they can spend their resources elsewhere while we respond to as many other prisoners as possible. It’s been hard knowing that there are people in Texas who could really use our support, but, as LGBT Books to Prisoners has grown in the past year, we hope to be able to begin sending to Texas again soon. You can support this effort with a financial donation or by joining us in the basement of Rainbow Bookstore Cooperative during one of our volunteer sessions.
LETTERS FROM PRISONERS
Each month, we receive hundreds of letters from prisoners in need of books, dictionaries, and other resources. Many describe the harsh conditions they face in prison and express gratitude for the support that LGBT Books to Prisoners provides. The next three pages contain excerpts from these letters to show the impact of our work.

Letter from a prisoner in Corcoran, CA

Letter from a prisoner in Milan, MI

Letter from a prisoner in Milton, FL
Letter from a prisoner in Fort Dix, NJ

Thank you so much for the books that you've sent me so far. I've enjoyed them all. We have a small Black Library that doesn't have many books in it. But some people here do check the books out of it. So when I finish reading a book, that's where it goes. I wasn't into reading lesbian erotica at first but now that seems to be all I want to read. Being a gay man it's opened my eyes to all parts of gay relationships. I just wish that everybody could be as happy as the people I read about in these books. That would make the world a perfect place. We all know that isn't gonna happen in our lifetime. I want to thank you all for making my time so much easier and go alot quicker by the things you do. If you have anymore lesbian erotic anthology I would like to read them. We're about 3 books

Letter from a prisoner in Huntingdon, PA

Thanks allot for your last order, it was great! (8/22/14) I love the books that you have sent so far and all the gay boys here love 'em too! I have been passing them all, then they go to the library here. This is my 3rd request for the year so I hope you can send me some good ones till I can write next year! Ft. Dix
Prisoners occasionally send art with their letters or decorate their envelopes. Here are some examples.
A NEW PARTNERSHIP WITH JANET MOCK AND #TRANSBOOKDRIVE

On November 30, New York Times bestselling author of *Redefining Realness*, Janet Mock, launched a #TransBookDrive in partnership with biyuti publishing, Black Girl Dangerous, and LGBT Books to Prisoners. The campaign, which exceeded its original fundraising goal in the first 24 hours, aims to send holiday packages to 250 incarcerated trans folks across the United States. Recognizing that trans people face higher rates of incarceration and greater violence in the correctional system, the campaign hopes to ensure that those who are most affected by mass incarceration receive stories that truly reflect them. Prepared with boxes of new trans books, letters from the authors, money for postage, and volunteers to put these special packages together, LGBT Books to Prisoners has begun to send out the first of these 250 packages to trans prisoners nationwide. It’s not too late to support the campaign, which has some great perks. Visit the website before December 30 to help us stock our shelves with the books that we need most.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON COMMUNITY

Many of our volunteers are college students who choose to spend their evenings and weekends in the basement. They come in the middle of exam week and during Badger games, ready to help LGBT Books to Prisoners in whatever way they can. This semester, we’ve been thrilled to have even more involvement from the UW-Madison community. At the invitation of UW student Kevin Franco, LGBT Books to Prisoners led a discussion on the prison industrial complex, mass incarceration, and the unique needs of LGBTQ-identified prisoners with over a dozen students at Smith Residence Hall. We’re grateful for the stimulating conversation, the new volunteers we recruited, and the residence’s book drive. The LGBT Campus Center and Spanish and Portuguese Department have also collected books on our behalf. A big thank you to you all!

LGBT BOOKS TO PRISONERS SWAG

This fall, we’ve tabled at the Dane County Farmers’ Market, Madison Print & Resist, PRIDE, and the Mariame Kaba lecture hosted by Comparative US Studies at UW-Madison. You might have seen our volunteers in shirts with our logo or with patches on their backpacks at these events. It’s not too late to get one of your own (suggested donation for $5 for t-shirts and $1 for patches) by emailing us.

DANE COUNTY JAIL WORKING GROUP

Since the summer, members of LGBT Books to Prisoners have been working to raise awareness about a proposal to construct a new, expanded, or renovated Dane County Jail and explore alternatives to incarceration in our own community. As prison abolitionists, the No Dane County Jail working group seeks more than just the end to jails and prisons. Prison abolition requires that we see how many of our institutions -- like schools, hospitals, and mental health facilities -- participate in the expansion and maintenance of the prison industrial complex (PIC). Our society as a whole functions to reinforce visions of “security” that require the existence of prisons and the designation of some people as “bad” and “criminal.” We believe that hate crime laws and other tough-on-crime legislation do not actually protect us, but function to punish and incarcerate those communities who were already most vulnerable in society: people of color, poor people, queer, trans, two spirit and gender non-conforming people, sex workers, homeless people, people with mental illnesses, people with disabilities, undocumented immigrants, and indigenous/Native peoples. Thus, prison abolition requires that we rebuild our societal structures and institutions in ways that don’t rely on incarceration; that we imagine alternatives to prison in our communities; and that we find ways to live those alternatives in the present, so we can all have a future that doesn’t include the PIC. LGBT Books to Prisoners is proud to part of the movement towards prison abolition.
FUNDING UPDATES

Sending books to prisoners is expensive and postage costs are rising, but there are no signs that the need for books in prison will diminish anytime soon. Study after study shows that prisoners who have access to educational programs while incarcerated are less likely to reoffend, but states are cutting their educational programs and limiting prisoners’ access to books. We at LGBT Books to Prisoners speak out against these cuts and fill in the gaps in this system while also meeting the unique reading interests of the LGBTQ prison population. LGBTQ people are incarcerated at much higher rates than the general population, are more likely to face abuse in prison, and often have unique questions related to coming out, sexuality, medical care, etc. which prisons are ill-equipped to answer. We continue to work hard to raise funds to support this work, and have some good news to report:

New Harvest Foundation Grant
LGBT Books to Prisoners is the grateful recipient of a $3000 grant from the New Harvest Foundation. The New Harvest Foundation helps channel charitable contributions to organizations working to promote LGBTQ rights, services, culture, and community development in Dane County, WI. We’re excited to offer a new program with our grant: a trans reading group will help connect trans people living in Dane County with trans people in prison across the country, who we hope will foster a sense of community through a common reading experience. If you would like to get involved in this project, please email us for more information.

Grant from the Madison Community Cooperative
A micro-grant from the Madison Community Cooperative (MCC) Community Services Trust Fund will help us with our core mission of sending books and reading resources to LGBTQ-identified prisoners nationwide. Thanks, MCC, for your support!

2014 Fundraising Campaign
During the month of October, we asked a large number of people to donate small amounts on a monthly basis, in order to create a sustainable and predictable funding base. We were hoping to raise $16,000 so that we could send packages to every LGBTQ-identified prisoner who writes to us (including those in Texas). We fell a bit short of our goal during the campaign, but we’re well on our way towards meeting our 2015 budget targets. With extra funds donated by Janet Mock through the #TransBookDrive and other end-of-year donations coming in, we may still be able to meet our goal. Either way, a big THANK YOU to the 94 different individuals who have supported us so far in 2014. Our work wouldn’t be possible without you!

DENNIS BERGREN LGBTQ ADVOCACY AWARD FROM WNPJ
This fall, two members of the organizing collective, Irene Toro Martínez and Melissa Charenko, were pleased to receive the Dennis Bergren LGBTQ Advocacy Award from the Wisconsin Network for Peace and Justice (WNPJ) for their work with LGBT Books to Prisoners. In their acceptance speech, they recognized that they would not be receiving the honor without the support of all the volunteers and donors who have helped the project grow. They also emphasized that, while direct services organizations such as LGBT Books to Prisoners cannot put an end to the prison industrial complex, this work acts an important lifeline for prisoners. The award was particularly fitting because it is named after the founder of the organization, and Irene and Melissa both got their start with LGBT Books to Prisoners by volunteering for the project at Dennis’s home every Sunday.
THANK YOU 2014 DONORS!

Although LGBT Books to Prisoners has received a number of grants in 2014, we remain a primarily donation-funded organization. We believe that a large number of people showing support for an issue however they can will create change over the long term. People freely give their time, books, and expertise to support LGBT Books to Prisoners, which allows over 95% of donation money to be spent on postage as we send packages of books to LGBTQ-identified people in prison (the rest goes to tape, paper, and printer ink). This year, we have received financial support from the following donors to help support this work (those marked with an asterisk* marks monthly donors):

Abbey M.  Gabe J.*  Marilyn C.
Alison B.*  Geraldine O.*  Marisol L.
Anders Z.*  Gonzalo and Alexandra G.  Megan P.
Andrea S.  Herta P.*  Melissa C.*
Anna L.  Hilary G.  Michelle K.
Anna Z.  Irene T.M.*  Mckelle H.
Anthony L.  Jane S.  Molly B.
Ariana H.*  Jara C.  Naama N.
Arlene B.  Jazmin I.*  Nathan B.
Becky B.*  Jean B.  Naomi S.
BobbiJo K.  Jeremy G.  Neil S.
Brian H.*  Joanna L.*  Noel M.
Britt T.  Joanne T.*  Oliver B.
Brooke R.*  Johannes W.*  Rachel G.
Caitlin T.-R.*  John B.  Rae M.
Carmen H.  Julie B.*  Richard C.
Cedric J.  Karma C.*  Sande J.*
Chris K.*  Katherine C.B.*  Santhouse C.
Chris and Arlene B.  Katie O.  Shinsuke E.
Craig S.  Katrine R.  Sophia W.
Dani B.*  Kelsey C.*  Spring G.*
Daniel U.  Kimbery M.  Taran C.*
Debbie C.*  Kristen C.*  Teresa N.*
Debbie R.  Kyle R.  Thea G.
Dee L.*  LaLita dP.*  Thomas S. and Marina M.-S.
Deena L.*  Lena O.*  Victoria W.
Dennis B.*  Linda A.  Virginia L.*
Echo F.  Lisa C.  Whitney G.
Erica H.  Margarita B.*  Yanee F.
Evelyn T.  Maria S.
Ryan C.  Marie G.*