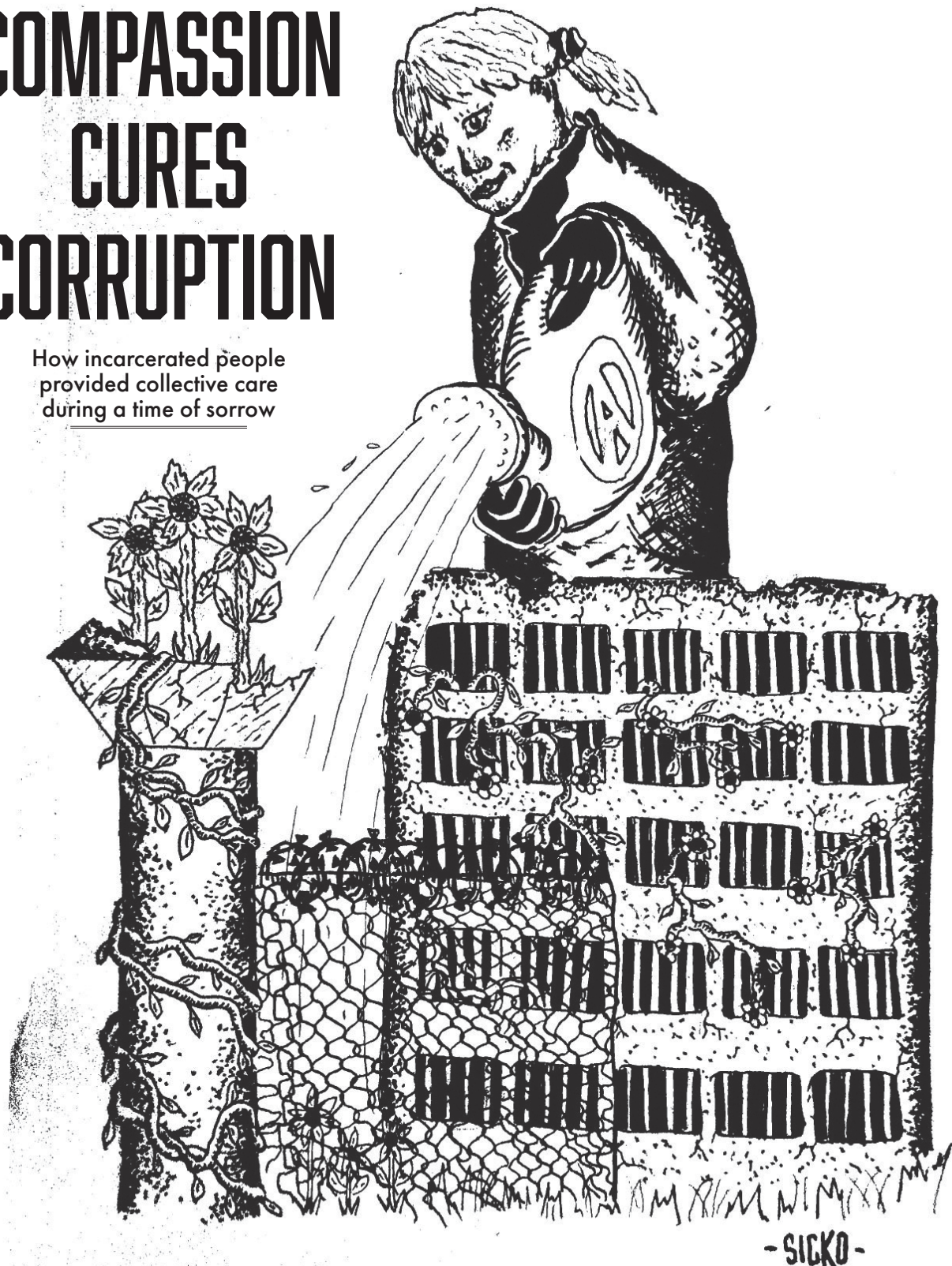


## COMPASSION CURES CORRUPTION

How incarcerated people provided collective care during a time of sorrow



Living in incarceration is a profound struggle; not solely for those incarcerated, but their loved ones alike. It is not infrequent that the all-pervasive milieu of these institutions people are forced to reside in is less than wholesome and nurturing. Therefore, finding kindness during such a time, in these rather predatory places, is even more-so uniquely challenging. However, this does not entirely dissuade genuine acts of compassion and empathy from transpiring in our societally sequestered islands of despair and suffering which often strip people of their most basic humanity and dignities.

There are undoubtedly countless stories about how people have given away tangible items in the hopes of bettering the experience of those around them and lessening the stress they are encountering. This will likely include supporting others by donating meals, commissary food, and other items of sustenance;

essential hygiene products such as deodorant, shampoo, and body wash; over the counter medications (i.e. cough drops, headache reliever, antacids, etc.). By no means should these gestures of kindness and generosity be discredited, invalidated, or ignored as being inconsequential or unimportant. These are deeply meaningful demonstrations of thoughtful compassion for those less fortunate and in a great time of need.

However, a truly significant display of sincere humanness was never more present than during September of 2024 when a young, athletic 23-year-old man — Malga Huran Yanga — unexpectedly passed away. His death was not only untimely, but entirely preventable! To provide some context: Yanga was an enthusiastic and irrefutably talented athlete who was a strong supporter of his community, establishing and investing in youth groups to provide opportunities. This man was not

merely a talented athlete, but also a kind and cordial person to everyone he encountered. There isn't a single person within the institution who will recount one unpleasant experience related to Yanga himself.

For quite some time, approximately ten days, Yanga had been back and forth to the health services department complaining about severe abdominal pain. In the final five days he was immobilized and unable to walk on his own. This required he remain in bed, transported throughout the facility in a wheelchair. He had lost color to his complexion, stopped eating, was vomiting blood, and clearly experiencing debilitating pain. This was the *beginning* of his fellow residents showing their concern and willingness to take care of another through mutual aid.

Ultimately, the health services department did nothing to see to his dire, emergent medical needs. At one point, an employ-

ee threatened Yanga, stating that if he came back to health services again he would receive a major report and be placed in restricted housing (the hole) for continuing to seek what was necessary medical intervention. The night Yanga was told not to come back to health services or he would be punished, he passed away while lying on the floor, his head in a filthy metal toilet, profusely vomiting. An overnight officer found him unresponsive in a puddle of his own blood. Turns out, Yanga likely succumbed to sepsis due to a burst appendix.

Naturally the housed population was shocked, saddened, and even irate. Nonetheless, there was never any talk or indication that violence was going to take place. There were no displays of rioting, violence, or disturbance directly resulting from Yanga's passing. Instead, those closest to him and the housed individ-

CARE, cont'd on back

### Court Report

## PUNITIVE PATTERNS

Observing racial discrimination in the local courtroom

There are as many ways to contribute to our community as there are people and there is a role in mutual aid work for all of us. Sharing resources like food/clothing/shelter/transportation and direct aid/crowdfunding efforts for community members in need are perhaps the best known activities of thriving mutual aid systems; but we all have different skill sets and different access to the resources that we seek to share.

Mutual aid can also be sitting in a courtroom bearing witness to and collecting data about the racial and socioeconomic disproportionality that exists in our local judicial systems.

Recently, a group of community members attended a court proceeding in support of a young Black man who was arrested at his high school in the Iowa City Community School District. The young person in question was involved in a physical altercation with another student one morning before school. A teacher and the school's principal intervened during the altercation and the student in question was put into a restraint hold by a teacher. When the student was released from the restraint, he had his arms extended and his hands made contact with the principal's chest. The principal chose to interpret this contact as a physical attack and called law enforcement resulting in the student being charged with assault.

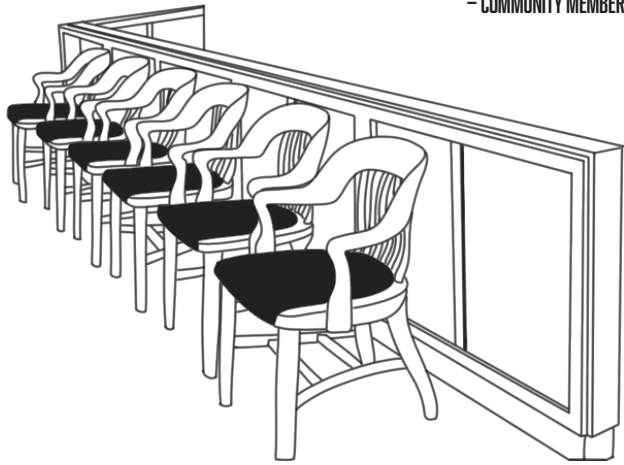
During the court proceedings, both the principal and the student described for the court the events that led up to law enforcement involvement. Although video of the incident was acknowledged to exist by both the student, the student's mother and the principal, no video was produced by the prosecution to show to the judge. Despite

this lack of physical evidence, the student was found guilty of a misdemeanor charge of assault.

The community members in the courtroom witnessed several other cases that same morning for a total of five cases including that of the student. Two white people had their cases dismissed by the judge. Three Black people (including the aforementioned student) were found guilty based on the witness testimony of law enforcement in cases that all lacked any physical evidence presented by prosecution.

The purpose of court watching is to generate data that will illuminate patterns in the court system and to signal to court officials that the public is paying attention to judicial practices. Legal experience is not a requirement to participate in court watching. The question of what happens with the data that is collected presents a creative challenge to court watchers. In the case of this student, one of the court watchers who has a family member at the same school has gone on to communicate with the school board and with city officials about the court proceedings and continues to ask questions about why there is such a heavy police presence at this particular school. A more immediate result of this court watching effort was the student and his family tangibly experiencing the support of the community while enduring a hostile and punitive system. In the spirit of continuing to build a robust court watching community that is multigenerational, multiracial, anti-racist, and abolitionist, please consider if this sort of work might be a fit for you and let Iowa City Mutual Aid know, by emailing [admin@icmutualaid.org](mailto:admin@icmutualaid.org), if you'd like to participate in future court watching.

- COMMUNITY MEMBER



CARE, cont'd

uals dedicated to reforming conditions of confinement set to finding a way to heal this deeply felt mutual pain from the untimely and avoidable passing of one of their own. This is when an act of compassion to cure the corruption manifested. After nearly a week of institution-wide lockdown – including no showers – action was taken by residents to have the facility hold a celebration of life ceremony. This was a nice gesture from the Newton Correctional Facility’s administration, but was by far not the most significant act of mutual aid. It was what the residents were doing independently, on their own, without prompting that was inspiring and instilled hope. There was more patience, humility, and empathy exuded from everyone, not just those closest to Yanga. Astoundingly, the entire population seemed to coalesce into one big amalgamation of group soothing and support.

People were offering words of support; others were offering assistance helping with the most basic daily responsibilities; still others provided any resources, contacts, or other clerical means of progress they had at their disposal. The most prolific came from the different religious groups and their members. Several of these, even those often with conflicting views or ideals, independently without collaboration spoke on the value of life and worked to bring together those feeling anger and at odds with the administration (they were viewed as at fault for Yanga’s preventable demise) or otherwise attempt to create some manner of calm.

However, the most vocal and heard statement that transpired from this was the complete silence from one particular religious gathering space – the Buddhist Saṅgha. They chose to hold a memorial at their weekly religious service following the lockdown. Instead of

speaking about anything, or giving some Dharma talk on the impermanence of our interconnected precious human existence, they merely posted a sign accompanied by inspirational quotes from venerated monks in the Buddhist culture. They spent their time that week sitting in absolute silent meditation reflecting and dedicating merit to all beings so they may find peace and healing in their time of grieving. All were welcomed, and many of those who attended had never done so before. It was an immeasurable act of cathartic empathy to provide mutual aid!

No one saw a “criminal”. No one cared about the nature of the crime that would place Yanga on the state’s registry. No one gave any consideration to the atrociously rapacious conditions surrounding them on a daily basis that leaves people devoid of identity and humaneness. Instead, the population only saw a person gone too soon that deserved to be loved and honored.

This act shows how: **Compassion Cures Corruption.**

– MISCHIEF MARX

Mischief Marx has been a core contributor to Iowa City Mutual Aid Monthly since its inception. Residing in central Iowa, Mischief holds a certification with honors from Blackstone in paralegal work and legal research; is an ordained Sramanera in Mahāyāna Buddhism; and an enthusiastically dedicated champion for his community. As an experienced peer advocate, Mischief’s selfless generosity and compassion is witnessed through his altruistic endeavors in community outreach working with marginalized and disenfranchised citizens, those struggling with addiction, abuse, and mental health, as well as access to essential needs, services, and housing. Mischief’s articulation and depth of writing demonstrates his sincerity in striving to tirelessly fight stigmatization, empower classes met with oppression, protect those facing hardship, and enrich the lives of all beings in his daily pursuits.

Poetry

## HEART BEATS

BY BOBBY MESSIER (PAWZ)

My heart beats to the sound of your name,  
For it knows our love is not a game,  
I follow my heart for I know that it's true,  
That you love me like I love you.

Take my hand and walk with me,  
Through our love, we'll be set free,  
As we walk to the place, where the heavens meet,  
Dancing to the music of our own heartbeat.

For what once was two now is one,  
For our love cannot be undone,  
Nor can it die, as we will someday do,  
For our love is pure and true.

You be my partner, and I'll be your man,  
Though our love, some could never understand,  
So hold my hand, and walk with me,  
For our love will last for eternity.

Mr. Bobby Messier is credited as one of the individuals responsible for the genesis of Iowa City Mutual Aid's Queer Prisoner Correspondance Program and its growing prolific expansion throughout the state of Iowa. With a trained passion in horticulture and independent pursuits in social justice, Bobby displays his thoughtful willingness to assist others in his contributions to the community around him through efforts to alleviate the challenges faced in the

day to day. Bobby, an ordained minister of spiritualism, offers not only the inspiration and vulnerable introspective insight of the human experience through his artistic prose and poetry, but also by way of having trained Leader Dogs for the visually impaired. His welcoming, communal approach and openness continues to calm and empower his fellow journeyers in a subtle, yet irrefutably powerful way. Bobby... a man of simple courage, yet complex strengths!

## A NOTE FROM ICMA

Iowa City needs to do better amidst the quick changing political landscape

There is no better time for active preventative measures from the city government to preserve the rights and protections of our community members. We cannot wait any longer, we are already behind. Community members are under attack and our city government seems to believe the best mode is inaction; wait to see what the state and federal government try to throw at us because we “don’t know exactly what they are going to do”. We do not need to know exactly what they are going to do and in many cases we already know. This is a tired playbook we have seen before.

In this rapidly changing political landscape it is imperative that the city take action now. The city must decide whether they want to protect the most vulnerable or work alongside the state and federal government to destroy the lives of people that are too often left behind.

There is no way to do both.

ICMA asserts that the vitriol and hate we are seeing in this country has no place in our community. The immigrants and trans people in Iowa City deserve to be celebrated. Immigrants and trans people are incredibly sacred and are necessary for the thriving community that is Iowa City. They show us that our lives are in our hands and we get to make the choices that shape who we are. Our most vulnerable neighbors work our farms, they are our nurses, our students, our artists — they are incredibly valuable in so many ways. Autonomy must be integral to our community. People in our community deserve access to the healthcare they choose without fear and limitations. They deserve to live here in peace.

We must stand in solidarity with all vulnerable populations and if the city chooses not to, they have no right to make decisions about our livelihood.



Donations support homeless people in Iowa City and queer incarcerated people in Iowa.

Are you an anti-capitalist? Do you believe in prison abolition? We want your contributions! Submit to [admin@ic-mutualaid.org](mailto:admin@ic-mutualaid.org).

## DECLASSIFIEDS

### COMMUNITY PROJECT OPEN HOURS

TUESDAYS 6-7:30PM | PS1 CLOSE HOUSE



### IOWA CITY COMMUNITY FRIDGE

Take what you need. Leave what you can.



### BECOME A FOOD DONOR!

The Fridge is looking for community partners to provide food for the fridge. This includes fresh produce and prepared meals.

LEARN MORE:



CONTACT US:



[iowacityfridge@proton.me](mailto:iowacityfridge@proton.me)



## AUTONOMY IOWA CITY

Supporting bodily autonomy, right here in Iowa.

Assistance getting abortion pills for a self-managed abortion or miscarriage

Assistance with out of state travel for abortion related medical care

Support and education for people choosing self-managed abortion

[autonomyiowacity.org](http://autonomyiowacity.org)

Have a mutual aid project you want to promote? Email an ad to [admin@icmutualaid.org](mailto:admin@icmutualaid.org). Ads are free of charge.

