

**SICK OF IT!**



**SICK  
OF IT!**  
VOLUME  
3

**A Disability Inside/Outside Project**

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**WE LOVE YOU, WE ARE THINKING ABOUT YOU.**

**Thank you for a great first year of this zine project!**

**Look out for a collaboration with our friends at In the Belly!**

This is the third volume of **Sick of It! A Disability Inside/Outside Project**. We are a group of abolitionists and disabled activists working to build connections between the free world disabled community and that behind bars. We aim with this project to amplify the voices of incarcerated disabled people, and provide education about the ways disabled liberation and a world free of cages are intertwined. More at **sickofit.space**

# POLITICAL EDUCATION: BOOK EXCERPTS

“Today, the argument that “prisons are the new asylums” is often used—not as a way to connect to movements that fought to close the old asylums—but instead as rationalization for the creation of new jail facilities (for “the good of” those with mental health differences) or of psychiatric wards within existing jails or prisons.

As many activists forewarn, these will likely increase the scope of incarceration. Because of the rising cost of construction and maintenance of carceral spaces, the corporate world and criminal justice and health care systems are now turning to various “alternatives” to incarceration and institutionalization. But, this turn signifies the increased privatization of penalty and health care— not the decline of segregation but its intensification through other means.”

- **From Liat Ben-Moshe, *Decarcerating Disability***



“Letting die is a stealthy violence that consigns large numbers of people to lead short and limited lives.”

- **From Jasbir Puar, *The Right to Maim***

- **What is biopolitics?** A management of ‘how’ we live and die—where categories of protectable life imply categories of ‘unprotectable’ life
- **Debility:** slow wearing down of people instead of the singular ‘event’ of become disabled.
- **Capacity:** formulations of health, agency, and choice that enable some bodies for productivity, wealth, and upward mobility
- **Disability:** Pushing against human rights discourses of disability as an identity that standardizes bodily “usefulness” vs “uselessness”. Categories of disabled and non-disabled shift historically, geographically, legally, etc.

# COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS

These are agreements collectively created with Sick of It! Pen Pals on the outside to be accomplices, friends, and comrades in this movement. This builds on agreements written by other political formations. We invite you to edit and add to this list. Consider how we will cultivate a community where we can uphold our agreements to each other.

- What do each of these agreements mean to you?
- What does it mean to uphold them?
- What do you need emotionally and mentally right now?

## **BE COMMITTED TO GROWING ABOLITIONIST POLITICS.**

The politics of this project is no prisons, no jails. Sick of It! explicitly approaches this work from the perspective of no forms of incarceration, including institutionalization and coercive care; detention and deportation; jails and prisons; and e-carceration and aims to grow this analysis. The relationships of care built through this project are inherently political, and we reject a paternalistic approach to care work.

**BRING IN YOUR HISTORIES** and speak from your own experience. We all come to this gathering with different lived and embodied experiences and knowledges. As Sick of It collaborators, we maintain that everyone is the author of their own experience, and we prioritize our inside pen pals' explanation of their own experiences.

**BE OPEN TO LEARNING.** Ask questions and be curious and humble. This is a space to speculate and imagine together. In our open-ness to learn from each other, this also means taking responsibility for ourselves and each other as we learn to account for harm and make genuine apologies.

**BE COMMITTED TO EACH OTHER'S COLLECTIVE LEARNING AND GROWING.**

Everyone has something to contribute to this space. While no one knows everything, together we know a lot! Be generous, empathetic, and kind with each other. Make room for each person's feelings and perspectives while also understanding we are differently enmeshed in systems of power. We embrace imperfect language and stumble through ideas, because we can't be articulate all the time.

**PRIORITIZE CARE FOR OURSELVES AND EACH OTHER.**

Sick of It is a remote pen pal program, but in our relationships with those inside and each other, we strive to be honest about our own capacity. We embody care through our commitment to consistent communication, clear boundaries, and anti-urgent labor. We understand that time is different for people who are disabled and/or incarcerated, and that we all operate on different timelines when it comes to correspondence, administration, and relationship building.

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*Our work is informed by and aspires towards the 10 Principles of Disability Justice from Sins Invalid: intersectionality, leadership of the most impacted, anti-capitalist politic, recognizing wholeness, sustainability, commitment to cross disability solidarity, interdependence, collective access, collective liberation. We see these principles as tools for approaching our community building and political education project.*



# ON MENTAL HEALTH AND DECARCERATION

By Mon Mohapatra

Across the U.S., mental health has become an excuse for expanding jail construction and investing in police. Politicians have begun to use mental health and psychiatric support as a cover for hiring social workers who cooperate with cops and building new facilities that are no better than old ones. Instead of recognizing that you can't get well in a cell, efforts to build jails as "new asylums" carry on the longstanding tradition of psychiatric facilities as carceral (aka prisonlike) spaces.

In New Orleans, a proposed 89-bed facility was intended to provide a space for people in custody with mental health needs, currently already being held at a state prison but activists have demanded that the city put the funds towards developing mental healthcare outside of jail.

In Orange County, California, a plan to add hundreds more mental health beds at an Orange County jail received intense pushback as residents of the county argued that the OC jail should not become the primary provider of mental healthcare. In New York City, the borough based jails plan proposes to replace the notoriously awful Rikers Island Jails system with jails that feature "better design" meant to improve mental health.

Some history: In the 1950s, after a period known as "deinstitutionalization," where many mental health hospitals and facilities closed (which themselves were violent and harmful places too), counties were left with a shortage of treatment and care facilities for people with mental health needs. At the same time, the country was continuing to criminalize disabled people at large through laws which impoverished them, through racism and ableism in the healthcare system, through police brutality aimed at those with disabilities, and through cultural norms that portrayed disabled people as violent and harmful.

In addition to these trends of criminalization, the country underwent a jail boom where the numbers of people with mental health needs continued to grow. Predictably, violent jails and poorly maintained facilities did not provide people with the care they needed. Despite this, localities began to so-called “invest” in healthcare within jails, and funnel even more funds to bloated corrections budgets.

The Prison Policy Initiative estimates 44% of all those in local jails have been diagnosed with mental illness and 37% of all those in federal jails. We know the numbers are higher than this because of how intrinsic ableism and lack of thorough reporting obscures the truth. In Cook County, Illinois, the Health and Hospitals System spent nearly \$100 million providing jail health care in fiscal year 2016—more than seven times what the county spent on traditional public health services.

The recent trend of “mental health jails” follows in this legacy of carceral expansion, where funds are directed towards incarceration, institutionalization, and caging under the pretense of “healthcare.” Cities claim to be responding to the demands of incarcerated people and communities for better healthcare for incarcerated people, while actually sidestepping the root causes.

Jails and prisons are some of the largest providers of “healthcare” in the US, and still, thousands die in these facilities every year. With local and county jails, the driving force behind high incarceration numbers is pre-trial detention, meaning people incarcerated without being convicted of a crime. Together, these paint a picture of how the Prison Industrial Complex hopes to sustain itself: through continuing to be a leading provider of subpar mental healthcare for millions of people who should be free instead.

Every single day, there is news of mistreatment within jails, detention centers, and psychiatric institutions. Those with serious mental health needs are considered to have behavioral problems. From the school to the cell, Black and queer people in particular are seen as needing to be coerced into care, with no sense of autonomy or trauma-informed need.



Now for some good news. The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors voted in 2019 to cancel a nearly \$2 billion contract to build a mental health-focused jail. Instead of investing in mental health jails, abolitionists have argued cities should invest in free healthcare programs which support disabled communities, particularly Black, undocumented, trans people, before interactions with the police. Instead of involving police in crisis intervention, people are designing new community-based ways to respond to mental health crises.

Many groups are fighting for better implementation of community alternatives which direct people away from jails, and which place them in non-carceral, non-coercive care programs such as harm reduction, housing, and resident care programs. As an abolitionist project, we believe that there are many models yet to be created and explored for mental health care that centers disabled survivors, and does not involve policing or incarceration. We see the trend of mental health jails as opportunism: contractors, cities, companies, and capitalists using the real healthcare needs of incarcerated people to entrench mass incarceration, and we oppose it.



## Submissions from our Community

**PAIN**

by **Steven Levy**

*CW: medical abuse & neglect, withholding care*

Now I could write 1,000 different stories about pain but today I must address the constant, chronic pain I endure each and every day. I will address other pain issues in later issues. I was born with a bad case of scoliosis in my now broken 52 years old spine. Now being a prison inmate here in California Department of Correction and Rehabilitation I had an exhaustive back x-ray done in 2010.

The doctor said "damn" and told me to turn around.



He swivelled the computer screen around so I could see the picture. My spine looks like an "S" on top of another "S".

He asked "are you in pain?"

I responded: "Yes, constant chronic pain."

Now I jump to 2017 or 2018, I am now a prison inmate here at Mule Creek State Prison. I went to see my doctor.

I said: "Doctor my back pain is killing me!"

He responded: "Mr. Levy you have degenerative disk disorder where your neck meets your shoulder."

My response: "Doctor can you fix it?"

His response: Mr. Levy we will not fix your spine until you are in complete paralysis and unable to work or move freely."

I responded: "But doctor I live in constant chronic pain and the Ibuprofen and acetaminophen do not help, I can't sleep at night because of the pain. "

Doctor's response: "I don't care, you can leave."

I responded while walking towards the door, "I wish I had a real doctor, not you" and left.

Now I must say I am very, very good at writing medical formal complaints against staff, but here at Mule Creek State Prison, the cops tear up and constantly search cells of people who write complaints of any kind.

I am stuck between a rock and a hard place,

1. Write a boz and get my cell constantly searched
2. Endure the pain until I parole and fix my spine on the streets
3. Hang myself for 3 to 10 seconds of no pain as the vertebra disks pull apart.

I have no choice but to pray I go home in 2023 so I can get my neck fixed. A note and warning to anyone who could end up in prison. Mule Creek State Prison is where high risk medical patients come to die. Medical staff strips away all your medical devices when you arrive then you have to fight to get it all back.

# ***AN INTRODUCTION***

**By David Annarelli**

*Edited and excerpted for length.*

My name is David Annarelli. I am 46, a father, musician and activist. I've experienced a number of disabilities—super powers—but specifically madness & monocular blindness. The madness presents as the following; bipolar, ADHD, major depressive disorder, anxiety disorder, personality borderlines, paranoia & PTSD. These were first diagnosed at the age of 6, I managed them without medications & currently still do.

In 2011, I experienced "at least a major traumatic brain injury" (neurotrauma specialist's words) & I am led to understand there could be further damage, as of yet unknown, due to, specifically, the VA DOC refusing to provide medical treatment; but more on that later. The monocular blindness is my left eye, & essentially, all I see is a blur of shapes and color swatches without any discernible form or details.

As I mentioned a few sentences back, I am "incarcerated" or more correctly stated, held captive. I am at the Pocahontas State Correctional Center, one of Virginia's worst, of 41, state prisons. I was arrested 4.5 years ago when, during a mental health crisis, my son, concerned for my well being called the police, of course, you know the rest of the story. Untrained to handle—or even identify a mental health crisis, police arrived & acted in a manner not becoming of an officer. They ignored protocol, procedure, constitutional rights & made the situation go from bad to worse. I was arrested for malicious wounding of a law enforcement officer and it's likely that the only reason I survived at all is because I'm white.

At no time have my disabilities been taken into consideration. In fact, the above mentioned neuro-trauma specialist, who has 20 years experience in TBI's & mental health, was told by the sentencing judge while testifying on the stand "you don't know what you're talking about, I know mental health!"

Welcome to the rogue state of Virginia. That event occurred two hours south of Charlottesville, two days after Virginia born-and-raised nazis marched with torches & pitchforks through that merry town, eventually killing one person. I had no criminal record at 40 years old. No history of violence. A documented history of mental health that included a special education school & hospitalization in my teens & a documented TBI. This was 2016, years after the NFL changed its rules regarding concussion safety. A year after the movie Concussion starring Will Smith. A full 20 years after the National Institute of Health (NIH) acknowledged the importance of recognizing head trauma and its links to altered behavior leading to criminality.

My crime called for 2-4 years, before considering all the above mentioned mitigating evidence, all of which calls for a reduced sentence, even avoiding prison where alternatives certainly exist...I was sentenced to 20 years. 15 to serve and 5 years of supervised probation.

As I mentioned, to date, the VA DOC has ignored the recommendations of the aforementioned neuro-trauma specialist, who has, in a sworn affidavit, recommended a further full examination to determine just how bad the injury (TBI) was. He did suggest that there could be axon disruption and destruction, the literal tearing of brain tissue. The VA DOC, being made aware of this from the beginning has several times wanted to medicate me—without getting a proper diagnosis.

For the record, my father, a pharmacist, recently retired after some 46 years. Mom is a phlebotomist and is still working as an admin for a blood lab-processing cover tests. So, I have a marginally better grasp of medicine than say, for instance, EVERY person on the medical staff here, most of whom I would question the validity of their certifications, if nay, Having grown up and witnessed medical professionals my entire life, I can honestly say, PSCC does not have any employed in their medical unit. I currently have a pending litigation regarding the deliberate indifference to my medical needs.

There are a lot of topics in this introduction. A number of mental health diagnoses. A major Traumatic Brain Injury. The ignoring of both of these by the criminal justice system. The ignoring of both and more by the DOC Litigation against the DOC for ignoring those disabilities, -422 section 1983 action for deliberate medical indifference.

My Monocular Blindness, which certainly makes prison more dangerous, ut is NOT total blindness. The lack of police training-or even simple awareness-of people who are disabled in a myriad of ways that do not allow for a one size fits all response ( aka shoot to kill, worry later protected by the police unions). There is also the grossly compounded trauma created by being run through the sausage grinder we call the system. System being both a misnomer and a euphemism for nothing good.

There are so many nuances to each of these topics. Things so subtle that most humans fail to see them, not out of a lack of empathy, but from a lack of personal experience. It would almost be easier if it was just a bunch of sociopaths with no empathy, who derive pleasure from the suffering of others. But it isn't. Those are the police and prison guards.

But, education, the rest of the population does help solve the problem. "We the people..." are a lot more than the opening three words of the declaration of independence. They have to be. So I am going to write out my experiences on the above disabilities (super powers). I will try to do so in a way that draws in the people who do NOT share these experiences, by finding some shared analogy. Understanding is best achieved through shared experiences. So we make the political, perusal.

***Survival is a form of resistance! Abolish Prisons Now!***

*David Annarelli is a Father, musician, activist and contributing whiter to the Prison Journalism Project. He is being held captive illegally after being the victim of police in his own home, during a mental health crisis.*

# ***SLOW DOWN AND LOVE SOMEONE***

**By Jeffrey Prager**

Today I want to talk to you about making the people that you love feel as loved as you say. You never know what someone is going through mentally or how long they may still be around.

My name is Jeffrey Prager, 30, and I'm currently at a psychiatric prison facility in east Texas. Suicidal thoughts get me here. What triggered them? In the next few paragraphs I'm going to give you a brief depiction of my life and explain why it is important to "slow down and love someone".

I grew up with a pedophile father who was very abusive mentally, physically and sexually. At a young age I was beaten, molested, locked in a closet, forced to eat dog food, forced to stand and kneel on rice till my feet and knees bled. I was bullied by both my brothers and sisters.

After a few suicide attempts, I felt enough was enough and ran away. I was 14 years old. This is when my life of crime and drugs started. I used alcohol, weed, pills, heroin and meth to help me cope with the long time effects of the abuse I endured. To pay for the drugs I burglarized, stole and robbed. I was 19 when I went to prison for the first time.

When I was released from a 18 month bid on a 3 year sentence I decided to get my life on track. I landed me a job, made a friend and met a beautiful woman I had a beautiful daughter with. I was mentally in heaven. That is until I came home from work one night to find my best friend in bed with my fiance. I was so crushed I went back to drugs. The drugs led me to lose my job and back to the life of crime until I went to prison again. When I was released I decided to give the right path a chance again for my daughter. I got me a job, car, place to stay and met another beautiful woman. Life was good. I fathered a second daughter in 2016. I thought everything was perfect till I found my now ex in bed with a stranger. I was DESTROYED and back on the path of drugs and crime.

I am now serving a 15 year sentence for robbery. It's been a very hard sentence because I lost my mom to suicide. Both sets of grandparents found out my youngest daughter wasn't mine and 12 weeks ago I received the news that my only biological child passed away because of Covid- 19.

Although I feel defeated I was strong enough to ask for help. There is not a day that goes by that I don't think about suicide. Someone out there, please help me. If you have dealt with the loss of a child and gotten over it, please write me so I can get through this battle.

Also, if you love someone with your whole heart please show them so because you never know what they are going through. Not everybody is strong enough to ask for help. Slow down and love someone.

*Jeffrey is looking forward to feedback and can be reached at:*  
Jeffrey Prager 2060601  
379 FM 2972 W. Rusk, Texas 75785

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# **A WORLD WITHOUT PRISONS**

**by Hakim Trent**

The question that was brought to mind is how can we build a world without prisons/ I believe in order to genuinely do so we must first look at what is the true definition of prison? What does the prison stand for, or the purpose of its existence? What defines prison to many is a place of confinement, entrapment, slavery, despair, agony and the loss of freedom etc...

But if we really look close at what a prison is we will see that what actually makes a prison is much more than a wall, fence, guards and bars. As the powerful quote states: "A wall is just a wall it can be knocked down" what makes a prison live up to its true definition is the mental enslavement of the mind.

"Disability is a wide variety of things" - I believe that the biggest disability that one can have is not being able to have control over how one thinks. The freedom of thought is freedom in its purest form because it allows us to have the ability to express and vocalize our inner self unapologetically.

Colonialism and imperialism are two of the tools that are used to disable or should I say "trap" the minds. Because the objective is to control how we think.

The prison system agenda today is the same agenda from the past: when the first physical prison was established, this agenda was based off of the ability to control how the masses think because the process of mental slavery was developed. I stand firm with the abolishment of each physical prison in the world that holds the masses hostage. Because this practice of caging the masses is



a cruel and savage practice passed down by the power structures. We must first look within ourselves and knockdown the wall that treaps us mentally. We must ask ourselves what are the vices and facilities that enslaves us? Could it be attachments to physical things in the sense of materialism or material gain? What steps are needed to unlock these chains?

A mouse trap is placed inside a location so that the mouse can be captured and done away with. The hunter places a treat, which is usually cheese on top of the mouse trap, hoping that the mouse would come along and reach for that cheese and then destroy themselves. This is what the builders of the prison industrial complex anticipates when it comes to placing the masses inside of a prison. The mouse or mice has the whole world to search for food but this one particular mouse decided to search for the cheese on top of the trap. The mouse found himself literally inside. "The trap house! The mouse imprisoned himself! The poor mouse didn't see what was in store for him or herself by taking that cheese.

But let's turn the tables a little bit. Let's imagine this same mouse educated. And when I say educated, I mean aware of the traps that are hidden and meant to destroy us. This mouse knows what they're up against. They know that they are prey being trapped and hunted and being punished for simply trying to live!

A world without prisons is a world that offers education universally; by any means and free of cost. The price of education is commitment sprinkled with dedication and ambition. A world without prisons is freedom of the mind, when we can envision a clear picture drawn up in our minds of uniting the entire planet under and above the virtues of love, truth, peace, freedom, and justice. This is a world without prisons.

# WELLNESS RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE INSIDE (MIND & MEDITATION)

**Adapted from the Wellness Zine by the Chicago Torture Justice Center (CTJC)**

This guide is meant to help you do what you can do to take care of yourself while in prison. This guide focuses on some practical tools you can use. Not all the activities will apply to you so take what is useful and forget the rest! Wellness can be difficult in prison; there is a lot out of your control right now. You have been through a lot and you are surviving. Meditation and mindfulness help you to take your body and brain back from systems of oppression. This section will give you some techniques to focus your mind.

**Meditation:** Meditation is a practice that allows the mind to notice what is. Find a time when you have some time to yourself without feeling too vulnerable. Start by sitting or lying down and allow yourself to become still, relaxed, and alert. Close your eyes or rest them gently on one spot. Try to focus your attention on one simple thing (which we call an 'anchor'). It can be anything, but two good places to start if you are new to meditation are either focusing on your breathing or on a word or phrase (called a mantra) that you repeat over and over to yourself during your meditation.

**Fill in your mantra here:**

*Some examples could be 'I am loved,, or "I am enough..."*

As you meditate, your mind will wander, and that's okay! Try to allow these thoughts to pass by, like clouds floating away. Your only job when you practice meditation is to bring your attention back when you notice that it strayed from your anchor. For many people, anxiety or difficult memories or feelings come up when they meditate. Meditation doesn't always make you feel relaxed- just more aware. Try to simply observe what happens in your mind and body rather than fight it. If meditating does relax you, great! But don't get too caught up in 'doing it right'.

## Ways to tap the brakes when meditation gets intense

- Shorter practice periods
- Try a soothing form of touch, like your hand on your heart
- Open your eyes to help you stay in touch with what is happening around you
- Take breaks in the middle to walk or stretch
- Take a few slow, deep breaths down to your belly

**Mindfulness:** Mindfulness isn't a specific thing you do. Instead, it's how you do something. Plan a task you can do mindfully today, like washing a dish or walking down a certain hall. Notice the texture of the dish and temperature of the water. What sounds or smells do you notice? Focus all your attention and care on what is happening right then. You may find that your mind has wandered to the past or future or judgements about how 'well' you are doing. When you notice this, gently bring your focus back to the present. You can choose any task to do mindfully, from noticing each footstep to feeling the textures as you make your bed. Try doing one task every day mindfully to live on purpose rather than going through the motions.

**Reflecting:** If your thoughts seem very fast or scattered, it can help to describe facts about your day to yourself. Include small things that you did and give yourself credit for all the work you put into surviving the day. (Today I woke up. I opened my eyes, and I got out of my bed. I made my bed. I washed my hands and splashed water on my face, etc.). This kind of detailed description can help remind you of the many things you have power and control over, even when so much is out of your control in prison. Those are choices you make to take care of yourself, and you deserve credit for them! Writing a list may help you feel more grounded and slow down your thoughts.



# **SUBMISSIONS:**

**Thank you for your interest in submitting to Sick of It!  
Here our our submission guidelines:**

## **How to Send Us Your Work:**

Please mail works to:

Matilda Sabal c/o Sick of It!

PO Box 180177

Brooklyn NY 11218

*You can also submit via JPay or email if we have been in touch there.*

**Types of work accepted:** We accept all forms of writing and artwork, including poems, creative and nonfiction essays, and visual art. We are most interested in works focused on disability, healthcare, strategies for self care inside, and messages of resistance. Each zine also includes a set of prompts to help you create your work.

Please limit submissions to around 3 pages typed or 5 pages hand-written. For art, please limit your submission to 1-3 unique works.

**Response Time:** Due to the volume of submissions we receive, we cannot respond to all individual submissions. If your work is not chosen for publication in the upcoming issue we will keep it for potential inclusion in future issues, as well as for the project's archives. Even if we do not respond, we read every single letter!

**Re-printing:** In collaboration with other zines, networks, collectives, we sometimes like to forward on pieces of writing for re-printing. If you would like to authorize re-printing of your work, please tear the below and mail it in with your letter to give us permission or write down in your next letter which ones you agree to.

## **-----RE-PRINTING PERMISSIONS-----**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (name) \_\_\_\_\_, authorize Sick of It! To reprint my work in the following places:

\_\_\_ physically in Sick of It's zines

\_\_\_ physically in other political and abolitionist publications

\_\_\_ digitally on Sick of It's website and social media

\_\_\_ digitally in other political & abolitionist websites & social media

Would you like to be anonymous? Y/N

If you would like to be credited, what name should we use?

# **PEN PAL SIGN-UP**

To sign up for a penpal, please send us the following info!  
(Please write clearly and print, not cursive, if you can!)

## **SEND:**

Legal First Name, Legal Last Name

#Number (eg. Jamie Smith #F05B56)

Cell/Bunk Location (if given after the number, eg. B1 Lower)

Facility Name (eg. Michael Unit or Arrendale SP or SCI Greene)

PO Box #

City, State Zip

## **TO:**

Matilda Sabal c/o Sick of It!

PO Box 180177

Brooklyn NY 11218

You can also send us the following info to help us match you with someone! We will try our best to meet requests. Please note that the focus of our project is on building political solidarity and friendships. We do not accommodate romantic or sexual letters.

## **For your penpal, do you have a preferred:**

- Age? Gender? Race? LGBTQ?
- Do you have any specific interests or things you would like to talk about ?
- Do you have any access needs? Do you need things to be typed, or written in a larger size?
- Do you prefer to use Jpay or another form of email?

