

# CCV Year-End News 2009

December 28, 2009

## Highlights from 2009: A Year of Action

### Special points of interest:

- Aqeela Sherrills joins CCV's Staff
- MVFR and CCV Release Not in Our Name: Murder Victims' Families Speak Out Against the Death Penalty

With the new year upon us, there's much anticipation and excitement for what's to come. In 2009, it became clear that the tide is changing and people are ready for change. Support for the death penalty is dwindling in California and across the country and the voices of murder victim family members are stronger than ever. Let's look back at this year's successes!

On June 30, 2009, The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilita-



Mary Kay Raftery testifies at the lethal injection hearing on June 30, 2009

tions (CDCR) invited the public to comment on the lethal injection procedures used by the prison system to kill those who have been condemned to death.

Hundreds of individuals, including many CCV members, gathered in Sacramento to offer impassioned and often intensely personal testimony about why they believe the time has come to end

California's death penalty system. Hundreds more sent in written comments.

**"I was once a strong supporter of the death penalty until I realized how that fervent support was adversely affecting my physical health. The harboring of negative emotions eats away at all aspects of a person's life."** - Loretta Carrico-Russell whose two sisters were murdered by their husbands

Californians will soon hear back from the CDCR in response to each individual's personal testimony. CCV would like to warmly thank each of you who took the trip to Sacramento to be part of this day of action and to those of you who submit written comments.

On October 26, 2009, CCV held a great panel discussion at Berkeley Law School. "The Role of Victims in the Criminal Justice System: Death Penalty and Domestic Violence Cases," featured clips from the documentary *Love Lived on Death Row* with CCV Outreach Coordinator Judy Kerr and Domestic Violence Law Professor Nancy Lemon as panelists.

Also in October, CCV presented another successful panel at the Centerforce Annual Summit. The panel included Denise Taylor, murder victim family member who has reconciled with her brother's killer, Judy Kerr, murder vic-

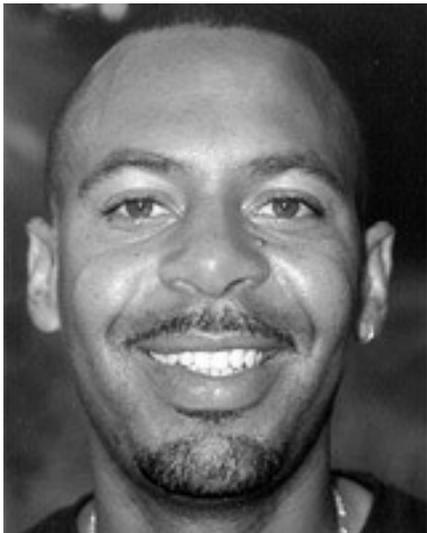
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# Meet CCV's New Outreach Coordinator for Southern California: Aqeela Sherrills

Profile from *“Not in Our Name California: Murder Victims Families Speak Out Against the Death Penalty”*



I grew up in Watts in South-Central Los Angeles, an epicenter of gang violence. Each of the 10,000 victims of gang violence in Los Angeles County over the past 20 years was somebody's daughter or son crying out for help.

After seeing 13 friends killed in gang wars, I was inspired to bring the warring factions, the Crips and Bloods, together and end the violence. We were able to create a peace treaty between the gangs in 1992, which has sustained for over ten years—not

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tim family member whose brother's murder remains unsolved, and Susan Swope, co-chair of the Restorative Justice Committee at the Society of St. Vincent de Paul of San Mateo County.



Susan Swope, Denise Taylor, and Judy Kerr present a panel on Restorative Justice at this year's Centerforce Annual Summit.

While prosecutors and district attorneys across the state continue to pursue extraordinarily

costly death penalty cases, it is becoming clear that the death penalty is too costly and broken beyond reasonable expectation of repair. We already spend

without problems and challenges, however.

For the past 16 years I've continued working for peace. I believe that where the wounds are, the gift lies. But in January 2004, this belief was seriously tested when my 18-year-old son, Terrell, was murdered. He was an unbelievable kid and after losing him, I thought, "What is the gift in this?"

The young man who killed my son wasn't caught, but we know who he is through the street network. I had the opportunity to retaliate, but I decided that revenge shouldn't be Terrell's legacy. Instead I spoke to the community about why revenge doesn't work. Terrell's killer is a victim too – a victim of a culture that lacks compassion.

You can only kill someone if you have a callous heart; I want to know why this young man had such a callous heart. It's not enough simply to catch him and throw him away or catch him and execute him. We need to communicate with these individuals and touch their hearts, helping each one find their

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millions more on a dysfunctional death penalty than we would

on permanent imprisonment; to fix the broken system would cost yet again millions more.

The voices of the survivors of homicides are growing stronger and more diverse. And when we do pause to consider this barbaric response to violence called capital punishment, we should stop and listen long enough to hear the mothers, and sons, and sisters, and brothers of the thousands of individuals who have been murdered on the streets of our cities crying out in courtrooms saying that the death penalty does not serve their needs. That they just want the killer of their loved ones punished.....that's all.

***“My parents did not believe in the death penalty and I think it is wrong to use it in their names.”*** - 21-year-old Eric Rogers whose parents were brutally slain by his mother's brother.

# Successes Around the Country

By Beth Wood

At one of the New Jersey study commission hearings in 2007, Barry Scheck of the Innocence Project opined that the science of DNA had ushered in an era of questioning the way that things were done. The same shift is occurring with family members of homicide victims. In the past, the loved ones of murder victims have found that other people try to speak for them. My dear friend Aba Gayle often talks of how after her beautiful Catherine was murdered; she was patted on the back and told what she needed and how she would feel better. However, she found that she DID NOT feel better. The death penalty solved nothing for her and its process was adding pain for her. Family members across the nation are not only calling for an end to the death penalty, but also asking that the process focus on the victims' family members and their needs. I commend all of you who have, despite the heartbreaking loss of a loved one due to violence, spoken out and let policy makers know your needs.

Across the country, you've been joined by family members of homicide victims who:

- Played an integral role in the drive that repealed the death penalty in New Mexico

- Participated in a campaign that passed the Racial Justice Act in North Carolina
- Helped pass legislation in New Hampshire that outlawed discrimination against family members who advocate against the death penalty
- Encouraged Ohio's governor to respect the wishes of Jeffrey Hill's family that he not be executed for the murder of his mother. When Gov. Ted Strickland commuted Hill's sentence to life, he cited the family's objections, saying they had suffered enough.
- Called for a removal of an amendment to add the death penalty to the Matthew Sheppard Hate Crimes Act. The amendment was removed and the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act passed on October 22, 2009, and was signed into law by President Barack Obama on October 28, 2009
- Opposed a new lethal injection protocol in California

Let's ride this wave of change by continuing to raise our voices for violence prevention, an end to the death penalty and appropriate, needed services for family members in the wake of homicide.

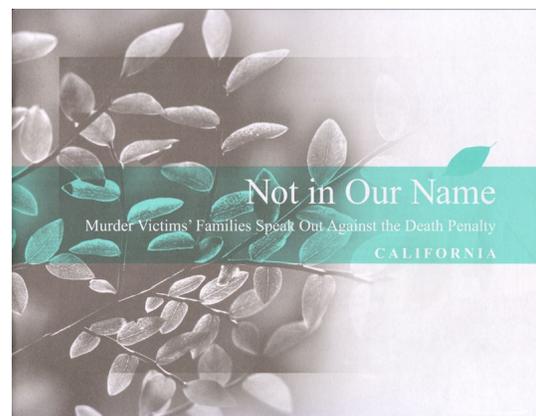
*Beth Wood is Interim Executive Director of Murder Victims' Families for Reconciliation.*

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own humanity and see that violence is not the answer. It's about igniting a conversation about life—what makes people happy or sad; what they fear; what things they can change in the neighborhood. We must be motivated by love for the human being. It's about reverence for human life and spirit.

We have redefined what peace is and what it looks like in this community. Peace is not this utopian idea of dashing through a field of dandelions; it's hard work. The key is that individuals consistently come back to resolve their conflicts and take the next few steps towards peace.

My work is truly an extension of me. As I resolve the wounds in my own life, I'm able to see more of what I need to do in the community I live in and love.



"*Not in Our Name*" was produced in 2009 by Murder Victims' Families for Reconciliation and California Crime Victims for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (CCV). To read more stories from "*Not in Our Name*" visit: [www.californiacrimevictims.org](http://www.californiacrimevictims.org) or [www.mvfr.org](http://www.mvfr.org).

**CALIFORNIA CRIME VICTIMS FOR  
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california  
**Crime Victims**  
for **Alternatives**  
to the Death Penalty

*[www.CaliforniaCrimeVictims.org](http://www.CaliforniaCrimeVictims.org)*

California Crime Victims for Alternatives to the Death Penalty is a coalition of families, friends, and loved ones of murder victims who oppose the death penalty. The coalition supports families, friends, and loved ones in telling their stories and being heard. CCV educates the public about alternatives to the death penalty and provides information, resources, and support to families regardless of their views on the death penalty or whether the perpetrator has been apprehended.

CCV is a joint project of Murder Victims' Families for Reconciliation, Death Penalty Focus, and the ACLU of Northern California.

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## Upcoming Events and Ways to Get Involved

### Alameda County Coalition for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (ACCADP)

ACCADP is working to end the use of the death penalty in Alameda County, one of the most aggressive death penalty counties in California. To learn more, **please attend and ACCADP meeting, held the first Thursday of each month, 5:30—7:30pm at 1000 Broadway, 5th Floor in Downtown Oakland or visit the website:**  
**[www.alamedadeathpenalty.org](http://www.alamedadeathpenalty.org).**

### Los Angeles County Coalition for Death Penalty Alternatives (LACCDPA)

LACCDPA is a coalition of organizations focused on reducing death sentencing in Los Angeles County and ending the death penalty in California. If you are interested in joining the fight, **please attend and LACCDPA meeting, held on the 2nd Wednesday of each month, 6-8pm at the ACLU of Southern California, 1313 West Eighth St. in Los Angeles or visit the website:**  
**[www.enddeathpenaltyla.org](http://www.enddeathpenaltyla.org).**

### January 14-17, 2010 - Louisville, KY National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty 2010 Annual Conference -- Building Bridges to Wider Audiences

Where:  
The Seelbach Hilton Louisville Hotel  
500 Fourth Street  
Louisville, KY 40202-2518

Please visit the conference website for full details and to register:  
**<http://www.ncadp.org/events.cfm?event=1003>**

### CCV Staff Changes

As of January 2010, CCV Program Coordinator Aarti Kelapure will be available in the office M-F, 9am-5pm. We'd also like to extend a very special welcome to our new Outreach Coordinator for Southern California Aqeela Sherrills.