

Event in Bern, Heiliggeistkirche, October 17th 2018
“Hart, härter, Todesstrafe” – see separate flyer.

I was invited to lead a discussion about the United States death penalty in Bern. It was a well-attended event with representatives from other NGOs present.

I have worked as a mitigation specialist – an investigator in death penalty cases whose job it is to gather information about the defendant – since 2004. I began this work in Texas. Now I live in Baltimore, Maryland. I opened my own NGO in 2014 to grow the field of investigators doing this work and to support defense teams who have death penalty cases. My office also works on cases where we have child clients who have received or are eligible for life without parole sentences.

I was invited to Bern by a dear friend, Sophie Berger. She has been writing to a client of mine for 18 years. She met this person through lifespark.org and has been a source of stability and support for him all of this time. The first time I met Sophie was in Texas and over the years we have stayed in touch. The connection and communication she has with my client is a gift for him and for me. It is a way to know that he is communicating with someone who will be a stable presence. She has become his family.

The discussion in Bern was incredible. I was moved by how eager the audience was to discuss the complications of the American death penalty system. People were curious about how race and poverty impact chances of someone ending up on death row. They had questions about the quality of attorneys given to those who face capital punishment. They wanted to know what they could do to support people who have been condemned.

Support takes a lot of forms, but becoming a lifespark pen-pal is one way. Another way is to consider supporting our life-saving work by making a donation to ARC Advancing Real Change. More information can be found on the Internet at <http://www.advancechange.org/>.

Elizabeth Vartkessian
Founder and Executive Director of ARC
October 30th 2018