

## ***The Community Speaks***

The May 2015 issue of *Wired* contains a small article about how Facebook is now sharing its security code “with everybody and anybody,” so other code developers and even people who aren’t security experts can help Facebook find and fix any weaknesses in its security code. “It’s no longer sustainable for security teams to live in their walled gardens and keep all their information to themselves’... Sharing, it’s the new security.” And Facebook isn’t doing anything new here. The technology world has long embraced a concept called open source, in which inventors, developers, etc. post all the details of their creations online for anyone to use and build on. This is an early example of the sharing economy that has become so dominant and revolutionary in America. People everywhere are sharing their knowledge, free time, patented property, cars, and even

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## **How You Can Help**

*The Community* is 100% community-funded (see p. 11 about donations). All funding is currently used to maintain a P.O. box (\$60/yr) and cover printing and postage costs on as many issues as we can afford for those on our mailing list. Because it’s not a guarantee we’ll have enough money to mail copies of each issue to everyone on our mailing list, **many incarcerated readers will have to ask a friend/family member to print them a copy from [thecommunitywis.wix.com/home](http://thecommunitywis.wix.com/home)**. Every \$50 we receive will allow us to send copies to 60-75 additional incarcerated readers.

**It is important that incarcerated readers share their copies with as many people as possible** at their respective facilities. If you are absolutely unable to obtain copies any other way, write to us to be put on our mailing list for when we have the funds to send out more copies. However, we can also use help with various clerical and investigative duties, such as typing up submissions, printing material, and researching stories. If you or someone you know is willing to help in this regard, please tell them to e-mail [thecommunitywis@gmail.com](mailto:thecommunitywis@gmail.com), or write us: The Community, P.O. Box 100392, Milwaukee WI 53210

If you are on our mailing list, please inform us immediately if you become able to obtain copies another way, are moved to another facility, or are scheduled to be released soon. And if you are ever denied an issue, please let us know the “reason” you were given.

## **Parole Commission**

### **Making Rule Changes**

New Parole Chairman Dean Stensberg has confirmed that the Parole Commission will be making changes to the parole rules. Exactly what this means will be revealed when the Commission releases the draft of the proposed changes. However, Mr. Stensberg has reportedly said, off the record, he will definitely be letting more people out. How many more may depend on how effectively the anti-mass incarceration movement can get the Commission to understand the wastefulness of the current process.

Until the draft is released, people can contact their county legislators about the issue. Once it’s released, though, we will be given 10 days notice to prepare suggestions/commentary to present at an official hearing on the matter. A strong showing and well-thought-out presentation at this hearing will be very important.

*The Community* will send out an e-mail to everyone on our e-mail list once the draft is released. In the meantime, contact Peggy Swan (c/o Parole Rules Changes, 29631 Wild Rose Drive, Blue River, WI 53518; [pgswan3@aol.com](mailto:pgswan3@aol.com); 608-536-3993) or David Liners (c/o Parole Rules Changes, 3195 S. Superior Street, Ste. 310, Milwaukee, WI 53207; [david.liners1@gmail.com](mailto:david.liners1@gmail.com); 414-736-2099) about how you can assist their efforts on this specific issue.

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## **CORRESPONDENCE COURSE OPPORTUNITIES WHILE IN PRISON**

Like many topics in prison, there is much misinformation about correspondence course opportunities, whether for college, religion, or personal advancement. Although each state and especially each prison has its own set of rules and obstacles regarding this topic, some info applies to everyone. The following is meant to address some frequently asked questions

*(Education—Continued on page 6)*

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

*The Community* is a non-profit bimonthly newsletter devoted to fostering a productive, motivating sense of community among those interested in the prison system, especially Wisconsin’s, and those sympathetic to the increasingly notorious need for smarter criminal justice policies.

## Violent? Criminals?

By Shannon Ross

I recently read "Too Cruel, Not Unusual Enough," a collection of autobiographical essays written by incarcerated individuals in the U.S. serving LWOP (Life Without Parole). The painful material - to read and write, no doubt - opened my eyes a little wider to the depth of the evil of this issue and the absurdity of America's general approach towards criminal justice. What truly hurt, however, was my celly's contempt for the writers' "cryin' cause they got caught." This hurt wasn't so much because a fellow incarcerated community member had expressed such a narrow-minded, stereotypical free-world view. Rather, it was because I took the statement personally.

I'm not serving life. However, after 12 years in prison, I know very well the absolute confidence, common among LWOP individuals, of having utterly outgrown an environment, but being helpless to move on. This is part of the dirty little secret of criminal justice reform: while so-called non-violent offenders (a label based not on their personalities or thought processes, but solely on the official categorization of their crimes get the overwhelming majority of the attention, so-called violent offenders are oftentimes the lowest hanging fruit in regards to being ready for release.

Anyone who's worked or lived in a jail or prison is not surprised by the high recidivism rate. In fact, many would probably say if anything they're surprised it's not higher (to paraphrase a former celly, if anti-mass incarceration activists had to be around incarcerated individuals constantly everyday, many would give up). This is due as much to the blatant ineffectiveness and indifference of jails and prisons as it is to the wild, complex immaturity of incarcerated individuals.

There are legitimate concerns when deciding how much a currently or formerly incarcerated individual can be trusted. We are constantly manipulating, primarily ourselves. This allows us to better manipulate others because we actually believe the bullshit we're selling (the appearance of sincerity and confidence is more important than the sales pitch). Plus, because of the significant reduction in temptations available in jails and prisons, many of us find it easier to stay out of trouble. Not surprisingly, when we get out we commonly find we're not as prepared as we and others thought we were to return to the free world.

It is stupid-easy to give into the purposelessness and stagnancy of incarceration. Everything we need is provided: TV, radio and games are here to keep us pacified. Canteen is around 90% junk food to comfort us and make us mentally and physically lazy.

Education beyond and oftentimes including the institutions' trivial offerings is generally disregarded and even blocked in many ways for very questionable security reasons (*see Opportunities for Correspondence Courses while in Prison, p. 1*); ingenuity and self-respect are constantly punished; and the system not only encourages but coerces us to treat each other not as friends or neighbors, but as threats or enemies. As for drugs, sex, and prestige, many of us still spend our days chasing them in here—just lower quality versions. Add to this the oppressive weight of our sentences and regrets and it can take more strength to stay humble and focused on this side of the walls. Nevertheless, there are genuine examples of personal transformation all throughout the swamp of criminal justice facilities in America, and they're not hard to find.

When someone mentions the danger of releasing *murderers, rapists, thugs*, or any other narrow-minded label meant to define us by our pasts or our crimes, many of us respond with an angry laugh. Angry not because we are in fact dangerous, but because that's what humans feel toward injustice; a laugh because absurdity is comical. We can only wish society knew how we forgive and even break bread with those we know have stolen from, tattled on, and/or attacked us. How we set aside time and even drop what we're doing to counsel, assist, or simply listen to other struggling incarcerated individuals.

(Violent—Continued on page 11)

**Practice  
safe text;  
use  
commas.**

**And, never miss a period.**

Those who are possessed by nothing possess everything.  
- Aikido martial arts saying

## FACT OR FICTION

### Fiction:

### “This is the only place that [fill in the blank].”

People have a strong, natural tendency to exaggerate when they get frustrated. A well known example of this in prison is when an incarcerated individual runs into some disappointing aspect of the institution or correctional department they're in and blurts out *“Man, this is the only joint that doesn't show movies or is this petty or takes this long to respond to requests or serves this much soy or this is one of the few states that doesn't offer good time, etc.* Virtually everyone in prison has heard or said some form of this countless times. It's a classic reaction that makes the object (or, in one's mind, “the cause”) of their frustration/disappointment seem worse than it really is. In turn, we feel and even appear more justified in complaining, more legitimate playing the victim.

On some rare occasions, an institution or correctional system is truly the only one that does or doesn't do a particular thing. However, the mass majority of such statements are untrue and usually highly untrue. This is why someone will commonly respond to them with some form of “well, I just came from [another institution] and it was the same way there.” Or the person making the exaggerated statement will try to support it (or, in their mind, prove it) by stating what some other place(s) did when he was there several years or even decades ago—as if policies and privileges don't change frequently. Many times, however, there's no one around to correct or challenge the exaggeration, which then tends to be believed, particularly by those who haven't been down long. After all, the exaggerator's confidence and claims to have been “everywhere” in the system are convincing.

The reason we believe and repeat these exaggerations is due to a natural characteristic of the human mind: lazy thinking. This isn't a matter of stupidity; it's a matter of poor effort, which is a habit. Long story short (for the long story read “Thinking Fast and Slow” by Daniel Kahneman or “The Invisible Gorilla and Other Ways Our Intuition Deceives Us” by Chris Chabris and Daniel Simons), the brain operates on two levels, which we'll call the thinking system and the reacting system. The thinking system is our active brain, when we engage our reasoning and analyzing abilities. Unfortunately, the thinking system prefers to chill and let the reacting system handle most

problems, like mental auto-pilot. So when we encounter new info, our instinct is to believe it because doing so is easier—questioning it requires the thinking system to work. And the lazier we are as thinkers, the less we involve our thinking system. This is the same with physical work: our instinct is to take the path of least resistance (look at technology inventions).

Unless we get into the habit of questioning what we read, hear, see, and most importantly, what we think, we will continue to be sabotaged by our reacting systems' thoughtlessness. For some, getting into this habit sounds like too much work — they'd rather keep looking foolish by believing ignorance (especially their own). But, like overcoming any bad habit, taking control from our reacting system and putting our thinking system in charge simply requires small, gradual steps. For more, read “The Power of Habits” by Charles Duhigg and “On Second Thought; Outsmarting Your Minds Hard-Wired Habits” by Wray Herbert.

Anytime you find yourself or someone else starting a sentence with *this is the only*, engage your thinking system. Challenge their statement in your mind, at least. Do not just let it be, because the reacting system will process and accept it subconsciously, without you realizing it. Physical laziness is bad, but mental laziness is the rocket fuel of virtually every messed up aspect of our world. “If you form the habit of taking what someone else says about a thing without checking it out for yourself, you'll find that other people will have you hating your friends and loving your enemies” (Malcolm X).

Ultimately, if one institution does or doesn't do something, it's highly likely that there are not only one but several others that are the same way. And even if it is the only one, consider the whole picture: some “garbage” places have one really good feature, and vice versa. For example, in Wisconsin, Stanley Correctional is considered by many incarcerated individuals and even staff to be one of, if not the worst medium security institution in the state. However, they have a relatively great chapel department, which for some makes up for all the bad there. Meanwhile, Oshkosh Correctional, largely considered the best institution, only allows a couple phone calls a week, which for some cancels out all the good there.

A common saying in prison is *do the time; don't let the time do you*. In addition, use your brain; don't let your brain use you.

When all else fails men turn to reason.  
- Abba Eban

## Network

*From theinnervoice84.wordpress.com (posted 07/17/2010)*

Often mixed in with the nervousness and fear generally felt upon release from prison is invigorated confidence and expectations. We come out feeling that we have an edge over others. After all, the time helped us think of better ideas than them, the separation from free life allowed us to attain more focus than them, and the experience left us stronger and with more insight than them. But if you believe any of that you're a fool.

We usually base our understandings of people on our experiences and social circles. However, we can't accurately judge the quality of anything by comparing it to our limited life experiences; our former selves, friends and family; or the cats we know or knew in prison. I cannot emphasize enough how many equally smart, tough and determined, as well as credentialed, connected and criminal-record-free people there are with ideas identical to or better than ours. That business plan we think is gonna make us rich when we get out; best believe several people are currently working on it—or already did it and you just haven't got the news.

However, this does not mean we should give up—far from it. It simply means that we cannot delude ourselves about both the competition and our abilities. It simply means that we, currently and formerly incarcerated individuals, may very well have to play catch up for sometime and even start somewhere at the very bottom. Fortunately, we have a lot to gain from this.

So much of success, of achieving our goals, comes from who we know and so many of the greatest relationships start in the most basic, unexciting places, such as menial jobs. But we will surely miss these life-changing unexpected opportunities if we hold the illogical view that those things *ought to be* easier or better. Why pass up potential diamonds while waiting for possible gold?

Just as a fun house mirror affects our vision, prison has a way of distorting what our minds see. We begin to confuse hopes and dreams for some guaranteed picture of our future. However, **there is no such thing as should be. There is only what was, what is and what will be, and we do nothing more than surrender our chances at what will be when we continue to live in prison dreams instead of reality.** (If you don't believe me, ask or read about any successful person who didn't grow up privileged; the willingness and patience to start anywhere—legally, of course—is key.)

No matter how boring or frustrating, first steps are just a temporary bridge to something greater, possibly much greater. So get in where you can. Embrace your second (or third, etc.) chance and keep your eyes and mind open for the next step.

Remember: Just because we see clearer doesn't mean the path ahead suddenly is as well. Anticipate and embrace the challenge.

Keep boxing temptation.

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## 13 Things Mentally Strong People Don't Do

by Amy Morin

[www.huffingtonpost.com/amy-morin/13-things-mentally-strong\\_b\\_6341412.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/amy-morin/13-things-mentally-strong_b_6341412.html)

Mentally strong people have healthy habits. They manage their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in ways that set them up for success in life. Check out these things that mentally strong people don't do so that you too can become more mentally strong.

### 1. They Don't Waste Time Feeling Sorry for Themselves

Mentally strong people don't sit around feeling sorry about their circumstances or how others have treated them. Instead, they take responsibility for their role in life and understand that life isn't always easy or fair.

### 2. They Don't Give Away Their Power

They don't allow others to control them, and they don't give someone else power over them. They don't say things like, "My boss makes me feel bad," because they understand that they are in control over their own emotions and they have a choice in how they respond.

### 3. They Don't Shy Away from Change

Mentally strong people don't try to avoid change. Instead, they welcome positive change and are willing to be flexible. They understand that change is inevitable and believe in their abilities to adapt.

*(Strong—Continued on page 10)*

It is the weak who are cruel, and gentleness is to be expected only from the strong.  
- Leo Rosten

(Speaks—Continued from page 1)

residences with strangers. Of course, much of this is for a fee, but that's generally a necessary ingredient (only a company or well-funded non-profit could efficiently run these operations). The point is the connecting of individuals and groups all across the world, the vast and immediate collaboration of people who needed each other and often never even knew it.

The question for the anti-mass incarceration movement is why, amidst all this sharing, connecting, reaching out, are we neglecting each other?

There is insufficient communication and proactive engagement among the thousands of anti-mass incarceration organizations and activists across the globe pursuing similar and sometimes, identical efforts. What these places know about each other is generally limited to local or regional information and is too often not up to date. This applies to incarcerated individuals and their loved ones, as well— anyone should be able to access information about call rates, canteen options, prison menus, early release opportunities, visitors looking for a ride or other assistance, etc. (A current organization addressing this need is Prison Talk, where users can chat with others, ask questions, and research information about institutions across the country.

A popular reason for the absence of this connectivity and access to info is resources: money and therefore staff are predictably low throughout the anti-mass incarceration movement. But it takes a lot less nowadays to accomplish a lot more. The real reason for the status quo is will: those in the movement don't have the energy to or don't recognize the importance of sharing and connecting. Either way, they aren't willing to do it. As stated in the first issue, *The Community's* goal is to stimulate (whether we make it or help/motivate someone else to do so) the creation of a central hub where the movement can collaborate and easily research any organizations, services, or activities related to keeping formerly and currently incarcerated individuals on a constructive, healthy path. We have faith that the necessary resources, particularly volunteers/assistance will eventually come. We have faith in the wisdom and righteousness of our purpose. We have faith in the community. We have faith in you.

We expect to hear from you.

Keep moving forward.

## What's Up

### Tablets

As of June 25, Keefe was officially awarded the contract to install and operate the system of tablets and kiosks in the Wisconsin Department of Corrections. A legal protest by JPay over Keefe's initial selection last year had been holding up progress. The tablets are handheld devices on which incarcerated individuals will be able to (at first) send/receive e-mails and download music, and eventually download books and educational material — then possibly video chat in later stages. Keefe will begin installing the system very soon.

### Segregation

Echoing what we reported in the previous issue, segregation at Jackson Correctional in Wisconsin is only halfway full, as well. However, incarcerated individuals there are apparently being sent to seg as much as before the population reduction. Only now they aren't staying as long. In fact, staff is quoted as saying administration is telling them to crack down more on petty violations and perceived acts of disrespect in order to make up for the lost bed space (due to the reduction in seg population). We have reports of similar developments at Green Bay Correctional: considerably reduced seg population, what were in the past major offenses now being charged as minor offenses, and less seg time overall.

### Columbia

From May 5 to mid-June, Columbia Correctional was on lockdown after a correctional officer was stabbed multiple times to the neck. This happened after a librarian was stabbed there in January, and an incarcerated individual killed his celly a few months later. Columbia had also been having staffing issues that have resulted in COS working 12-hour shifts. The institution is still experiencing cutbacks in programming and extracurricular activities due to the staffing issues, which has had an equal if not more pronounced effect on those housed in its minimum barracks.

It is better to die on your feet than to live on your knees.  
- Mikhail Bakunin

(Progress—Continued from page 9)

chose to charge for a number of crimes. Even findings that seemed to reverse the trend turned out to be prejudicial. “It [the data] said that we charge white offenders for property crimes at a higher rate than we do black offenders for those kinds of cases. So I thought, good, here is a disparity the other way.... But a deputy of mine pointed out that what the data really meant was that we devalue property crimes in the center city, we don’t charge a car theft, because we think it’s just some junker car.... We were devaluing our African-American victims of property crimes—so that was another thing to address.” Following the lead of the 2013 Federal Smart on Crime Initiative that led to a near 16% decrease in federal prosecutors seeking mandatory-minimum sentences for certain drug cases, Chisholm overhauled the district attorney’s office to send fewer people to prison. His efforts have shown success as much less people of any race are prosecuted for low-level drug offenses and misdemeanors, the number of blacks from Milwaukee County sent to prison on drug charges has been cut in half, and the racial disparity among burglary cases has faded.

From the passing of Prop 47 in California last November to the repeal of a number of mandatory-minimum sentencing requirements in conservative states such as Louisiana, the status quo of mass incarceration is genuinely being challenged. Most importantly, some of the loudest anti-mass incarceration advocates now are conservatives. Newt Gingrich, well-known former House Speaker during the Clinton presidency, is pushing to cut the national prison population in half in 10 years. Jeb Bush, who once advocated more prisons and emphasized “punishment over therapy” for juveniles has come to support criminal justice reform, stating how incarceration can make low-level criminals worse. And former Texas governor Rick Perry said, “[Y]ou want to talk about real conservative governance? Shut prisons down. Save that money,” and “[d]uring my leadership as governor, Texas shut down three prisons, and we saved taxpayers \$2 billion. When I left office, Texas had the lowest crime rate in our state since 1968 .... We evaluated prisons on whether they got results.” According to the conservative leader Grover Norquist, “[b]y the time we get to the caucuses, every single Republican running for President will be versed on this .... Some guys will be playing catchup ball, but I do believe that, largely, this will become a consensus issue within the center-right.”

(Education—continued from page 1)



for those in prison.

Can incarcerated individuals get money for school? Not from the federal government. In 1994, incarcerated individuals were made ineligible for Pell Grants under the claim they were taking needed funding from law-abiding students. Within three years the number of higher education programs in prisons across the country dropped from 350 to 8 and the percentage of incarcerated individuals taking college correspondence courses has remained abysmally low, due mostly to the high cost. Meanwhile, the benefit to society was a mere \$5.00 extra per grant for the same number of non-incarcerated recipients as before. Not one additional grant was awarded. (See **Incarcerated individuals get access to Pell Grants** on p. 8 for an update.)

Some states, however, still offer financial assistance. For example, incarcerated individuals in Wisconsin are eligible for the WHEG (Wisconsin Higher Education Grant). Those outside Wisconsin should contact their states’ higher education department for any grant opportunities available to them. The WHEG currently awards \$1162 per semester—nothing is awarded outside the school year. To receive the WHEG, you must submit a complete FAFSA financial aid form — available online or through your institution’s education director — several months before the fall semester. Deadlines for filing vary by school, but it’s best to send in your FAFSA form as early in the calendar year as possible. Also, the grant can only be used at Wisconsin schools, of which UW-Platteville and NWTC (Northeastern Wisconsin Technical College) are the primary if not only two options. To use the grant, UW-Platteville requires you to take two courses at \$930 each, and NWTC requires you to take four classes at \$325 each (however, NWTC pro-rates, so you can take three or two classes for 75% or 50%, respectively, of the grant). And none of these costs include textbooks, which are generally well over \$100 even when used. Textbooks can often be resold to the bookstore for up to 50% of the purchase price, but you can also rent them for as low as \$20 to \$60 from places like Barnes and Noble and Amazon. Unfortunately, Wisconsin institutions do not allow textbooks in if they know they’re rented; and to resell your books you must send them home to have your people do it.

Despite the lack of government assistance, there are many other funding opportunities. Thousands of scholarships are open to anyone and a few are exclusively for incarcerated individuals, such as the Prison Education Foundation

(Education—Continued on page 7)

A superior man is modest in his speech, but exceeds in his actions.  
- Confucius



(Education—Continued from page 6)

(prisonedu.org) and the Prison Scholar Fund (facebook.com/PrisonScholarFund; The Prison Scholar Fund, 23517 Orville Road East, Orting, WA 98360). Most institution libraries have books with scholarship information covering a wide range of categories and types of students. An option that has been more successful is to write to private organizations. Consider this statement from Ohio University: "Some incarcerated students have sought aid for tuition costs from charitable, civic, church, or professional groups. Often, when a group understands the benefit of education for an incarcerated student, it will be willing to offer some financial assistance, even if on a limited basis." You may have to contact a lot of these groups and potential individual donors before you get a response. Troy Evans (troyevans.com; The Evans Group, 3104 E. Camelback Rd. #436, Phoenix, AZ, 85016) is a great example of what can be accomplished this way and how to go about it. For more detailed information on this, check out *College in Prison* by Bruce Michaels, Trafford Publishing, or *Education Behind Bars* by Chris Zoukis.



#### What options are there for correspondence courses?

Every year more schools make more correspondence courses available strictly online. Nevertheless, many schools still offer a number of courses via snail mail. Some of the best options are: UW-Platteville (\$310 per credit), Ohio University (\$343 per credit), Adams State University (\$495 per class), Blackstone Paralegal (\$1,214 flat rate if paid in full, or a monthly payment plan), Upper Iowa University (\$325 per credit), University of Idaho (\$325 a class), NWTC (\$330 per class), University of Arkansas, University of Florida, Brigham Young University (BYU), Louisiana State University, and Sam Houston State University. For a much more complete list, check out *Prisoners' Guerrilla Handbook to Correspondence Programs in the United States and Canada* by Jon Marc Taylor; Biddle Publishing Company. Only a handful of schools (including the first five from the above list) offer degrees to correspondence students, and even then they may not offer all the courses required to complete the degree. For this reason, many incarcerated students take courses from a variety of schools then transfer the credits to a degree-granting institution. This is also a good way to save money since certain courses may be cheaper at other schools.

Another option is degree-granting programs with less recognition, such as New Freedom College (which was designed specifically for indigent incarcerated individuals), Huntington College of Health Sciences (\$50 a class) and many

more. Your institution may also allow you to use a tape or portable DVD player for the Great Courses advertised in National Geographic and other magazines. These are hundreds of courses taught by highly esteemed professors broken down into 20 or so half-hour lessons that you watch or listen to. Because there are no assignments, many Great Courses are offered for \$30 to \$100. Keep in mind, though, that you cannot earn college credits through these courses.

The cheapest way to earn college credit, however, is through CLEP (College Level Examination Program) or DSST (DANTES Subject Standardized Test). With these, you basically study on your own, then pay the company \$80 to take an exam when you're ready. Nearly 3,000 schools accept CLEP credits, while DSST is accepted by less but still a large number. Your institution will need to register with DSST to administer their exams (not a difficult or costly process). Unfortunately, CLEP went all online a few years ago, so you will need to do more work to convince your institution or correctional department to administer CLEP exams. Fortunately, they follow the same format as the updated online HSED (High School Equivalency Diploma) testing provided at most institutions, sometimes by law.

#### Am I ready to take college courses?

Probably not. But neither are most people. According to the National Center for Public Policy, 60% of college freshmen aren't ready. The better question is can you *get* ready to take college courses? Absolutely. People who give up on/drop out of college often do so because of poor study habits, which leads to other problems they then use as excuses for giving up/dropping out, such as *no time* or *too many distractions*. If you plan to spend your or, most likely, your people's money on college courses, make the effort now to be able to read, study, write, and/or think for at least several hours a day (depending on how many courses you plan to take at once). You need to be comfortable being alone with as much quiet as possible and oftentimes forego other activities you may prefer to do. Strengthening your discipline in this way is key to succeeding in not only college courses but life, period. Letters to an Incarcerated Brother by Hill Harper (reviewed in *Resources* on page 8) offers good advice on how to foster discipline and good study habits. There are also numerous quality books, programs, and especially people locked up with you that can help prepare you. Correspondence courses aren't for everyone, but many incarcerated individuals avoid them out of fear of failure. Virtually everyone is capable of taking and completing college, even while incarcerated. Don't pass up the opportunity to pursue secondary education because of imaginary limitations.

Please contact *The Community* if you have any more questions regarding this topic.

## Resources

“Letters to an Incarcerated Brother” by Hill Harper is a wonderful compilation of information, advice and encouragement. In it Harper uses letters from his correspondence with Brian, an incarcerated individual he came into contact with years earlier when he wrote to Harper as a 16 year old in jail after reading Harper’s earlier book *Letters to a Young Brother*. Brian’s letters express the same misconceptions, doubts, anger, insecurities and questions (often covered in the same fake indifference and bravado) as many currently and formerly incarcerated individuals. Harper’s letters address these concerns at length with help from some of his well-known friends, such as Russell Simmons, Lupe Fiasco, and Michael Stelle. These invaluable responses to Brian cover repairing/retaining the parent-child relationship, practical steps for fixing the negative attitudes and habits common among currently and formerly incarcerated individuals, dealing with harmful regrets and grudges, preparing oneself for the job market, building toward goals/dreams, college opportunities for anyone behind bars (see page 1), and much more. *Letters to an Incarcerated Brother* is a must read for any incarcerated individual (including women) who sincerely wants to turn their life around. It offers proven strategies, truth (no simple answers), and brotherly love to help readers recover from the stigma and consequences of a criminal conviction. Harper’s organization, Manifest Your Destiny Foundation ([www.mydf.org](http://www.mydf.org)), also is available to help in various ways.

If you’re in or returning to the Milwaukee area, here are two good Christian organizations that offer a number of reentry services. “GENESIS in Milwaukee, Inc.” is a five phase program derived from Deuteronomy 15:11, “therefore, I command you to be open handed toward your brothers and toward the poor

and needy in your land.” Phase one works to mentor the currently incarcerated and help them develop an exit plan. Phase two focuses on the transition period after release with an emphasis on “discipleship and the Word of God.” The remaining three phases help the person become reacquainted with society through employment, a church home, relationships with loved ones and eventually permanent housing. The program can last about five years with the goal that each participant will be self-supporting. GENESIS is also always looking for mentors to work with formerly and currently incarcerated individuals, as well as assistance with bible studies and transportation, donated men’s clothing and referrals for businesses willing to hire the formerly incarcerated. Contact **GENESIS** in Milwaukee, Inc., 2454 West Lisbon Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53216 (414-344-9880, [www.genesisinmke.org](http://www.genesisinmke.org)).

“JDK Ministry,” through its Prison Aftercare Program, works with a network of Christian churches and organizations to assist committed Christians with their needs following release. Similar to GENESIS, a key part of this assistance is connection to a church home and Christian mentoring program focused on encouragement, spiritual growth, and accountability. They require a minimum of six months notice prior to release and work mainly with those who are within 24 months of release. If you have less than six months to release they still may be able to send you some helpful information, but not their full assistance. Write or e-mail them to request their Aftercare Information Form—allow 4-6 weeks for a response: JDK Ministry, Box 100171, Milwaukee, WI 53210 (414-349-4680, [Tim@JDKM.org](mailto:Tim@JDKM.org)).

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## Incarcerated Individuals to Get Access to Pell Grants

Under a program that allows the feds to lift certain aid program rules for experimental purposes, the U.S. Department of Education is poised to announce a limited exemption to the ban on incarcerated individuals receiving Pell grants. A likely scenario would be for incarcerated education programs from several colleges/universities to be made eligible for Pell grants, with various restrictions on participants. This development may have been encouraged by the lack of negative feedback given in



response to the Obama administration’s clarification this past December that students in juvenile correctional facilities would be eligible to receive Pell grants. Then, on May 21, after several years of behind-the-scenes effort, U.S. Representative Donna Edwards (of Maryland) and five of her Democratic colleagues introduced the Restoring Education and Learning (REAL) Act in the House to completely repeal the ban on Pell grants.



## Progress in the Movement

In February, the MacArthur Foundation, one of the world's largest non-profits, pledged \$75 million to incentivize counties across the nation to pursue better/safer alternatives to jail as part of its Safety & Justice Challenge. In May, twenty counties, including Milwaukee, were awarded planning grants of \$150,000 for six months. From these twenty, ten will be selected to receive between \$500,000 and \$2 million a year for up to five years. "Where the incarceration system starts is local counties," says Laurie Gardugue, Director of MacArthur's new Justice Reform Program. "It's important to look at how decisions are made at the local level. The costs--\$22 billion a year—are borne by counties. The resources used are the same that could be used for education, housing, improved social welfare services." The selected counties represent 11% of U.S. jail capacity, so these efforts have the potential to significantly impact this problem. In addition, due to the high volume of counties that applied, the Foundation will be creating new opportunities for funding to support training, technical assistance, and further reform efforts.

Meanwhile, Illinois Governor, Bill Rauner, has created a committee to formulate smarter policies that will reduce his state's prison population by 25% over the next decade. In recent years, 34 states have reduced their prison populations, with nine experiencing double-digit percentage declines. In fact, New York and New Jersey have downsized their prison populations by 25% since 1999. As Rauner has observed, "for lower-risk offenders, prison is an expensive way to make them into more serious criminals." At the same time, long prison sentences bring diminishing returns (little is accomplished by keeping someone incarcerated well beyond the age at which people are routinely shown to age out of crime, which is typically in their 30s); because few people think about

being caught when they break the law, long sentences hardly deter crime.

In 2013, Danny Ludeman retired from his successful career as CEO of Wells Fargo Advisors, which managed \$1 trillion in assets. Two years later he has launched Concordance Academy and Concordance Institute, as part of a first-of-its-kind holistic, thoroughly researched and tracked re-entry operation in St. Louis. The inaugural class of 60 men and women will be selected in December, six months prior to release. The goal is for each person to have their HSED and a job by the time they get out. Concordance will then provide them with a variety of services in-house instead of sending them to separate organizations that likely have different agendas. Ludeman has raised \$8.5 of his \$9 million goal, which will allow the program to take on more men and women in following years, at a cost of \$15,000 per participant. As Ludeman told a room of 200 in April—including powerful supporters such as the director of the state's Department of Corrections and St. Louis' mayor, county executive, and former police chief—"With proper resources and evidence

-based practices, could we dramatically lower reincarceration rates and do it in a scalable fashion? ... We concluded the answer to this question was a resounding 'YES!'" From there they plan to expand statewide then nationwide.

As for Wisconsin, Milwaukee County District Attorney John Chisholm has gone against the state's political stubbornness. In 2007, upon taking office, Chisholm let the New York-based Vera Institute of Justice question his staff and research their files for several years to examine how he used his prosecutorial discretion. The study found a number of inexplicable racial disparities in who prosecutors

*(Progress—Continued on page 6)*



The man who complains about the way the ball bounces is likely to be the one who dropped it.  
- Lou Holtz

(Strong—continued from page 4)

#### **4. They Don't Waste Energy on Things They Can't Control**

You won't hear a mentally strong person complaining over lost luggage or traffic jams. Instead, they focus on what they can control in their lives. They recognize that sometimes, the only thing they can control is their attitude.

#### **5. They Don't Worry About Pleasing Everyone**

Mentally strong people recognize that they don't need to please everyone all the time. They're not afraid to say no or speak up when necessary. They strive to be kind and fair, but can handle other people being upset if they didn't make them happy.

#### **6. They Don't Fear Taking Calculated Risks**

They don't take reckless or foolish risks, but don't mind taking calculated risks. Mentally strong people spend time weighing the risks and benefits before making a big decision, and they're fully informed of the potential downsides before they take action.

#### **7. They Don't Dwell on the Past**

Mentally strong people don't waste time dwelling on the past and wishing things could be different. They acknowledge their past and can say what they've learned from it. However, they don't constantly relive bad experiences or fantasize about the glory days. Instead, they live for the present and plan for the future.

#### **8. They Don't Make the Same Mistakes Over and Over**

Mentally strong people accept responsibility for their behavior and learn from their past mistakes. As a result, they don't keep repeating those mistakes over and over. Instead, they move on and make better decisions in the future.

#### **9. They Don't Resent Other People's Success**

Mentally strong people can appreciate and celebrate other people's success in life. They don't grow jealous or feel cheated when others surpass them. Instead, they recognize that success comes with hard work, and they are willing to work hard for their own chance at success.

#### **10. They Don't Give Up After the First Failure**

Mentally strong people don't view failure as a reason to give up. Instead, they use failure as an opportunity to grow and improve. They are willing to keep trying until they get it right.

#### **11. They Don't Fear Alone Time**

Mentally strong people can tolerate being alone and they don't

fear silence. They aren't afraid to be alone with their thoughts and they can use downtime to be productive. They enjoy their own company and aren't dependent on others for companionship and entertainment all the time but instead can be happy alone.

#### **12. They Don't Feel the World Owes Them Anything**

Mentally strong people don't feel entitled to things in life. They weren't born with a mentality that others would take care of them or that the world must give them something. Instead, they look for opportunities based on their own merits.

#### **13. They Don't Expect Immediate Results**

Whether they are working on improving their health or getting a new business off the ground, mentally strong people don't expect immediate results. Instead, they apply their skills and time to the best of their ability and understand that real change takes time.



Take care of what you like or you will be forced to like what you get.  
- George Bernard Shaw

(Violent—Continued from page 2)

How we consistently, on impulse now, avoid triggers and potentially negative activities, despite strong peer and environmental pressures to conform. How we embrace each day despite our circumstances, grateful for every meal, every dash of support. How we've acquired the very attitudes and habits society constantly—and understandably so—bemoans the loss of. How pained we are over what we've left in the wake of our selfishness and stupidity (of course, nobody wants to hear about that—rot in hell, right). Most of all, how many of the gentlest, most trustworthy, self controlled, responsible currently and formerly incarcerated individuals are those who've served significant time, so-called violent criminals, those doing LWOP.

The biggest shame here is that many LWOP individuals were sentenced as teens. I came in at 19. I'm now 31. I don't need to know the abundance of statistics and studies showing a steep drop in criminal activity after 25. I don't need to know the piles of scientific evidence demonstrating how much hormonal output and brain structure — thus behavior — change after our teen years. What I know from being immersed in the character, struggles and goals of long-timers, particularly those incarcerated as juveniles, is sufficient. If nothing else I know the growth of my maturity, the considerably improved sincerity of my heart. When I talk to people on the outside I grew up with, I commonly find myself thinking: *we in here are the ones society's worried about?*

To an extent, the public can't know the truth of what I'm saying—that requires an above average familiarity with those in the system. Plus, there will always be a number of people,

including fellow currently and formerly incarcerated individuals, who simply refuse to adjust their opinions about us no matter how much evidence is presented of our development and potential. However, as the truth about the waste and poison of mass incarceration sinks into society's understanding more and more, those of us pushing for a smarter approach toward criminal justice should keep in mind the truth behind the popular promotion of so-called non-violent offenders. A powerful force for strengthening struggling families and communities is abandoned and demonized over a misleading label branded on them for long ago temporary, though shameful idiocy. Actions so distant from who they've become it's truly as if they were done by others.

## Prison Legal News wants to hear from you!

After successfully helping achieve a significant reduction in prison/jail phone costs, PLN is now collecting info about how families of incarcerated individuals get cheated by the high costs of sending in money. Write to them and/or have your people contact them about any experiences in this matter. Include fees, delays in transmittals/receipts, costly fees to use pre-paid debit cards upon release from custody or to submit payment for parole supervision, etc. This effort is part of the Stop Prison Profiteering Campaign ([www.stopprisonprofiteers.org](http://www.stopprisonprofiteers.org)). Send all related correspondence to Prison Legal News, Attn: Panagiotti Tsolkas, Box 1151, Lake Worth, FL 33460 (561-360-2523; [ptsolkas@prisonlegalnews.org](mailto:ptsolkas@prisonlegalnews.org)).

PLN is also seeking pictures and videos related to prison and criminal justice topics as they expand the multimedia section of their website. Please note they are **not** seeking anything written. Submissions must be e-mailed to [content@prisonlegalnews.org](mailto:content@prisonlegalnews.org). Please confirm in your e-mail that the photos or videos are your original content, which you took/produced yourself, along with some context as to where and when they were taken/produced. Your name will not be disclosed.

## Submissions

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Keep in mind that if your submission is chosen for publication, it may be edited for length, grammar, and/or language.

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