

The P.F.C. Lantern



Prisoner's Lives Matter

Is My Life Worth A
Second Chance?

Interview with Dr. Renee

Criminal Justice

And More

*A people for change
publication*



Volume XX

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About the Program

Mission Statement of The University of Toledo
Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program:

We engage in education that approaches problems across profound social boundaries to create opportunities for people inside and outside of prison to collaborate in addressing crime, justice, and other areas of social concern.

The UT/ToCI Inside/Out Program brings students from the University of Toledo the Toledo Correctional Institution to engage in coursework in a collaborative, active-learning setting with students who are incarcerated. The program is part of an international effort to bring higher educational opportunities into carceral institutions of all levels while breaking down barriers and stigma that exists on both sides of the wall.

The UT program offers one class each term. Please look out for flyers announcing each new class. You will be asked to kite Ms. Ceglio with a statement of interest in taking the class.

People for Change:

The official think tank of the UT Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program.

Turning prisons into universities and cells into classrooms.

People for Change was founded in 2011 by the first student participants in the Inside/Out program. We organize workshops, study together, publish the newsletter, organize community meetings, and invite members of the community in for discussions of matters related to education and criminal justice reform.

The Lantern is the newsletter of People for Change. It is a fully collaborative project; all participants in PFC request and shepherd through the process pieces from inside and outside contributors. We discuss together the theme for each newsletter. All pieces are approved in general by the group.

Artwork is done by inside members of PFC, tagged as appropriate.

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Tenayah Bowmer and Tyler Dominguez, students at the University of Toledo do the lay-out and design.

Prisoners' Lives Matter



Why wouldn't I matter?

We've all heard "black lives matter," "blues lives matter," and "all lives matter!" If all lives matter, why wouldn't I, an inmate matter? Because I made a mistake? Because I am not perfect? No one is perfect. The purpose of prison is to pay for a bad deed for which I am responsible. After said prison term is completed, the debt should be paid. Yet, as we all know, that's not the case. So for all those people who don't think prisoners' lives matter, allow me to make my case. I am a father of a beautiful daughter... and fathers matter.

I am a friend to all those I encounter.... and friends matter. I am a son, a grandson, a brother, an uncle, a student, a teacher, one day a husband...and children matter, grandchildren matter, brothers matter, uncles matter, students, teachers and husbands matter. All these men beside me matter. All the mothers, aunts and grandmothers in women's prisons matter. Maybe not to you, although they should, but to our kids, our family and friends and to those who mean the most to us we matter. Maybe if you took the chance to get to know us then you'd come to know that we mattered as well...as we know you do. Peace and love....

Dakota, *Inside PFC Member now at Youngstown*

Still Fighting

I once read in one of these newsletters that, and I'm paraphrasing, that any man judged for his worst act will never be seen for his best attributes because his judge will forever be blinded by his hate...

I find that to be the case in this instance. A lot of people view us in prison as the worst of the worst of people, regardless of what we are on lock for...and that's wrong. Sure I've never been to college nor did I enlist in the army, but I am American strong. I'm a proud father who cares for his family. I take care of my friends, I reach out to my community. And yes, I'm in prison because I made a mistake that I must pay for. I know I am not perfect; neither is any one I know. But I continuously make strides in becoming a better person. And I don't care what mistake a person makes we are all human and we all matter. No person is irredeemable.

So this should be resoundingly agreed upon: all lives matter including those of us held as prisoners!

Anonymous, *Inside Contributor*

My Thoughts

fighting for redemption in the eyes of those who hate me
or just don't understand me
the love in my soul commands me to try harder
not just for me but for my son and my daughter
I never denied the truth of the act of which I perpetrated
I am wrong no doubt but your energy is over exerted
I'm paying for my misdeeds
as I'm constantly correcting the misleads
that you, my judge who has no right to judge casts down
on me
but if you open your eyes shade won't cast down on me
and you'll fully see that prisoners lives matter as well

Tae, *Inside Contributor*

Last Saturday I was folding sheets at the laundromat when I happened to look up and see a photograph of a sweet-faced black boy on the screen of the wall-mounted tv. " ... an honor student" the newscaster was saying. It was Jordan Edwards, the high school freshman who was shot and killed on April 29, 2017 by a policeman in a Dallas suburb as Jordan and four other boys were leaving a party. " ... an honor student" – as if it was the boy's good grades that made the unprovoked shooting inexcusable. As if the murder of a C-minus student would have been defensible.

For the spring of 2016 the Principles of Law class I was taking at the University of Toledo, I chose to write my final paper on the differences between criminal and civil juries. "Do juries serve the same purpose in both civil and criminal cases, or should we talk about civil and criminal juries as distinct institutions?" the paper assignment began. I learned a lot in that class. But only in the past year has one of the key differences between criminal and civil law stood out for me: in a criminal case, all lives are at least theoretically treated as being of equal value. Whether the person you kill in a DUI is a 35-year-old Walmart supervisor or a 35-year-old heart surgeon, that aggravated vehicular homicide is a 2nd degree felony in Ohio and is going to earn you a prison sentence of two to eight years along with a license suspension for life. In a wrongful death civil suit brought by the victim's surviving spouse, however, damages will be computed based on the deceased's lost future earnings. Still, a look at how "justice" is meted out in one Chicago court shows how theoretical equality is even in criminal law. In journalist Steve Bogira's Courtroom 302: *A Year Behind the Scenes in an American Criminal Courthouse*, he writes, "When no relatives or friends show their support for a defendant at sentencing, prosecutors sometimes remind the judge that the defendant won't even be missed if he goes away for a long stretch." (p. 304).

Any law that protects one group of people abridges the rights of another group. So how do we choose whom to favor and whom to burden? The image we hold of various groups helps us make those decisions – "us" here being policymakers and the voters and interest groups that influence them. And so pervasive stereotypes wind up driving legislation: groups perceived to have the most positive "social construction" receiving its benefits and groups afflicted with a negative image bearing its burdens.

This summer I took a course at UT called Principles of Public Policy. "Public policy is about communities trying to achieve something as communities," the authors of one of our textbooks write – even though conflict invariably arises over who the community's members are. Case in point: In 2015, the American Bar Association's Criminal Justice Section completed work on a database of the statutes and regulations that impose collateral consequences on persons convicted of crimes in the U.S. – regulations that constitute a civic death, disqualifying these men and women from participating in their community long after they have served the sentence imposed on them by the state. Norway's prison system, on the other hand, operates under what it calls a "principle of normality." To achieve this normality, the prisoner's community continues to take responsibility for his health care, education and other social services so that his eventual return home is a smooth one. Restriction of the prisoner's liberty is his punishment,

states the Kriminalomsorgen, the Norwegian Correctional Service, the sentenced offender having all the same rights as all other residents of the country. The state does not send men and women to prison to be punished. Confinement itself is the punishment.

Might the U.S. follow Norway's example? In 2005, when U.S. Supreme Court Justices Ruth Bader Ginsberg and Sandra Day O'Connor alluded to international law in an opinion they wrote, they were met not only by opposition from members of Congress but a death threat from an Internet chat room "commando" who perceived the reference as "a huge threat to our Republic and Constitutional freedom." Too many Americans form their concept of law, law-breakers, policing, the courts and the penal system from unrepresentative, sensational stories that are shown on the nightly television news, crafted into crime fiction page-turners and fashioned into action-packed movie screenplays whose heroes and villains come with pre-printed labels. Example? In a memoir written by a doctor about the years she spent working on the floors of New York City's jail inpatient psychiatry service, she writes, "I get complaints that 'my' patients are taking up beds for people who really need them, as if incarceration somehow negates a lifetime of serious mental illness. The message I hear is that forensic patients are less worthy of care and that maybe, by association, I too am less worthy as a doctor."

Amidst all this darkness, I heard a wonderful story recently from a man who works in a faith-based re-entry program in Ohio. I'll call him Bill. Wanting to encourage local employers to hire returning citizens, Bill brought a group of human resource managers and small businessmen into the state prison where he was doing a workshop on job readiness. The employers had laid down one caveat before their visit: They would consider hiring any man except one who had been convicted of a Tier III sex offense or murder. After spending a good part of the day with the workshop participants, the group adjourned to talk about their impressions. "What a great bunch of guys!" one of the potential employers said. Heads nodded all around. "I'd hire any one of them tomorrow," another added. Heads nodded again. "Six of them have been serving time on a murder charge," Bill informed the men.

I have few memories from childhood. But in one, I've fled in tears to the bathroom of our three-room apartment. My mother kneels in front of me, and I look up at her, afraid both of her anger and of the spanking I fear will follow. She tries to explain: "I'm not angry at you, baby. I'm angry at what you did." Does an approach like that make sense with adults, or at some point do we become our actions? Here's the policy question I'm asking: Is there a way to be tough on crime yet recognize that prisoners' lives matter, too?

Susan, *Outside PFC Member*

Is My Life Worth a Second Chance?

An associate of mine went to the parole board after doing eighteen years for a murder. He had one violent ticket in that eighteen years (a fight in 2009) and they gave him ten more years. He is 35. Is his life, and what he can make of it outside of prison walls, worth giving him a second chance even though he took a life as a teenager? Do the people responsible for our liberty possess souls compassionate enough to consider the mental, emotional and spiritual plight of an incarcerated American? And if they don't, I wonder if they teach their kids to be just as callous as them. We have a system that forces people to languish in prison for most of their lives then tiredly beg individuals, who were not even born, when their time started for their freedom. Is the purpose of prison in America to waste and humiliate law-breakers in the name of punishment?

If the parole board is really to be meant to be fair and impartial why does it not ask for recommendations from administrative staff in the prison where the person has spent years? Instead of that, they judge that human before they sit on the other side of the screen from them for the act that got them into prison in the first place, determining their fate before they see their face. And that person is left to convince a group of strangers not to "flop" them for mistakes they made as a dumb kid.

We have to break away from the primitive way we view justice. If somebody kills my family member or robs them or rapes them, it is not justice if they're languishing in prison and my family and I are still feeling the same strong bitterness and resentment towards them. We exercise retributive justice as if the knowledge that someone who wronged us is in pain will alleviate ours. But that never has and never will bring about a more just order. Instead of figuring out alternative, creative ways to deal with our lawbreakers our "progressive", "forgiving" citizens settle for the mental, spiritual and emotional torture of them and a humiliating meeting to end it.

Is the life of a human being who took the life of a human being worth a second chance in America?

Darryll



Food for Thought

The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.

The pain you feel today is the strength you'll feel tomorrow, for in every challenge encountered there is opportunity for growth.

Don't pray for an easy life, pray for the strength to endure a difficult one.

Hardship often prepares ordinary people for an extraordinary destiny.

Train your mind to see the good in every situation.

Growth is painful, change is painful. But, nothing is as painful as staying stuck somewhere you don't belong.

Surrender to what is, let go of what was, and have faith in what will be.

When there is no enemy within, the enemies outside cannot hurt you.

The only thing that makes it part of your life is that you keep thinking about it.

Be around those that feed your soul, not those that starve it.

Andrew, *Inside Member, PFC*

What Now?

After 17 years of incarceration, my bunkie, A.D., asked me, "What now, School?" That question came about when we had a conversation about how I started doing my time in my twenties compared to now. He's 20 years old and was impressed with how many certificates of completion I have. He was like, "Man, School, you're going in on your education."

I asked him if he finished eighth grade, he said yes. I asked him if he finished ninth grade, he said yes. I then said, "Don't you have a birth certificate?" He said, "Of course." I said, "You have the same thing I have." He asked, "How's that?" So, I explained that it's all the learning and teachings we've been given since we were adolescents. From our teachers, ministers, moms, pops, cousins, uncles, aunts, siblings, or the old heads in the bullpen while we waited for court. The old winehead on the corner that told us to slow down and stay in school. Whether or not we paid attention, we've been educated with the tools to live, to succeed, and to know right from wrong.

Our mothers bore us in their stomachs up to 9 months because they believed that their child would be the one to make a difference. Mothers don't go the distance with pregnancies because they want to raise someone who robs, murders, pushes drugs, or rapes. Mothers want sons to make a positive difference.

Our birth certificate is evidence we exist. It is up to us on how we exist with the education we've been given to live. He asked me what will keep me from coming back to prison. I told him there is no efficient answer to that. I tell him to ask me what will keep me from re-offending or breaking the law.

I tell him I now know what to do. When I saw on the news a 16 year-old killed a mother after robbing her at work, leaving her children motherless, it hurt. When I saw on the news a mother and daughter fought off a robber, I was rooting for the mom and daughter. I know I won't reoffend. When I saw a women's and children's shelter (Mom's House) had been burglarized and food/supplies had been stolen, I started crying. That's truly when you know what to do because you have not been able to understand the harm and hurt to the masses that one act of reoffending or breaking the law can have on people. You start thinking and acting to not just want to be better for you, but to want the best for your community and for humanity. You see crime and your mind and your heart say "victim awareness" and you look to find ways to promoter change. You start thinking out loud, "What can I do to stop this madness?"

You stop entertaining conversations your peers may have as far as being lawbreakers. You begin saying, "Love yourself... Just say no to what you know will harm and/or inflict pain on others. The gift we were given was life... to exist." So, we must encourage others to live, and live in harmony, despite those that are still going to resist and give the finger to positivity and growth. You just keep watering, because iron does sharpen iron. Inspire and promote change.

Wayne, *Inside Member, PFC*



Inspirational Quotes

"Don't judge your journey before it's over. Trust in yourself, believe in yourself, give your all, and in the end, you'll be able to say that was one hell of a journey."

"Every step forward is an arrival... It's up to you whether your step is toward success or failure. So, don't stand stagnant if you want to stand for something. Step forward."

Wayne, *Inside Member, PFC*

The Dangers of Neoliberalism

What is neoliberalism and how does it impact lives of anyone coming into contact with the American criminal justice system? When I first became familiar with the term as a participant of the Inside-Out program, it took me a while to truly understand its meaning. There were many references to it in the curriculum of the program, but no definition. So, I thought it may be beneficial to write this relatively short explanation.



In the last few decades of the twentieth century, America saw the rise of the neoliberalism. This is an ideology that has made some strange bedfellows of public servants, government employees and private sector entrepreneurs.

Neoliberalism describes the view that the government should be smaller, people left largely to fend for themselves whether that fending will make them or break them. It's kind of like a practical approach to the evolutionary theory of natural selection, where only the strong survive, while the weak must perish.

In addition, by actively promoting the view that the private sector can always do better at any task than the government, due to the incentives of competition in the free economy, this philosophy demonizes professional public employees as being incompetent or uncaring.

Needless to say, the modern proponents of the neoliberalism often fail to acknowledge the forces of greed that also function in a free economy and greatly diminish the quality of the services outsourced to the public sector.

While neoliberal philosophy targets a wide variety of government operations, it disproportionately affects the poorest and least educated; this is not because of some diabolical plan, but because by its nature a large portion of governmental expenses are allocated to helping the neediest citizens. And that is where private enterprises see the best opportunities for profit. A fact that those on the bottom of socioeconomic hierarchy are less likely to fight back, due to lack of financial resources or education required for proper organization and mobilization, is a cherry on the cake.

In today's America, private industry has assumed

responsibility for a wide variety of services that for a good reason traditionally fall under purview of the government. For example, one of the fundamental principles that establishes government's legitimacy, lies in its power to punish. By gradually outsourcing various parts of the criminal justice system to the private sector, which is fundamentally motivated by profit, the government is undercutting its own legitimacy. Somehow, the neoliberal agenda has allowed elected public servants to peddle that legitimacy under the noses and with the consent of American people.

We now have privately operated prisons, probation and parole services, prison food services, electronic monitoring, and much more. All are solely concerned only with profit and market stability, which can only be achieved through higher incarceration rates and longer sentences.

And so, nearly 200 years after America set an example for the rest of the civilized world, by implementing a true reform of criminal justice system with a goal of rehabilitation, America finds itself in the midst of a new criminal justice reform. Only instead of a competition to effectively rehabilitate as many people as possible, we are now in a competition to cheaply incarcerate as many people as possible.

Stan, *Inside PFC*

The Three Impacts

Of the Inside/Out Prison Exchange Program

The University of Toledo and Toledo Correctional Institution



As I prepared myself to write this paper, I was thinking of its structure and how our professor disliked disorganized ramblings and critiqued my tendency to do just that. Thus, I chose to format it around three distinct types of impact this program achieved. The first impact was achieved by the structure of the program itself. The second, by the curriculum of the program. And the third, was the most surprising and unexpected of all, achieved by association with college students, a group of people that had virtually nothing in common with me.

As a disclaimer, I would also like to point out that other broad references as to the state of mind of inmates as a group, are mostly speculative and are based on my personal observations and experiences.

PART I: IN THIS FINAL ASSIGNMENT, I WILL FOCUS ON THE IMPACT BOTH DIRECT AND INCIDENTAL, THAT THE INSIDE-OUT PROGRAM HAD ON MY LIFE, MENTAL STATE, AND THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE AMERICAN CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM. THE TRUE VALUE OF ANY LEARNING EXPERIENCE, CAN ONLY BE MEASURED BY THE IMPACT THAT THAT EXPERIENCE HAD ON A STUDENT. EVERYTHING ELSE IS OF A SECONDARY

NATURE AND IS MUCH LESS IMPORTANT.

Impact through participation: I would like to begin with a brief analysis of the general impact that the structure of the program itself, had on me. A mere fact that as an inmate I was allowed to actually be a part of a college level course, sitting side by side with real college students had a significant effect in itself. In order to comprehensively describe this effect, I must first describe some of the psychological issues that I, and in my opinion, most of the inmates experience.

Most inmates, whether they admit it or not, are afflicted with the sense of insignificance. The loss of control over one's life and the general lack of any significant or meaningful purpose creates a mental state that is in a perpetual state of identity crisis and overcompensation. There are a multitude of symptoms that are manifested by this overcompensation, some can be perceived as positive, while most are unfortunately negative in nature. An example of the positive manifestation, can be a job assignment to which an incarcerated person may take wholeheartedly and make it the central point of their

existence. Negative examples can be adherence to the convict values, gang membership, etc.

For the sake of being completely honest, in the few weeks of orientation, as I was being introduced to the structure, curriculum and the rules of the program, I began to be suspicious of its motives. As an inmate, I have grown to be weary of any goodwill shown to me by the administration or anyone else that does not have to wear a state blue uniform and is not related to me through blood or marriage. I was not alone in my suspicions, even though I myself did not voice them; some of my fellow inside-students did. As an example, I will use a comment made to me and which I found to be very credible in those early weeks: "This program is really for the real college students and they need us there to enhance their experience. We are just props, so I wouldn't worry about any of the assignments."

As weeks went by, I gradually began to realize how wrong my initial views of the program were. While it may be true to some extent that the real college students were much more important to the program, I also

realized that it is because they have so much more potential to do something about the injustices revealed to us by the curriculum. I realized that our role as inside-students was not just to learn from the program, but also to let the real college students see for themselves who some of the two and a half million inmates are. In other words, to put a human face on the numbers. And from this perspective, I no longer minded being a prop, even if it was sometimes uncomfortable to open myself for strangers.

In addition, any further reservations were completely removed when our professor along with the program aide showed up on the extra day for the extracurricular writing workshop that had only 4 or 5 inmates and one outside college student. That act in itself had convinced me beyond the shadow of the doubt, of the significance the program attributed to the inside-student learning.

PART II: IMPACT BY CURRICULUM:
ONCE AGAIN, IN ORDER TO MAKE SURE THAT THOSE WHO DO NOT WEAR A BLUE UNIFORM OF AN OHIO INMATE, CAN FULLY COMPREHEND THIS PARTICULAR IMPACT OF THE INSIDE-OUT PROGRAM, I MUST ONCE AGAIN DIGRESS INTO THE PSYCHOLOGY OF AN INMATE’S MIND.

In order to learn how to live in prison, one must learn how to cope with being in prison. It is easy to see who is good at it and who is not. Those that have developed the best coping mechanisms are usually the most stable and consistent. What is a coping mechanism as applied to the incarcerated? The simple answer would be a developed worldview that generates a sense of belonging and purpose. There are many forms of this coping mechanism and once again some can be viewed as positive, such as those that focus on family, religion or self-development, while others are negative in nature that focus on finding ones place and purpose in negative aspects of prison life.

There are also coping mechanisms of somewhat neutral nature that create a sense of belonging and purpose from the incarcerated person’s uniqueness. For example, there are many inmates who have spent many years in prison and are extremely proud of their clean institutional records or are proud of

their accomplishments in regards to programs they have created or education they have received. There are even some who somehow find purpose in the unrealistic amount of time they have served or will serve. Incarcerated individuals will find meaning and purpose in anything, as long as one can find uniqueness in it that will support a separation from others in the environment specifically designed to make everyone the same. So that they are able to create a functional coping mechanism.

As an inmate I was always more inclined to the neutral type of the coping mechanisms. Several things separated me from others and gave me my perception of uniqueness as an inmate. First was my sentence of natural life and an attitude it generated that whatever prison I was in was my house and everyone else was just renting space. Second, my record of having only two conduct reports in the past twenty years, twelve of which I spent in the most violent prisons Ohio has to offer. Third, the programs I created and the impact my work had on other inmates. Somehow, I was able to twist reality and form from it a coping mechanism that made life somehow not just bearable, but even meaningful at times.

And then, a friend of mine convinced me to sign up for the Inside-Out program.

It is not easy to read about yourself in some textbook. To realize that you are not unique. To read about your most intimate thoughts, beliefs and coping mechanisms as if they were some daily rituals of the Capuchin monkeys in the wild. To watch as the realization begins to sink in, of how delusional you really are. And to find yourself once again feeling as scared and dizzy as in those first days, weeks and months of incarceration, only this time consciously knowing that there are no lies you can tell yourself to find comfort.

I almost quit the program. The only reason I did not, is because at that time quitting was even scarier than coming back. Somehow, a group of strangers, most of whom were just born when I went to prison and with whom I had virtually nothing in common, briefly became the most

stabilizing force in my life.

Until I became familiar with the curriculum of the Inside-Out program, until I read about myself and many others like me, life in prison and the mechanics of the criminal justice system were mostly of the practical nature. The coping mechanisms and philosophical aspects of life in prison were mostly hidden in subconsciousness. While I would like to say that I am glad for everything that I learned in the program and even that I am now better for having all this knowledge, that would be a lie. Perhaps it makes me a coward, but all I keep thinking of is that ignorance is bliss and that I find myself at the crossroads. I don’t know what comes next, but the way I look at things will never be the same.

PART III: IMPACT BY ASSOCIATION:

I am one of the inmates who are serving a life without parole sentence in Ohio. I have committed crimes, been convicted, sentenced, and sent to prison at the age of twenty one and now, nearly twenty years later, I am forty years old.

There is nothing unique about the road that led me to prison. Bad company, drug addiction, and eventually total loss of control that culminated in crimes that I find hard to understand or explain to this day. That last year of freedom was like a nightmare wrapped in a dense fog. Attempts at treatments, brief successes, relapses, several failed suicide attempts, and eventually the crimes followed by another suicide attempt.

Crimes are indefensible. As a rational person, I understand that to those I’ve hurt by my actions it matters little what drove me. What matters is that I’ve caused them unimaginable loss and my actions have altered their lives forever. There can be no words or excuses that would have the power to alleviate the pain. I know this, because many times in the past two decades, I’ve imagined how it would feel if someone took from me someone I love with my whole being.

Almost every morning as I open my eyes I regret being alive. You see, despite my crimes, pretty much all those who knew me before prison



and friends I’ve made inside will agree that I am a decent person. My family, also thinks that I am a good person and supports me to this day. So, while it will be relatively easy to off myself at any time, it is not an option. What kind of a message will suicide send to my family? A message that my life was so miserable that I could not bear to take another breath, to live another day? To thank them for all the support over the last twenty years with the statement that they have failed? So you see, it is not about me or my life any longer, it is about hurting more people with my actions should I choose to end my suffering.

This is a new insight for me. Up until a few months ago my views on suicide were similar to those of Steppenwolf, the main character of the novel by the same name written by Hermann Hesse. The Steppenwolf was a profoundly miserable and depressed man who held a view, that at any moment he could choose to end his life if it became unbearable. To him, the door to suicide was always open. He even set himself a date on his birthday at the specific age, when he would actually permit himself to do it. During some especially difficult times, he would fantasize about that last day, about how he will actually do it, and that gave him the necessary strength to bear his misery. It had actually turned into a curiosity, to see how much he can endure before he crawls through that door that leads to the end of his suffering.

Similarly, for many years I drew comfort from the thought that the same escape was available to me as well. The fantasies of how I will actually do it and the immediate liberation became my ever-present

companions and the sources of strength. And then I met a young woman, a college student who turned my world upside down with the one following sentence: “If I had to end my life, I would hire someone to do it”.

I don’t remember why or by whom that subject was brought up, but that statement was constantly on my mind for the whole week until I had a chance to speak with her again. There was something that bothered me about it, but I couldn’t figure out what. At first, I thought that not everyone can do it themselves, but, somehow, I felt that that was not the reason. Finally, when I saw her during the next class, I reminded her of what she said and asked one question. Why? This is what she said: “Because it would be much easier for my parents to accept that I was a victim of a crime, instead of facing the fact that I was so miserable that I could not live another day and they could not do anything to help”.

And just like that, a nearly twenty year old, carefully created and functioning coping mechanism was nearly shattered into useless pieces.

In conclusion, all I can say is that the reason I took this program is for something to do. My thinking was that I might learn a few things worth knowing if I am lucky. Due to my experience within the criminal justice system and the inexperience of the real college students, this program was probably designed to cover the basics that I already knew. Instead, almost a month after the program has ended I feel like an amateur boxer who just spent three rounds in the ring with Muhammad Ali. My head is ringing and both eyes are so swollen that I can hardly see one yard ahead of

me.

For the last three weeks, all I kept saying to myself is that I need to find something to keep me busy, to keep my mind occupied, to pull my head as far as it will go inside the shell. But, I am not a turtle, I am a man. And whether it is comfortable or not, will have to deal with reality sooner or later. And as this paper demonstrates it is rather sooner, thanks to my professor who noticed the absence of my final paper and pointedly reminded me of it via prisoner e-mail system. And I think that it worked for the best, because if I wrote this paper when it was actually due, it would have resembled the ramblings of someone, as they are being carried semiconscious out of the ring.

Stan, *Inside PFC Members*

Interview with Dr. Renee, Professor of Political Science, University of Toledo Instructor, Inside-Out Program and member, People for Change

**Conducted by Mark Norton
former Inside member,
People for Change**

DR. RENEE:
I'M HAPPY TO INTRODUCE READERS TO INSIDE/OUT AND TALK ABOUT MY INVOLVEMENT, HOW IT STARTED, AND THE MISSION OF THIS COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE UNIVERSITY OF TOLEDO AND TOLEDO CORRECTIONAL.

MARK:
My first question to you is, how did you come up with the idea of bringing inside and outside students together to form a coalition of people who wanted learn more about laws, bills and mass incarceration?

DR. RENEE:
I did not come up with the idea. A man named Paul, incarcerated at the Graterford State Prison outside of Philadelphia, came up with the idea. He was meeting with a Criminology professor named Lori Pompa when she brought her students from Temple University to do a tour of the prison and speak briefly with a few men incarcerated there. Paul said he wished the conversation could go on longer and was there a possibility of creating a class including Temple students that met at the prison?

Lori Pompa took the idea and created a class at Temple University in 1997 that would include students attending

Temple University and students incarcerated at Graterford. In 2003 Dr. Pompa got a grant from the Soros Foundation to develop a curriculum for a week-long institute to train other professors how to do a class using the model she and the students at Graterford and Temple had developed over the prior six years. The model is based in democratic educational principles, using circles to facilitate discussion and connection among students, integrative classroom exercises, and promoting active and engaged learning.

Since 2003 hundreds of faculty members from across the world have become Inside/Out instructors. We each attended a week-long institute in order to learn how to facilitate these classes. The Inside/Out Center at Temple University continues to promote the model and train faculty at institutions in Philadelphia, Toronto (in Canada), Detroit, West Virginia, and other sites.

I went to the institute with Dr. Elliot and Dr. J (a Criminal Justice professor at UT who has since left) in 2010 and together we started the program at Toledo Correctional.

People for Change was started by students from the first class we taught. It has been meeting twice monthly to create educational opportunities on the inside and the outside of the walls of Toledo Correctional since spring of 2011. Many individuals have come and gone over the years because they graduate, move away, get transferred or released, develop other interests, encounter disciplinary issues (both inside and outside students have encountered disciplinary issues), and other reasons. But PFC keeps going because a core of individuals, including myself, think it should, but more importantly because new students from each class continue to engage and take on the responsibilities of keeping it going.

MARK:
I also want to know, where do you see this program in the next ten years?

The program will be what the participating membership makes it in ten years as they confront challenges and grab opportunities along the way. And I hope I am still involved in some way!

People for Change is a local organization that will remain local

because it involves students who take the University of Toledo classes and students incarcerated at Toledo Correctional. The amount that people on the inside and the outside of the walls know about it depends upon the willingness of the participants to explain, talk about, and promote the program through various forms of media and word of mouth. We have been on the local news and publish a newsletter that we distribute to a network of interested readers on the inside and outside. But our primary mission is not mass mobilization or promotion. We plant seeds by educating individuals and groups who take up the critical thinking, reading, and writing skills cultivated through Inside/Out and People for Change to change the world.

In ten years I hope all of those touched by Inside/Out and People for Change are continuing to do the right thing by one another as democratic citizens of the world, whether that be through prison education initiatives or radical activism or writing poetry or doing music or work or familial and community commitments.

I love doing the work of Inside/Out and PFC just like I love doing the work of teaching and research at the University of Toledo. My aspiration is that everyone involved learns about being a proactive citizen in a democratic society and about how important it is to work collaboratively to cultivate conditions for empowerment of each and justice for all. Doing that work in a constantly changing group like People for Change is an ongoing effort and often a challenge, but one that has resulted in beautiful and inspiring projects, events, and programs; People for Change is creating an ongoing legacy in its own right.

MARK:
What do you get out of this program?

DR. RENEE:
I get to spread the wealth that I consider education to be and learn about myself in the meantime. I am a privileged person in so many ways so I consider it my obligation to share

what has been generously given to me by my teachers and colleagues. I learn something every time I enter the space of Inside/Out or PFC. And I try to share that learning with those I engage with in other facets of my life.

MARK:
Do you think that what you are doing is helping people?

DR. RENEE
Help is a very broad term, so it depends upon what one means by it. It often means that someone is giving and someone else is taking. Education is not about giving and taking, it is about mutual engagement and collaborative work; it ultimately requires a trusting relationship among and between those involved.

I should also say that Inside/Out and People for Change is not about what I am doing—I did not individually invent or come up with any part of what we do, though I do help facilitate the activities by finding resources and keeping stuff organized. Inside/Out and People for Change is about what WE are doing. I hope what we are doing is educating ourselves and others and cultivating a culture of curiosity and learning. Inside/Out and People for Change is not about “helping” people. It is about creating the conditions as best we can (given the restrictions of the system) in which participants can think and learn independently (and then work with others in a similar manner if they choose to do so).

MARK:
Could you explain why you made the program to be a in house thing rather than bring it to the forefront?

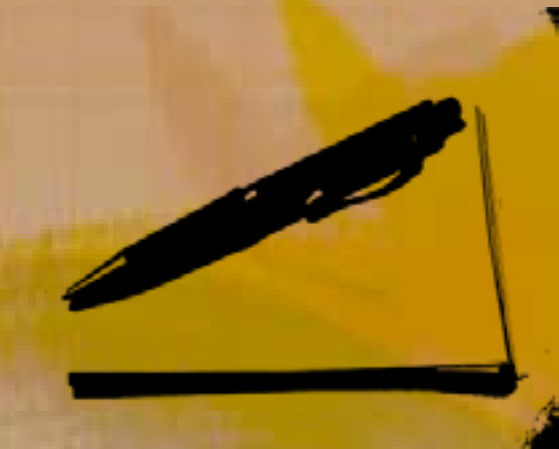
DR. RENEE:
The circles of collaboration we form in the Inside/Out classes and in People for Change are part of a national movement in prison education. So, while we do unique things in People for Change (the newsletter, family days, community activities, educational workshops, etc.), as an organization, for better or worse, we are accountable to forces larger than ourselves. Every participant is an ambassador in their

own right for Inside/Out and People for Change. Every time an individual speaks about the program with someone not yet aware of it, seeds are planted. We are “in house” because we do our work in a prison setting and in a University setting. Those institutions both enable and limit what we do; it is not about what any one person wants.

Real learning about justice and injustice is not accomplished through social media campaigns or getting on the nightly news. It is the slow, steady work of committed individuals, groups and movements. As an educational collaborative we are at the “forefront” in the sense that the model we promote, of education and engagement inside and outside prison walls, is deeply radical, at least in comparison to traditional forms of education in the University and programs in the prisons.

Most importantly, to my mind, through our organizational principles and activities we enact the change we want to see in those institutions. Hundreds of students have come through the UT/ToCI Inside/Out classes and People for Change over the last eight years and I am grateful to have had the honor to work with each and every person who has given their time and energy to these projects.

POETRY PROSES



How to Be a Man

The May-June 2018 session of the Writing (for) Your Life workshop read Ron Carlson’s flash fiction story, below, in preparation for the May 29th session. For the following week, participants were asked to write their own story modeled after Carlson’s. His original, below, is followed by stories the workshop participants wrote.

When you move left for a hard-hit ground ball and misplay it and it goes between your legs and into left field allowing the runner on third to score the winning run, don't look in your mitt as if the ground ball which would have saved the day is in there because it is not. Stand up straight and remove your glove and carry it by the thumb in your off hand. Walk with your chin at altitude toward the dugout. Keep your eyes open. Do not grimace. Look for the coach's face and when you find it, look him in the eye and nod. You know what happened.

Ron Carlson’s *Blue Box: Flash Fiction and Poetry (2014)*

When you push down the gas pedal during a driving lesson, you look behind the car to back up, and all of a sudden the mailbox rushes into your rear bumper, don’t stare at your father as if it did not happen because it did. Calmly put the car in park. Turn the car off. Get out with your dad and walk to the rear of the auto. Look at the damage. Then look your dad straight in the eye and nod. “I am ready for the rest of the lesson.”

Paul, *Inside Contributor*

I was not considerate of my younger brother’s wishes when my father asked me to take him to the mall to buy some DVDs. It was a journey that took one hour by public transit. We ended up buying everything I wanted and nothing my brother Micko desired. The very next day we had to return to the mall and return the DVDs for the ones my brother wanted. I should have asked my brother if he was ok with the DVDs I shoved into his hand. A real man has consideration for others.

Ernest, *Inside Contributor*

When your five-year-old says "Draw me a lion," don't tell him not to climb into your lap without permission. Don't tell him you don't have the time, or that you don't know how to draw or that this is the wrong color crayon or to "Say please." Sit down with that purple crayon and draw the best damn lion you can. Remember that this is a child who draws the sky as a blue band across the top of the page and the earth as a green strip across the bottom. It doesn't occur to him to explain all that white in between. He could care less that it looks like a lion by the time it's finished. It doesn't matter to him that he asked the right way. It matters that you did it. And that for five whole minutes you were his.

Phil, *Inside Contributor*

It starts with one night, just four weeks later it becomes nervous anticipation and shadows of doubt. One month grows into nine hurry to the hospital your baby’s on time. No longer called son, junior or boy, now you are father, mister and sir. You no longer have a job now it's a career. A child earns a child’s wage irresponsibility, freedom, and joy. A man earns a man's wage responsibility, honor and respect. Try not to forget if you buy a 6-pack of beer you'll be sharing with no one, buy a 6-pack of soda you'll be sharing with your family.

Jay, *Inside Contributor*

This poem was written as part of a final project in the Inside/Out class of spring, 2018, titled “Storytelling and Law.” Student groups picked novels to write about using what they learned in the class. The following is a poetic “analysis” of I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou.

The questions we ask
What is right? What is wrong?
How could a story affect the law?
How could you give then take away that precious gift
From a child so small?
A “Jury of Her Peers”, but I think they got it wrong.

The impact from the statement of a victim
Can change the direction of the way that we listen.
And if your vision is equal to that of the system,
Then there’s no way you can see the way we’re living.

A motherless child
But yet, could feel so loved from her older brother’s smile.
Her black family owned the only store in the loneliest town.
She’s from up north
But as a child she was sent down south
Back in the days when Jim Crow had shit locked down.
The age of 8, she was sent back up
But like a child’s building blocks, she was broke back down.
Story turned so foul
It turned her brother’s smile upside down.

And we always wonder why the caged bird sings,
But we refuse to be bound, so we use the words of a song to replace those wings.
So fly away lil bird and escape those things.
The injustices and the hatred
Can’t we all just agree that we hate those things?

Let’s think of a few words that can replace those things.
Like love and justice for women who can’t shake those things
Or black men who are caged in and can’t break those chains
The type of freedom that made Martin Luther King chase those dreams

Rather a bird or a man
We were all made to be free.
Made to be loved
Not to be enslaved or be judged
Our mind is our freedom.
You want that, you gotta take it in blood.

Avery, *Inside Member PFC*

Asked and Answered

One Question

Two Inside Members of PFC Answer

Answers by Steve

Answers by Marko

What would an outsider be surprised to learn about in prison?

That you can see first hand why so many people come back to prison. Their family, girlfriend, and so-called friends continue to enable prisoners' bad habits, decisions, and actions instead of helping solve their problems.

An outsider would be surprised to learn that prison is not what it all plays out to be on TV and in movies. There are many smart and educated inmates with plenty of talents.

If you could change one thing about prison policy, what would you change?

I would allow all prisoners with earned good behavior to have conjugal visits with their spouse on their visiting list. It would keep families together and prisoners would be on their best model behavior, having that visit to look forward to. And, the spouse would stand even closer to her children's father because she'll have him emotionally and physically. It would stop drug trafficking, drug use, and violence in prison.

I would change the education and programming policy. We need an upgrade.

What gives you hope while incarcerated?

God, my momma, and me knowing that I have an out-date, and having help when I get out. Meaning, there are people that believe in me and have high hopes for me. It is reassuring and comforting.

My mom, family, support system, and faith give me hope.

Questions about the Inside/Out Program

Maddie (outside member) and Cory (inside member)

What most interested you about the Inside/Out Prison Exchange Program at Toledo Correctional?

What interested me initially about the Inside Out class was that it is a college based program. When I first came to Toledo in 2016 I intended to take the Inside Out class, because I had heard so many great things about it from people whom I respect. And I feel very fortunate that I was able to come back to T.o.C.I. and experience the Inside Out class.

Did participating in the course change you in any significant way?

Honestly, I do feel I've changed since participating in the Inside Out class. Mostly in the way I take my time to analyze certain situations, so that I can try to see things from several points of view, as opposed to just my point of view.

What would you identify as the most important thing you learned in the class?

The most important thing I took from the Inside-Out class was confidence in myself, and a sense of accomplishment. I also learned that I'm not really as much as an introvert as I thought I was, and I found the direction I would like to take my life in the future.

Why did you come back to be a part of People for Change?

The reason why I came back to be a part of PFC., is because every time I come I learn something new. I learn something new about myself, the law, philosophy, etc. I also appreciate the fact that I am treated like a human being, and that my thoughts and opinions are valued in the group. It also just feels like I thrive in the PFC/Inside Out environment.

What would you tell people thinking about taking the Inside/Out class?

What I would tell people who would want to take this

class, is that it is a challenge. A challenge that should be embraced, because once you embrace the challenge you will get much more out of Inside Out class than you thought you would. And the individuals in the classes are amazing people to work with, and learn from.

Do you plan to continue your formal education when you are released?

When I am released from prison, I do plan on furthering my education. I would like to attend law school at Case Western Reserve, and I would like to work with the A.C.L.U. to help the oppressed and disenfranchised receive justice. I think that helping the people who are wronged by our criminal justice system is something I need to do, because I know exactly how it feels to be mistreated by our criminal justice system.



Inspirational Playlist

Playlist curated by Mr. Miller

“Here” by Alessia Cara

“Here” helped me understand that I’m different. It helped me accept my differences and welcome myself to who I really am!

- Andrew

“Just Be a Man About It” by Toni Braxton

This song helped me understand that I have the ability to do whatever I want with my life. Why choose to destroy part of others’?

- Andrew

“Be Careful” by Sparkle feat. R. Kelly

This song gave me a better understanding on what goes around, comes around. So I now give out positive energy because I’m tired of the negativity!

- Andrew

“Man in the Mirror” by Michael Jackson

Because I want so much to help and reach out to others and uplift them. Yet, I must start changing my ways and not justify behavior, starting with the man in the mirror.

- Steve

Reflections on the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Experience

I was given the opportunity to be a part of Inside/Out in the Spring of 2018. This particular class was unique in that it took place within a maximum security institution, which had never been done in the state of Ohio. For maximum security inmates, there is typically very little educational programming available. In fact, if an inmate had already received a GED or high school diploma, there was none.

In this specific Inside/Out class, the course was titled “Storytelling and Law.” We studied how storytelling impacts the way we perceive, study, and practice law. It is hard to imagine a better place to study these things than in a prison. Since the discussions were taking place within that context, the topics were “in your face,” so to speak. We were having class in a kind of physical manifestation of the ideas presented. Many of the outside students claimed to be preparing for law school. Getting to know the stories of the people on the other side of the law they will study had to be a valuable experience. I know it was for me; I got to hear the opinions and insights of others who may not see things from my perspective.

Initially, my only goal in going through Inside/Out was to earn college credits. By the end of the course, I felt like I had gained a better sense of direction. Honestly, I didn’t think it would be as difficult as it was. No doubt the work required was more than I expected. This wasn’t some watered down version of a college level class, it was the real thing. Coupled with that was that being around the outside students made me feel extremely uncomfortable. I’ve been in prison for 10 years. Being in a room with a bunch of strangers isn’t exactly my idea of a good time. The outside students didn’t seem nervous at all, which in turn made me even more nervous. I have no doubt that when people come in here they have to battle feeling uncomfortable, of course. I have a deep respect for anyone willing to come into a place like this in order to work with people that they don’t even know.

This class caused a paradigm shift for me. If there was one thing that stuck out from the materials, it is that people’s stories matter. The basic understanding that human beings have intrinsic worth and ought to be treated decently is not accomplished by legislation. Legislation presupposes those things in order to be meaningful. We feel outraged toward injustice in society because we believe that human beings are valuable. But does society immediately become guilty of the very thing they claim to be trying to prevent? We create environments where we attempt to protect ourselves from people who treat others as less than human. We then treat the ones we condemn for acting inhumanely like they are worth nothing.

People tend to ride to the level of other people’s expectations of them. It’s no coincidence that most of us in here grew up in a climate where our surroundings told us we were worth less than other people. It’s true that decisions were made by us as free moral agents to commit acts that may have hurt or even destroyed lives.

However, if we find that there is an overwhelming amount of evidence that certain environments repeatedly give rise to certain issues, then wisdom tells us to take those things into account. Nobody sets out to live a life like those of the individuals who end up in prison. There has to be a major shift in thinking for someone to go from dreaming about becoming a doctor or lawyer as a child to being willing to sacrifice an entire future over something essentially meaningless.

The Inside/Out program does more than just educate inmates, it humanizes us. It creates an opportunity for people to see prisoners as actual human beings, with hopes and aspirations for a better life like everyone else. We have families, we have children who love us; and, like everyone we want to be known for more than our mistakes. All of my best friends are men who are doing life sentences. The state has labeled some of them unfit to ever re-enter society. That is, regardless of any accomplishment or proof of change, they will never get a chance to show they can live as free men. These are the best men I have ever met in my entire life. Men who inspire me to live with integrity and encourage me to never lose sight of what is important in life. And they are living in circumstances that would undo the average man within hours. Why are they “thrown away?” Can you imagine what someone like that could offer a youth who is about to ruin their whole life to gain acceptance by their peers? Couldn’t these men’s experience strip away the veneer of the lifestyles that seem so appealing from the outside, but that destroy men’s lives from within?

I have seen more public discourse on prison reform in the past two years than ever before. Clearly, people are recognizing that something has gone wrong. Fyodor Dostoevsky said, “You can judge a society by how well it treats its prisoners.” It is programs like Inside/Out that show the way. They really change public opinion working on the front lines. Criminal justice reform may be fashionable now; we should remember that became possible through the people who were advocating for us when it was not.

Matt, *Inside Participant in Spring ‘18 Inside/Out class, “Storytelling and Law”*

Resources

Black & Pink (B&P)

“Black & Pink is an open family of LGBTQ prisoners and ‘free world’ allies who support each other. Write for a free subscription to our monthly newspaper. Sign up for our pen pal program and other services through the newspaper. We offer a limited amount of advocacy for people in prison or formerly incarcerated. Our chapters do local organizing and support.”

614 Columbia Rd
Dorchester, MA 02125

www.blackandpink.org
members@blackandpink.org

Wings Beyond Walls

“Wings Beyond Walls seeks to connect incarcerated and hospitalized people who self-identify as having mental health concerns with those beyond the walls that hold them. Any initial letter sent to our mailing address by an inmate or hospitalized patient will be read by our volunteer coordinator in order to find the ideal volunteer match.”


P.O. Box 7019
Richmond, VA 23221

<http://wingsbeyondwalls.wordpress.com>
wbw@mindfulliberation.org

Register to vote, update your address or find your county board of elections on the Ohio Secretary of State’s website:
<https://olvr.sos.state.oh.us/>.

Contact the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles for information about the 6-month driver’s license reinstatement fee amnesty: (844) 644-6268 (OHIOBMV) or www.bmv.ohio.gov



The background of the image is a light-colored grid, possibly graph paper, overlaid with large, expressive, and somewhat chaotic brushstrokes in shades of yellow, orange, and light brown. The strokes vary in thickness and direction, creating a textured, painterly effect. The text is centered in the middle of the image, overlaid on the grid and brushstrokes.

Freedom, family gone
Silver cuffs, cold dark, white snow
I sit in despair

Paul, *Inside Contributor*