

Reflecting upon my time in the Canadian federal penitentiary system where I am completing a sentence premised on the idea that I could use this period of my life to work on myself for my own betterment and that of society, I cannot help but think about the disconnect between official policy and practice. Below, I highlight a few such gaps that if bridged would make an important difference for both federal prisoners and Canadian communities to which the vast majority of us will one day return.

### **ACCESS TO EDUCATION**

I feel that there are not enough opportunities to further our education while in prison. Outside I work with computers as a web developer and since arriving in federal prison I have been unable to find anything, aside from the books that I was sent by my family, to help me further my career in programming.

Web development and programming are rapidly booming industries (Venture Beat, 2017). We would not need any network or internet access to learn basic programming or improve upon existing skills (see Shea, 2017). It seems crazy to me that I have a skill that will help me to become a productive member of society upon my release, but I am not encouraged or even allowed to practice my trade so that I will not be behind in the industry when I am released.

Another point on education is the lack of choice in terms of distance education courses available without internet access (CSC, 2018), almost all of the correspondence courses available are on the internet. The courses that I was able to find, through assistance from my family who have been looking since I entered federal prison, are either accounting or business courses. I cannot even find any pure math distance courses (e.g. statistics, probability or calculus) that do not require internet access, and these are the next best things to computer science for me. It would be great if while I am incarcerated I could further my education after finishing high school and not come out of prison with less of a chance of getting a good job than when I was arrested. I feel like the system is not built to help prisoners succeed upon their release, but rather just warehouse us here until our release date arrives. I have explained my situation to multiple people here, including school counsellors, teachers and parole officers, and have been told time

and time again that there is no way for me to get on a computer. There are only certain institutions that have computer programs available. We have some computers in my current institution and I do not see why we are unable to have any computer courses here as well.

## **BOOKS**

For those of us who try to further our education on our own time by bringing in books to study, we are limited to only bringing in a small number of books. During my last sentence I tried to bring in boxes of books on subjects from substance abuse to computer programming and was told that I could only have 10 because more than that would be a fire hazard (CSC, 2015). In addition to this, we are only allowed to order from a small selection that has no specialized educational books and we are also limited in the amount we can spend (Josephy, 2017).

## **PRISONERS' PAY**

In terms of the pay system I believe that it is incredibly unfair. Instead of increasing our wages to keep pace with inflation (Shook, 2018) they have been cut and the deductions have been increased (ibid). The price of food goes up year after year and our pay remains the same. As a result, we can buy less and less. For a day's work, \$2.80 seems a little abusive to me.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, under the current circumstances it is very difficult to improve myself and my education while I am incarcerated. I thought the reason for being held in prison was supposed to be rehabilitation, but I have a hard time believing that is the case right now.

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