

Can Lifers Make Amends? *Anonymous Prisoner 4*

I am a prisoner serving a life sentence with the parole eligibility set at well beyond a decade. For the offence brought up against me I pled guilty. It has been more than a decade since my incarceration began and I am currently in transition to making the move to a minimum facility in a year or two. Since my initial arrest I took advantage of the tools available to me (i.e. high school diploma, anger management programs, as well as life skills training). Note that I did not start my sentence off on the right foot as I was young minded at the time. Over the years, I came to realize the things that are important to me (i.e. family, success outside of prison, and the need to prove I am more than just another statistic). Through changes brought on by the Harper government (Cook and Roesch, 2012) prisoners across Canada have suffered by means of having funding for programs cut (see Bassio, this issue) that they depend on to make necessary changes in their lives and safely transition from prison to society.

I am currently imprisoned in Archambault medium security Institution and I can see the effects of these cuts (i.e. lack of program availability, inadequate post high school training, etc.). Over the course of my decade plus behind the walls I have completed my high school diploma, received a G.E.D, and I am currently updating my high school diploma to Quebec standards. However, I cannot do anything in the meantime because college courses are not available nor are the tutors to teach said courses. I understand the hardship in society by the working-class citizens of this country, but would adequate training and education not contribute to the overall rehabilitation of those convicted of crimes and sentenced for more than five years, benefitting everyone as a result? The lack of basic trades makes it more difficult to find work and integrate into society post-release.

Nevertheless, in regard to the topic of life sentences I find it to be a complex subject because there are some people who commit very harmful acts and deserve to be incarcerated. However, there are also those who committed harmful acts out of desperation or because they were at a crossroads in their lives. These persons of unfortunate circumstances, myself included, deserve the chance to reintegrate into society without the stigma, bias, and punitive practices that can force some to spend the rest of their lives behind bars. While incarcerated I came to realize the errors of the life I chose. My mind is no longer what it was when I was younger, and I can now critically reflect

on the situations I face and those I have yet to encounter. The realization of my offence made me aware of the harm and damage I did, but more so my inability to be a contributing member of society.

I am saddened because I feel that each person convicted of murder deserves the chance to amend their wrongs. The idea of mandatory minimum sentences sends the message that there is no hope when it comes to rehabilitation. In my circumstance, I have continually made the effort to improve on myself and my situation through available programs and open dialogues with my parole officer about my offences. The road to my freedom has been a bumpy one, but I have not given up hope even when it seems that the very governing body that apply the laws are subjecting the prison population to practices that restrict inherent human rights, access to basic training, and the tools needed to make a safe transition into society and make amends.

REFERENCES

Cook, Alana and Ronald Roesch (2012) “‘Tough on Crime’ Reforms: What Psychology Has to Say About the Recent and Proposed Justice Policy in Canada”, *Canadian Psychology*, 53(3): 217-225.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anonymous Prisoner 4 is imprisoned at Archambault Institution.