

# PRISONERS' STRUGGLES

## **A Doorway Out of Darkness:**

### **Education to Heal**

#### *A Manifesto by Men Who Are Incarcerated*

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Let us succeed and prosper. Brothers and sisters, let's strive to improve our lives. We deserve to be educated; we have rights.

We are the "jailbirds" and "hoodlums" of the popular media: outcasts, losers, dead beats, lifers, misfits.

Perceived as waste to be rounded up, warehoused, locked away in overcrowded gyms and chapels,  
We are regularly excluded from the decisions that affect our lives.

We are human; we are one: mind, body, and spirit.  
We have beliefs, smarts, strength, equality.  
We have insights, opinions, talents, interests.  
We are artists, writers, thinkers, workers, students, mentors;  
We are sons, fathers, mooshums, brothers, friends, and community members.

We are given little to no chance of rehabilitation  
As our government cuts funding to our programs  
We are called dumb, unwilling, unable, hopeless, and undeserving.

But we are willing  
We are capable  
And we have the right to be heard.

Our experience of education has often been traumatic, confusing, ostracizing, and disabling:  
The history we were taught was not our own,  
There were few supports for our needs,  
We felt like we did not belong.

But we have a right to education<sup>1</sup> that is motivational, empowering, strengthening, and inspirational  
Independent, challenging, flexible, and focused

A welcoming, non-discriminating environment  
Holistic, non-linear, and open to many teaching methods.

Education is a journey that takes dedication:  
A tool for understanding, an adventure,  
A source of pride  
And a way to understand ourselves, our situation, and our rights.

WE have the capacity to

- educate and be educated
- design and deliver our own educational programs
- meet with, support, motivate, and mentor each other
- empower ourselves and others

WE need to

- be respected for what we know and what we want to know
- have opportunities for expression, connection, and communication
- have access to resources, space, educational technologies, libraries, and teachers<sup>2</sup>
- have access to a variety of educational opportunities: Indigenous languages, humanities and social sciences, creative arts, law and human rights, politics and voter rights, trades, food safety, life skills, public speaking, interview skills, budgeting, mental and physical health awareness (H.I.V./AIDS and Hep C), and A.A. and N.A.

OUR educational programs must

- focus on what we need, not on what others think we need
- focus on our Indigenous history, culture, and knowledge, from our perspective
- recognize all aspects of an individual: physical,<sup>3</sup> mental, emotional, and spiritual
- address a range of needs: social, occupational, academic, physical, and rehabilitative
- include LGBTQ perspectives and awareness
- be available to all prisoners: sentenced and remanded<sup>4</sup>
- provide access to information about the justice system and the courts

- provide knowledge of the supports and programs available upon release

WE stand in *solidarity* with our brothers and sisters who are incarcerated in this and other countries who often suffer great abuses of their human rights. We demand that our governments take action in our countries, but also at the international level, so that our health and human rights, including the right to education, are respected, protected and promoted, and we are involved in all decisions that affect our lives.

We are part of the *solution*, not part of the problem!

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> As affirmed by the United Nations, education is a basic human need and a human right (1), and “the right to basic education in prisons has been shown to be a prerequisite for achieving the internationally agreed goal of ensuring a basic level of education for all” (i). For the United Nations/UNESCO full report, see Basic Education in Prisons (1995) at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001116/111660eo.pdf>.
- <sup>2</sup> Currently there is one teacher therapist at the Saskatoon Provincial Correctional Centre (SCC) for over 400 men.
- <sup>3</sup> Due to overcrowding, the men at SCC do not have access to the gym, which is being used as an overflow dorm. The main classroom is also used for overflow.
- <sup>4</sup> Prisoners on remand are awaiting trial or sentencing and are not eligible for any of the core correctional programs. If men on remand are released with “time served”, they will not have had access to any programming while inside.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

This manifesto was written by men incarcerated at the Saskatoon Provincial Correctional Centre as part of the Inspired Minds: All Nations Creative Writing program, a partnership between SCC and the University of Saskatchewan. It is based on and borrows language from a similar manifesto, “Nothing About Us Without Us: A Manifesto by People Who Use Illegal Drugs” (see [http://www.aidsalliance.org/assets/000/000/377/310-2.-Nothing-about-us-without-us-Manifesto-\(English\)\\_original.pdf?1405520241](http://www.aidsalliance.org/assets/000/000/377/310-2.-Nothing-about-us-without-us-Manifesto-(English)_original.pdf?1405520241)), which encourages the free use, adaptation, and dissemination of its contents. The manifesto was originally published on June 2015 as part of the Land, Peoples, Justice initiative (see

<http://landpeoplesjustice.usask.ca/index.php>). Participants in this project expressed their hope that people who are incarcerated around the world will either adopt this manifesto or use it as the basis for creating their own manifesto. Reproduction of the manifesto is encouraged, as is adaptation of its contents. For further information, contact the Inspired Minds program via Dr. Nancy Van Styvendale at the University of Saskatchewan via email at [n.vanstyvendale@usask.ca](mailto:n.vanstyvendale@usask.ca) or by mail at the following address:

Inspired Minds Program  
c/o Dr. Nancy Van Styvendale  
College of Arts & Science  
Arts 414  
9 Campus Drive  
University of Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada  
S7N 5A5