

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE DEMISE OF
THE COLORADO DEPT. OF CORRECTIONS AND
POOR DRUG OFFENDER REFORM

by: Stephan Darris

While incarcerated in the state of Colorado I think it's fair to say that your past dictates your future. I am not a lifer or a violent offender. I am a repeat drug offender that has witnessed some of the most vile atrocity's that the system can deliver. I think that most people in this institution live under propaganda, false hope, and make believe promises. It took me years to understand that without all, you might as well be looking into the face of death.

In the past to date I've heard countless individual's say "If it doesn't kill you, it'll make you stronger". I don't think I can agree with that. I've done countless meaningless years in this system. None of which killed me obviously. But none of which has made me stronger. Maybe more cunning or manipulative. But stronger? I sincerely beg to differ.

Countless years I have participated in "Reform Theory". An improper term which basically describe Colorado legislators and their Senate or House bills that are designed/written to rehabilitate in the eyes of society but never really take effect on the offender. Some bills when passed have somewhat momentarily relieved the courts of congestion and the overcrowding in Colorado prisons. But it only lasts for awhile as they continue to incarcerate at a rate that is higher than that of the released rehabilitated offender. So in essence, these written reforms are only theoretical. Not proven. This is mostly because we are released and reincarcerated for simple parole violations. Forced to serve

sentences with absolutely no rehabilitation whatsoever.

Colorado will have you believe that it's making progress in it's policy's to control crime but that's the furthest from the truth. Particularly in this era where the incarcerator's are basically feeding on our past history and using it to negate a successful release of the non violent offenders ultimately resulting in longer sentences. Even more compelling is the fact that society (tax payers) have no clue that behind the veil prison here is a breeding ground for future criminal activity.

It would be fitting to say that 'you come in precarious and leave manevolent'. There's almost no way around it (without the proper treatment of course).

I'm sure only a very small percentage can walk away unscathed from developing additional criminal thinking patterns than when they entered and never to return. Very small.

Having been to almost every prison; housed together there's traffic violator's with lifer's, child molestor's with non violent drug offender's, rapist's with petty thieves. All inevitably learning from one another. Taking from one another's criminal tactics. A non violent repeat drug offender having served more than $\frac{1}{2}$ of his 6 year sentence get's his nose fractured and 2 bludgeoned black & blue eye's in his own cell by a violent offender serving a 25 year sentence. Time will not allow for me to touch on how frequent these incident's occur.

This system sadly isn't helping anyone that seriously needs reform. Instead offering mild rehabilitation to that previously mentioned small percentage who were already less likely to return. Their participation has been chosen by the administration in order for D.O.C to report successful statistics every fiscal year, re-applying for more budget money from the state. It's quite simple actually, and it's done nonchalantly clearly in the presence of the offender and right under the tax payer's nose.

In the last 17 year's in and out of this prison system it has become the worse ever to date. Recently the executive director of the Colorado Dept. of Corrections was killed by a recently released offender. It cannot be said if this was due to the dwindling conditions of incarceration. But it can be said that the new director has seemingly taken reprisal against the inmate population. Specifically, going as far as ignoring basic Constitutional rights like appropriately calculating D.O.C. sentences with or without good time for accurate release dates.

Daily inmates are subjected to challenges put on by the administration to further chastise repeat drug offender's and other non-violent offender's. With age it is evident and most certain that conditions will get worse.

Just recently an inmate committed suicide because of the poor case management. It is believed by most all that the casemanager's could have prevented his death. This inmate was mostly concerned with being transferred to another prison where he had been previously assaulted. The casemanager's knew this but neglected his concern.

Personal experience recently in this area is common. At one point being paroled and due to the casemanager's erroneous information to the parole board concerning a parole plan, (address etc.) the parole board decided to rescind the granted parole for an entire year. The casemanager did not apologize for the obvious elementary error or inform the parole board of such.

Ironically the 2 most important matters (time computation & parole) the Colorado D.O.C. has deemed non-grievable issues. The fundamental basics of incarceration has no recourse.

Most all offender's are subjected to such inferiority. Some of which it's beenadoneen twice. Once by the inmate population and 2nd by the administration.

Without a doubt there are some hard core offender's that would probably benefit from a bit of structure. But to occlude justice on any human is unconstitutional.

The evidence in D.O.C shows that prison doesn't work for repeat drug offender's. From a personal perspective there haven't been too

many successful offender's reintegrating back into society. The evidence further shows that while incarcerated inmates are more likely to be neglected and discriminated against rather than groomed for hopefully becoming a productive citizen.

I haven't witnessed too many victory story's of overcoming both the initial conviction for drugs and the subsequent reprehensible leadership by prison administration. Those whom the tax payer has put in a position of trust.

I have however witnessed firsthand the degrading treatment of homosexual inmates. The over exuberant commerce with price gouging on canteen items and collect call's to friends and family's. In most cases at a 200% markup.

The over wide spread of Administrative Segregation has become without a doubt one of the biggest factor's in some recidivism cases. Of course D.O.C will have you under the impression that they no longer have Ad-Seg which could be somewhat true as the written regulation basically under went a name change. The policy is still the same and offender's are still released from their 23hr lockdown cell's directly to the streets. Within 3 months most will be back in prison. Written policy returns them back to 23hr lockdown upon their re-entry.

Overall we are learning nothing. The offender's who most need treatment are without a doubt neglected. Our past consistently dictates our future. Ultimately because of our history the administration believes that we will not benefit from rehabilitation and inevitably the cycle of future incarceration begins again.

I am a repeat drug offender. The state has written specific legislature for repeat drug offender's but Colorado D.O.C selectively applies it to criteria eligible offender's. More and more drug offenders see less and less of the new drug reforms. Low class drug offender's are treated no different from violent offender's. Hence the previous mentioned assault.

It cannot be determined if this is due to the unfortunate death of the executive director; the department now feeling the need to further prosecute offenders, milking more and more money from their family's in lieu of successful drug treatment programs.

This particular Colorado system breeds criminal's in order to keep job security. Surely if all offender's were rehabilitated 85% of staff jobs would be unequivocally subjected to a need only basis. Several dozen jobs would be lost. From a broader perspective this penal system has focused it's attention on job security and not the rehabilitation of incarcerated offender's and the prevention of future incarcerations.

The Colorado D.O.C has made a mockery of the tax payer's dollar. Health care in prison amongst other offender services has dramatically decreased by a minimum of 50%. One of the first well needed sources to go was the reintegration classes as well as an entire reintgration pre-release prison itself.

It is evident daily that conditions of confinement are dwindling. The price of housing an inmate by the standards of D.O.C has risen in 17 year's by almost 22% eventhough the value of almost every product used in D.O.C has decreased significantly. This includes but not limited to adequate cleaning supply's to maintain sanitary conditions. Just in the last 2 year's entire prison's have been quarantined more than 3 times due to viral outbreaks etc.. Ten year's ago this was unheard of but now seems to be the norm.

With the aforementioned conditions and lack of treatment it has been near impossible for any offender, let alone a repeat drug offender to get the necessary treatment in order to make the best reintegration possible utilizing funds set aside every fiscal year to prevent recidivism.

I am convinced that the Colorado Department of Corrections is in no way committed to the state for the well being of safer Colorado community's. In fact it can be inferred that offender's leave prison in worse shape than when entered. This state needs more factual awareness from prominent individuals if we are to save our selves and our community's.

IN CONCLUSION

At one point the War On Drugs campaign influenced Americans to believe that marijuana was a gateway drug and the abuse of other hard core drugs would soon follow. Most A.A. and N.A groups still conclude to this theory. In a state now where marijuana is legal it is only fair to conceive that the state will eventually convict more offender's of drug crimes. Advertantly sending them to D.O.C and release them as hardened criminal's. The repeat drug offender has much to gain when his or her treatment is addressed appropriately.

Continuously locking up these offender's will only add to their demise and the failure of new potential felons that commit these self victimizing crimes.

Without awareness, mobility, and activism the Colorado D.O.C will continue to abuse their discretion and make more and more criminals out of simple non violent offender's. The state has undoubtedly vested too much power to the executive director of the D.O.C.. As long as this remains there will be no hope for those incarcerated. Only propaganda, and false promises leading to a walking death.

Effective tactful reform is needed immediately.