

Staff as a whole create the pressure cooker environment in which we live by overcrowding, and even when they are made aware of serious conflicts by ignoring them and even setting up the conditions to not only allow but encourage inmates to attack one another. By creating their own rules, and sporadically enforcing the actual rules, staff play favorites with some and with others pick and poke and prod and pretend that no inmate is human. Staff forget that every human has a breaking point. Each breaks differently. Some internalize and self-harm. Others externalize and hurt others.

The yard is not open after 5:30 p.m., which means there is no chance to escape from other inmates or any conflict. We are housed like sardines, with on average 2-3 square feet of living space. We are fed slop that is the lowest food grade permissible, poorly seasoned, and served lukewarm, at a cost of \$2.30 per day per inmate for all three meals. We don't get paid enough, on average, to buy even hygiene items.

Staff's answer to anything and everything is to lock down the yard, which only increases the vicious cycle. Inmates are bullied on a daily basis. Does anyone care? Inmates are mentally abused on a daily basis. Does anyone care? Inmates are treated as if we are something other than human. Does anyone care? All too often, that answer is no. Once placed in prison, an inmate is stripped of any humanity or dignity. An inmate is a number. A bed. A liar. A thief. Violent. Cunning. Stupid. Underhanded. Manipulative. Those who weren't before they are incarcerated become many of these things during their sentence. What one is treated as, one becomes. And staff treat inmates as all of these. When an inmate tells the truth, they are told they are lying, so they begin to fail to see the point in being honest. Inmates are deprived of basic physical human contact, which is proven to cause depression, deepen depression, and intensify other mental problems.

Inmates' children cannot even send them colored pictures. Some in society say the inmates brought these things upon themselves. To a point, I would disagree. The function of prison is to protect society and to rehabilitate those it houses.

Most inmates will eventually be released, but even then they continue to be punished. They are considered unemployable. They are discouraged and outright forbidden from living in many areas. They are not even second-class citizens: they are usually treated as if they were not citizens at all.

Inmates are humans. Inmates have made mistakes. But inmates are paying for those mistakes- inmates and their families. It is not the job of the Dept of Corrections to punish. It is the court's job to determine punishment. It is DOC's job to contain, control, and educate. It is their job to demonstrate and teach inmates how to be law-abiding, productive citizens upon their release. Mistreating, abusing, and bullying inmates is NOT the way to accomplish that goal. Mistreating, abusing, and bullying inmates IS the way to continue the cycle of incarceration. The cycle of negativity. The cycle of violence.

The cycle must end somewhere. Let it be here. Let it be now.

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