

# Suicide Prevention

OR  
See Something. Do Something

08/16/19

By: American ~~Prison~~  
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Due to a recent suicide at a Federal Facility, a suicide attempt and actual suicide recently at my current facility (Macon State Prison), and my dealings with suicide as a youth, I will attempt to offer a solution as well as insight.

I was 15 years old and also a free man when I dealt with suicidal attempts. I would play Russian Roulette in a two week interval in my back yard while drinking. I felt tired, hopeless, and purposeless. I desired rest. I'm sure this is not every man in prison's reasons, but I'm guessing they're similar.

What changed my sense of logic was the attention of a few guys I admired. They nonchalantly brought up how negatively they felt about dudes who committed suicide, after they'd spoken of how highly they thought and felt about me. The attention, compassion, and ego boost fueled me for a life long fight. Their opinions on the topic of suicide changed my ideas on it. The last thing they did, was to help me change the gloomy appearance of my environment. I was manipulated (skillfully handled) by people I admired.

How would you apply this to prison? Convincing a person to fight the good fight, is difficult to do when the prize is simply a miserable existence when doing so. Prison facilities suck! They literally suck the life, hope, joy, and aspiration out of your spirit. Prisons are even painted in dark and gloomy colors. Mattresses are uncomfortable, causing pain and restless sleep. Georgia's facilities have taken away desks in your rooms, giving you less comfortabilities, and I could go on forever. All of these things cause discomfort to those who are already mentally unstable due to life's hardships. The solution is to add comforts that are without reason. Such as bright colored paints within cells and dorms.



At this point I have to say that throwing a man in a strip cell, which consists of four gloomy painted concrete walls, a hole in the floor to use the bathroom, which stinks like all hell, a concrete slab to sleep on, and possibly no sink, and putting him in a paper gown has got to be the dumbest and cheapest form of suicide prevention on the planet. If a man wasn't a hundred percent sure life sucks, he will be by the time you let him out of that hell hole, which would explain why many suicides happen on suicide watch. Strip cells inspire a grim determination to end it all. An inhumane situation or inhumane housing is not efficient for prevention.

Men who are suicidal are also commonly lonely, with low self esteem. This combination causes you to fall into the category of prey. The solution to this is to create two different types of counseling groups in prison. Both groups must consist of prisoners being trained on how to spot out and talk to guys who may be contemplating suicide. In order for the groups to be successful certain dynamics must exist.

First off, you want these guys to really be passionate about what they're doing. While few may have a natural inclination to help, the guys who truly can help may not. For example, tough guys and bad asses hold the respect of inmates and authorities for the most part. They are the 'Somebodies' in the jungle. Their thoughts and opinions hold weight. It's quite natural for a good dog to come lick your wounds and to lay down beside you to give you comfort but something totally different for a lion to do so. It makes the insignificant become significant. To train a lion you must first have a lion. Reel him in by offering incentives. What type of incentives? The man is saving lives or attempting to. Let the State decide the worth of such valor.

Secondly, after coming up with what you'll decide to give



these men for their services, you must come up with a program that will properly train these men for the job. One of the major answers facilities give for their shortcomings is a lack of staff members. Cool. Create counselors out of the inmates who live amongst those in need. Paying for a teacher to train a dozen counselors sounds cheaper than hiring a dozen more for the cause. You must also have those trained strategically placed.

Thirdly, you must recruit. We've discussed the lions which is one of the two groups. You want the lions to be of different shades. At least one from each gang or ~~an~~ organization and each ethnicity. I doubt a suicidal, white racist wants to hear from an overly aggressive, black racist. The second group must adhere to the same dynamics but instead of lions, find and train a few good dogs. Guys who are deemed less threatening but have good standings with general population. Outsiders (people ignorant of prison life) may wonder how you would pinpoint guys like this, but C.D.'s and prison administration reading this probably are tossing names around in their heads already.

Lastly, ~~is~~ <sup>most</sup> ~~very~~ importantly, is the fact that these guys are merely preventive efforts. They, unless taking true counseling courses, are not professionals. The suicidal subject still needs professional care. Under no circumstance can an inmate report the subject to authorities. This will destroy trust and tarnish the reputation of your inmate counselor and render the program to practically a waste of taxpayers dollars. The inmates primary goal is to attempt to change the mindset of the subject and then to secondly, get the subject to seek help the right way themselves. Under no circumstances should a man become subject to being thrown into confinement of any kind. ESPECIALLY!!! The strap cell. While the public is told this is done for the subject's own good, it is deemed as harsh punishment by inmates and is often used as punishment for unruly inmates.



We've covered physically brighter conditions and groups within the system itself that will be trained to spot and counsel the suicidal. Now we must speak on actual hope. I recently heard a Kentucky politician state that prisons no longer seek to rehabilitate. This is a very true statement. I will be brief on this point due to promise of a writing on the subject. Millions of America's citizens from poverty and broken homes fill the prison systems. A lot, well most of, our drop-outs are here as well. Hopes, dreams, and aspirations are strangers to these men. As well as success and achievement. If you take these things away from a man you've taken the very substance of what he is. Many came into the system with little, if any of these things. Prison sucks that and even more from a man. Classes and programs that breed success and a change of perspective need to not only be put in place but mandated for release. Not only a G.E.D but book reports on an agreed upon list of books, an associate degree or some form of certification for those of violent offenses, some form of moral group association religious, atheism, etc etc, and the like. Knowledge changes people. It also occupies the mind and gives you direction. It fills you with wonder and potential. The things those who are suicidal feel they lack.

The last thing I must touch on may seem offensive to some, but that's just how truth cuts sometimes. We live in a society where drug addiction, homosexuality, gender confusion, emotional outbursts, have all been diagnosed as a mental issue, therefore, as a society we should in short, cater to these people and view them in a light of equality rather than condemnation. Yet, stats have proven that criminals come from such a tumultuous background that there is most certainly mental instability involved that ~~indeed~~ caused his bad decision making, <sup>which</sup> ~~that~~ caused his incarceration. Yet our perception of these 'criminals', who've for the most part, had the most difficult circumstances our nation ~~must~~ has to offer, thrust to them at



birth, are viewed in a ~~the~~ light of condemnation. And this is the fault of the media. The news quickly points out any criminals mistakes, but never the facts of an abusive, drunken father, an mother who's an addict, bouts of homelessness, days of starvation, lack of decent clothing, drug addiction, and the list goes on. This is the turmoil within the average criminal. This is their norm and many are mentally and emotionally unable to fight these conditions for a couple decades and remain mentally stable with a strong will to live. So add to the math that the majority of our society view you, as the scum of society and deserving of your imprisonment. You are housed and treated as livestock or a zoo worthy animal. This perspective is held by those who oversee our captivity because it is held by the masses.

This must change. Keep in mind we are speaking on prison suicide. If I am suicidal, other peoples perspective of me is or can be monumental. Criminals are bred and nurtured by the short comings of our nation as well as suicide is committed by a person with suicidal thoughts, which stem from a lack of will and desire to push through and for a person to possess such thoughts, a person of our nation has failed somewhere down the line.

So in close, change the appearance of confinement and make it physically more comfortable, within reason. Create a force of inmate counselors to aid in spotting and counseling inmates, ~~as well as~~ <sup>who are</sup> suicidal, as well as getting the subject to seek professional help. Add classes and programs that promote success, aspiring, and self realization to the system and make them mandatory. Lastly, we must change the perception of how the masses view criminals.

The only thing I would add is possibly making visitation an easier process and consider making conjugal visits a nationwide privilege. Male or female, the promise of a little intimacy in prison is pretty up lifting and pillow talk is the best form of counseling known to man.

While these things added to what prisons already have in place



may or may not help reduce prison suicides, the mere thought of completely stopping them from happening is preposterous. Prison is like one of those black, demonic spirits from the Harry Potter series by J.K. Rowling. A rather large version of one. Each day it feeds on the life of millions of America's citizens. No matter how many nice things you put in your hamster's cage, it's still a cage. Man was not designed for a cage, so he'll attempt to escape in any way possible. And suicide's an easy escape.

You've read this. See something ~~do~~ Do something.