

# Redemption Project

It is my own life experiences, interviews with incarcerated men, and subsequent changes to how I live my life that have led me to the conclusions I have drawn in this proposal. My position concerning all of the issues surrounding crime, punishment, and rehabilitation of men and women is based on what I went through to successfully reestablish an ethical and workable set of values that I live by to this day.

Taking a personal inventory of the things that were causing me to hurt myself and others was no easy task. Honesty with self is a rarity with people who lie, cheat, and steal as a way of life. But honesty with self is a necessary first step for anyone who wishes to make the fundamental changes in their thought processes necessary to function in society.

This proposal addresses most if not all of the areas where incarcerated persons fall short of societal norms. Continued community condemnation serves neither the offended or the offender, so that idea has no place in this rehabilitative framework. What serves *all* of us is to address those things that cause criminals to be what and who they are. If that means completely remaking them through education, inducement, indoctrination, or for lack of a better term, the “Carrot and the Stick”, then that option is far more cost effective and humane than the current system in place today.

How much wisdom is there in the saying “If you give a man a fish you feed him for a day, if you *teach* a man to fish you feed him for a lifetime.”? I can think of no higher calling than to effectively facilitate the redemption of people who have become outcasts in society. This is not just service to help them, but a service to society as a whole. This is an honorable endeavor, completely necessary to the future welfare of our country, and frankly speaking, a duty and responsibility that belongs to all citizens.

It is both futile and unrealistic to expect our police, prosecutors, lawmakers, and prison officials to effectively tackle the issue of an ever increasing number of law breakers. If they were willing *and* capable of dealing with this issue they would have done so already. Instead, they choose to remain in the same vicious circle of pandering to what they think the public wants to hear in order to secure their political positions. This is not an assertion based on my feelings, it is as plain as the nose on your face and therefore, based on the evidence we all see before us today. The only way a successful approach to dealing with these issues will ever be adopted is for citizens to demand that their elected officials completely revamp the existing system.

For all of their rhetoric about being tough on crime, our elected representatives and appointed court officials have in reality built a system that both foments and ensures the proliferation of the very thing they are supposed to be working so hard to combat. While I am sure that many of these people started out with the best of intentions, many have lost their way, even sacrificed their ethics in the name of political expediency. To toe the Party line makes it easy to fit in and be accepted as a peer in a system designed by lawyers, for lawyers. But to serve the public's interests requires taking an approach that falls in line with what it takes for corporate success. If members of the legislative and judicial branches of our government were judged on their service to their stockholders (citizens) and the bottom line, I dare say that most of them would be headed for the unemployment line.

I submit that anyone interested in seeing what is really going on in our criminal courts should look up the term "Judicial Finality" and see what rabbit trails that leads to. Beyond that, one can easily follow the trail down and see that the criminal justice system has morphed into a monster with little if any true fairness for the average man. If this paper sounds like an indictment of the current system of law, I make no apology. The truth of what is going on in our courts today should scare the hell out of anyone who thinks they have even a remote chance of having an encounter with the criminal justice system. While the main thrust of my position revolves around a solution to the issues of crime and the growing prison population, I would be remiss not to point out the oppositional barriers that stand between affecting these necessary changes.

It is not a lack of money or manpower that inhibits efforts towards reformation of society's outcasts, it is our elected officials' lack of will and their unwillingness to seek cooperative partnership with the private sector. Being "*tough on crime*" and being "*tough on criminals*" are not the same things. Being tough on crime amounts to making inroads in the effort to eradicate, or at least reduce crime and its root causes. Being tough on criminals means stirring up the ire of the public towards them, promoting longer and longer prison sentences for them under the auspices of "Community Condemnation", and eventually releasing those people unchanged or worse. This strategy assures the growth of prison populations and the agency's that deal with crime. This can only lead to the proliferation of a "Police State" whose chief purpose is the subjugation of the poor and mentally ill.

This proposal has been drafted in order to provide Alaska's courts, Department of Corrections, and the people of Alaska a new, workable approach to dealing with the ever rising crime rate. Drug and alcohol abuse are the leading factors fueling the growing cancer of crime. Coupled with substance abuse, there are a myriad of other anti-social behaviors responsible for criminal activity but by and large, most of those behaviors can be traced back to their root cause, *substance abuse*.

It is an unfortunate reality that once a person engages in substance abuse they embark on a downward spiral towards moral bankruptcy, incarceration, even death. If nothing is done to mitigate the damage substance abuse does to people's self-esteem and standing in their communities, they are destined to continue in their destructive habits. Ask any substance abuse clinician what the predictable results of substance abuse are and they will unequivocally state, "Insanity, Incarceration, or Death". Most of us have heard the old adage about the definition of insanity; "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, expecting a different result each time." Even those of you who may not be familiar with this adage should see the logic at work in that statement.

Many incarcerated people are not first – time offenders. And though they are most likely in trouble again due to reoccurring criminal behavior, it is not because they desire to go back to jail. Sadly, they continue to use drugs/alcohol, steal, hurt themselves and others, and live on the fringes of society because they know no other way to live life. While their behavior provides a textbook example of the definition of insanity it should also be apparent that Alaska's current approach to dealing with the issues of crime in our society fits that very same definition. Honestly examining the track record of the criminal justice system in use today can lead to only one conclusion... The approach to the problem must change.

The majority of people who are incarcerated have never had what could be termed as a "normal life". If asked, many incarcerated people will tell you that they have never had their own bank account, credit card, an apartment lease in their own name, or successfully purchased anything on credit. Many of these people live at the sufferance of others; moving from place to place as they inevitably wear out their welcome with both friends and family. Often times, their families are *relieved* when they go to jail. Not only do they know that their brother, sister, son, daughter, etc. is safe and alive in jail, but they no longer have to feed, house, or watch the person to keep them from stealing them blind. The family often deems it a small burden to send their child, sibling, or parent a \$100.00 for commissary, or to take their collect phone calls from time to time in comparison to the cost of housing and feeding someone they cannot leave alone at home.

If change is to be accomplished there are many specific areas of offenders lives that must be addressed. Simply putting them through the standard regime of drug/alcohol classes, cognitive therapy curriculums, etc. does not provide a complete program designed for success.

People with substance abuse issues need an environment that conditions them to break from their cycle of destructive behavior. Fundamentally, this means they need to be reformed in much the same way our militaries build soldiers to perform efficiently in their given roles. I am *not* suggesting a boot camp scenario! Even for the soldier, boot camp/basic training is only the first step in molding men and women into people who can affectively fill their roles.

I suppose the first question we should be asking ourselves is **“what do we wish to accomplish concerning the arrest and treatment of people who break the law?”** Is it to arrest them, punish them, and then return them to their communities unchanged and unrepentant? Or do we actually wish to see them change and reenter society as functional citizens?

In order to put a halt to their criminally destructive behavior, arrest *is* the only immediate option that makes sense. However, whether they are found guilty by a jury of their peers or eventually take a plea agreement, we owe it to ourselves as a society to evaluate, treat, and mold criminals into repentant, law-abiding, functional members of the community.

If we say that these people *cannot* be fixed, we proclaim a rather poor estimation of not only our professional resources, but also of our collective will as a society. The fact that our state currently faces a massive deficit is just one reason we need to do whatever it takes to stem the tide of increasing crime. We must stop warehousing men and women in prisons we can ill afford to build and operate. We cannot forget that these people are our brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, sons and daughters. All too often, the people who suffer the most from their anti-social behavior and incarceration are their own families. How many of you who are reading this right now know or are related to someone who cannot get their life together due to drugs, alcohol, or an inability to assimilate into society?

Because our law makers insist on using the moniker **“Corrections”** and make the claim that the public interest is being served, then the people who are coming out of the detention and care of the Department of Corrections should be coming out as truly changed individuals. Therefore, I submit the following outline for consideration by the citizens and elected officials of this great state.

Listed below are the areas that should be focused on in order to rebuild individuals with the best chances for success in the world when released.

## Intake Phase

At this point, individuals are offered a choice of whether to participate in the program or, to simply serve his or her time.

- They are informed that the program operates according to a **definite** time frame that is **not** negotiable (2 – 4 years for most crimes). Incidentally, this time frame corresponds with a typical armed services contract.
- Candidates must understand that if they elect to participate in and successfully complete the required curriculum, they could quite possibly see a significant decrease in the time they serve for their current offense.
- Candidates must also be informed that their odds of coming back to prison will be greatly reduced should they elect to participate in the rehabilitation process, whereas if they elect not to participate, the odds are very good that they will be incarcerated again in the future.

Provided a person opts to participate in the program, the process of testing and assessment should begin immediately. At this point we must learn all we can about each participant's history – their strengths, and their weaknesses. The data that is gathered in this process will determine each individual's needs and how those needs will be addressed. Information on personal history, education level, vocational training, work history, substance abuse issues, and economic obligations should all be compiled. Once each subject's information has been compiled and verified, a comprehensive rehabilitation plan can be formulated for that individual. From the information that is gathered in each area, a personalized plan can be made to address each individuals assessed shortcomings and build on their strengths.

## **Classification and Placement Phase**

- Education testing / evaluation
- Personal history
- Substance abuse evaluation and treatment plan
- Social conscience and responsibility - recognition of role in community
- Identification of ethics and values
- Vocational goals and action plan
- Economic responsibilities
- Community Placement action plan

## **Rehabilitation Phase**

### **Program Integration/Education plan:**

- Orientation
- Housing assignment
- Basic Education/GED

### **Social and Substance Rehabilitation:**

- Moral Recognition Therapy
- Victim Awareness
- Substance Abuse Education and Counseling
- Relapse Prevention

### **Vocational Training and Work:**

- Mandated Safety and Certification Courses (OSHA – MSHA - NCCR)
- Vocational education and apprenticeship placement (Private Industry Partners)
- Job Attendance and Performance Evaluations
- Continuing Education for Career Advancement

### **Financial Obligations and Budget:**

- Child Support
- Court Costs and Restitution
- Crime victims fund
- Cost of incarceration reimbursement
- Personal and Leisure Costs

### **Prerelease Plan:**

- Community Placement and Housing
- Job Placement
- Transportation Issues; I.E. Driver's License, Insurance, Vehicle, etc...
- Community Advocate/Probation and Community Resources

## **Post Incarceration Phase**

### **Financial Obligations and Budget – Post Incarceration:**

- Child Support
- Transportation
- Licensing/Insurance
- Housing/Utilities
- Food
- Personal Expenditures and Savings

Make no mistake; this is not a “free ride” for the individuals who participate in this program. While they are participating in the program, these men and women would be required to pay their own way for much of their daily living expenses, as well as the very same fees and dues that are the norm for anyone participating in union apprenticeship programs out in the community. By the time they have completed their curriculum and term of incarceration, they will have repaid their attorney fees, court costs, restitution, etc... as well as a portion of the cost of incarcerating them. This will greatly offset the cost to the taxpayers of the state.

The goal of this proposal is to not only develop a workable change plan for individuals who currently live as renegades in society, but to have *them* take responsibility for the cost, not the tax payers. This is an honorable and equitable arrangement where men and women learn to live the way they were intended to live while taking responsibility for their past actions and daily life.

It is imperative that partnerships be formed with private sector businesses to hire and train the individuals who opt to participate in their own rehabilitation. While not everyone is suited to work in trades associated with building and construction, the areas of computer technologies and clerical work hold many opportunities as well. There is also much to be said for manufacturing jobs in a wide range of fields. The career choices linked to food service and agribusiness are both wide open fields with much opportunity. Whether one elects formal training as a chef or in the field of hydroponic food production, the potential for advancement is only limited by one's own ambition and talent.

In today's ever growing economy, employers are seeking people who are both trainable and reliable. One verifiable fact is that prisoners, both inside a correctional facility and out in a "Work Release" setting, are virtually guaranteed to show up ready for work every day.

Speaking of Work Releases; these are also a vital part of reintegration into the community for people who have been away from normal life in society. Simply releasing a person back in to the community fresh from incarceration is a tremendous source of stress and shock, whereas reentering the community from work release allows an individual to make the transition seamlessly. This also provides the Dept. of Corrections with more flexibility when it comes to planning a reentry timeline for individuals. Much of what constitutes a prisoner's rehabilitation plan not only could, but should be addressed in the setting of partial confinement found in a work release facility.

During the transitional period of work release, it is not just employment and treatment networks that are developed but personal relationships as well. It can be overwhelming to reenter the community with no friends with which to socialize. The feelings of isolation often associated with a lack of close relationships can easily drive a person to seek out those he or she felt most comfortable with in their past life. There are many, many ways a person can essentially be set up to fail. This is why a comprehensive, integrated rehabilitative model is essential to the success of persons entering such a program. Every base must be covered.

While I will readily admit that at any one time 25% or less of incarcerated people are mentally ready to engage in their own rehabilitation, even that low number far exceeds the success rate of *any* state in America today. While I do not have all of the answers, I am at least willing to offer up suggestions for positive change to go along with my scathing indictment of the current criminal justice system. I truly believe that it is irresponsible to complain if you are not prepared to offer up solutions and work towards a better way.

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