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#### EDUCATION BEHIND BARS

Arriving at prison with a Masters Degree and college teaching experience, I was appalled by the lack of availability and no interest in college for prisoners. There was talk of some prisoners using PELL Grants through a specific college. I heard stories of days prior to my incarceration, where college instructors came into the prison and some motivated prisoners did obtain degrees. Finally, in the second decade of the 21st Century the PELL Grants and college courses with instructors are offered in prison.

At Thumb Correction Facility in 2010, a program was started for youthful offenders. The program is based on the youths adherence to prison rules and behavior, a honors program called LADS. Adult prisoners with college degrees and an interest in teaching were vetted and cleared to work with youth as instructors. The young men are required to have a high school diploma or a GED as a requisite for participation.

MY subject for this paper is Brandon, who entered prison at about age 16, serving a sentence for 2nd Degree Murder. Brandon received his GED at 16, became the first participant in LADS, and applied himself with intense drive. His grades and enthusiasm for learning were unmatched. As a he reached his 19th birthday and transition to the adult complex, the opportunity to enter the LADS program as an instructor was

presented to him. Brandon went through six months of observing instructors as part of his development. Constant questioning of the mentors and occasional instruction of a daily session resulted in being ready to venture out on his own as a LADS instructor. However, this quest for knowledge does not end here.

Brandon discovered during the LADS process that he wanted a college degree. He sought out financial assistance and began his journey. As of the writing of this piece he is a Junior at Adams State University and will receive his B.S. Degree in Business Administration before he is released from prison.

This prisoner has discovered that education give one a sense of freedom. Brandon learned that life struggles and life conflicts bread strength and confidence. Thus, more knowledge equals more options. Upon release he intends to continue his education, with the goal of a Ph.D. and becoming a college professor. He is committed to not forget where he came from on this journey and will remain a mentor, as a victim/youth advocate.

Encountering many road blocks from the prison system and discouragement from education staff, Brandon dug in and solified his commitment. Research into the policies concerning college level education shows an explicit design to discourage the prisoner. Relentless perseverance by this man caught the attention of a certain education staff member who went to his aid in order to get needed materials approved over many initial denials by education staff.

I've known Brandon throughout his educational journey.

This is one individual who is a true human being. Someone who upon release will be proof positive that one can change the course of their life.