

Editor

REFORM MENTAL HEALTH mental health

APWA

Reform must come from the Inside, OUT.

After 18 years in NC Prisons I've had the opportunity to interview dozens of prisoners who have been seen by Mental Health Services in prison.

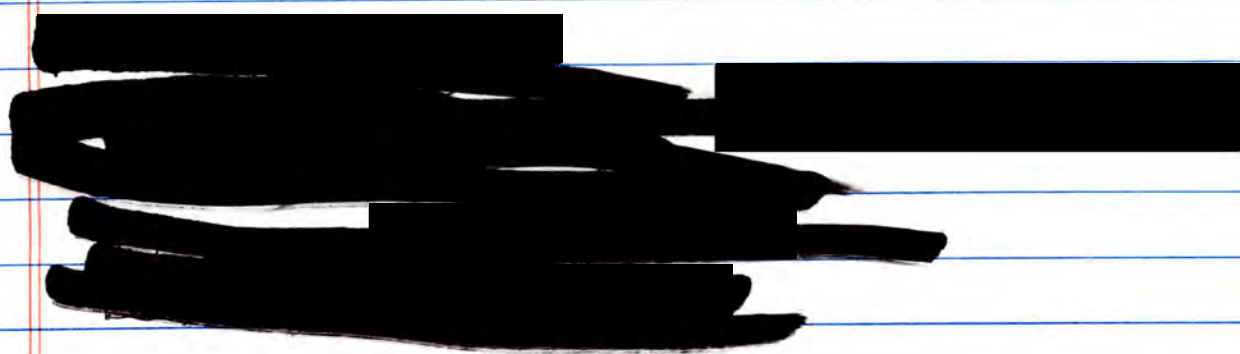
I was at The Processing NC Prison (#1) about the same time as Mr. Ladd in this essay. He verifies, from personal experience, the terrible rumors we in general population heard at that time in that prison.

The truth will set us free.

Thank you for the voice.

David Roger Thomas (pen)

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1 Mental Health Reform in Prison

Consider the remodeling of a house. A "reform" of that house. It would be necessary to inspect that house first, to accurately determine where reform was needed. The structure of the building would be of prime importance: The foundation, walls, attic, basement, plumbing, electricity etc.

Reform of that house - or prison - cannot take place without an accurate inspection of the "inside" by the remodeler.

I have read many articles by reformers, lawyers, judges who speak on this subject without setting foot in a jail or prison block for any extended time. Brief observational tours do not reveal the rot within the walls.

Consider reform of one of the "rooms" of this "house": Mental Health. I read an interview of a judge who suggested that prison was a place where a convicted felon with a mental disorder could get "help," especially if he could not afford mental health care on the outside (The Real World).

Here is an example, true in every detail, of such "help" that a reformer might consider as he or she remodels the "House of Pain."

This is what a "survivor" told me:

So Alan Ladd (not his real name*) was processed at NC Prison #1 for about twenty months. Before prison he had been diagnosed with chronic depression and prescribed Prozac.

First he discovered that the Mental Health NC Unit in Prison #1 was infested with cockroaches. He noted that his cell was rarely entered by a health care professional for any therapies. About once a month he had a 30 minute conference with a psychologist. His treatment for mental health? Thorazine, during the entire 20 months. No group therapy.

The side-effects of Thorazine are well known, inducing a zombie-like behavioral affect. Easy to control.

Mr Ladd says that nothing was done to alleviate his depression or other issues. Where are the judges who believe in prison mental health as a rationale for conviction?

He says his drugs were delivered through a door hole. The loneliness was inhumane. Sometimes he would be allowed to sit by himself in a day room.

On the walk to and from the dayroom Alan would pass other dayrooms or mental health cells. He saw terrible things: inmates with feces on their faces or eating feces. He knew of inmates who swallowed batteries or shoved pencils up their penises.

Mr Ladd says that inmates who refuse the drugs are held down and forcibly injected. He has seen guards body slam patients in the hallway. This is in prison.

Often, he reports, officers would make harassing statements as they walked by his door, dehumanizing insults.

For 16 months Mr Ladd was naked in his cell! After months of Thorazine he began to hear voices and have hallucinations. He decided he couldn't live like this and tried to hang himself. Found alive by staff he was sent to Wake and returned to his cell, still naked, and he was placed in diapers, a helmet, and strapped to a table for about four days.

Even now as he speaks to me about this, he weeps.

And during this brutal, inhumane situation, a camera recorded it all.

Any staff members could have intervened. Perhaps they were "just following orders."

Eventually the staff at another prison stopped the Thorazine (after years of use) because of heart problems caused by overzealous medication. (at one prison an inmate was so zoned out he couldn't pull up his pants if they dropped! He could barely speak. We all tried to help him - when he wasn't asleep.)

Only after the Thorazine ceased did his (Alan's) mental condition improve. He was given a prison job as an "orderly" to assist a blind prisoner.

Would knowledge of the horrors of mental health have had any impact on D.A. or judge sentencing nationals?

Mr Ladd says that in 2003 "animals were treated better than me." I hope that mental health treatment is no longer used as a veiled criteria for sentencing.

DAVID ROGER THOMAS (pen)

