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Dear reader, My Name is Zachary Martinez. I am currently incarcerated in Illinois River Department of corrections. I am serving a seven year sentence for possession of firearm and intent to deliver cocaine. Since I have been incarcerated in the Illinois prison system, I feel like IDOC locked me inside of a cage and threw away the key. I am a low medium security risk, individual in custody held at a medium high risk facility. I am only allowed out of my two man cell for an hour in a half in the morning and once in the evening; including three individual meals a day that only takes up to forty-five minutes max for all three meals. The prison will only allow us one hour at yard every couple of days. Altogether, we're only allowed three hours and forty-five minutes out of our cell on the days we don't have yard and four hours and forty-five minutes the days we do. I have been incarcerated for two years now and yet to receive any opportunities of rehabilitation. The only programs I've been offered is basic education; this facility also does not have any college courses of any kind for individuals who are seeking a higher education to broaden their knowledge upon their release. This facility also does not offer any job skills, training or trade courses that could potentially land us a decent job when we're released. I am also diagnosed with PTSD, depression and bipolar disorder and have not been offered any coping with trauma, anger management or any other classes. I can't help but notice this is called Department of corrections but don't offer help to correct our mistakes, habits or negative thinking.

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I was raised in a house with both parents that work and take care of seven children. I was sent to a private school since pre-school until I reached the tenth grade. I was always taught to respect people in authority and your elders as well as treat your neighbor how you want to be treated. Since I was raised this way I came to prison with the same mentality; respect everyone the way you want to be respected. Yet, time and time over again I have been disrespected, insulted and dehumanized by correctional officers and people in authority. An example of a time I've been disrespected and felt dehumanized is when covid 19 first was brought to the public's attention. We were locked in our cells for five days straight with no shower or phone calls; then put on a schedule where we only came out every three days for an hour. There was times when we would find out one of our loved ones were ill and we were stuck in our cells for days going crazy, worrying about our loved ones and when we would ask for a call home, we were ignored with no regards to our physical or mental health. I would ask for a mental crisis team and all the officers would say "do you want to go to the naked room?" That was their only solution to all of our problems, I feel as if this place is just to lock us away so that no one has to deal with us. I, myself don't like to be a negative person so even though this place may treat me like a animal in a cage, I want to change the mood, the atmosphere and the thoughts of the people around me.

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Thoughts are moving forces; thoughts are very powerful. Thoughts of happiness will attract happiness, if you make up your mind that today is going to be a good day, that energy will come to life. I work on that kind of thought and energy everyday because in a place like this design to keep you confined in a small room will break you down mentally, physically and spiritually. I believe that us inmates can't afford to waste thoughts of resentment towards individuals or circumstances because every idle thought will subtract a definite amount from our success and who we want to be as a person. Today as a man or a woman, we have to be in control of our destiny and concentrate our thoughts on what we want to manifest for ourselves. I know this may be hard for the ones that will never see freedom again; that's why us as human beings don't deserve long harsh punishments. We all make mistakes and yesterday doesn't define who we are tomorrow. The people that have actually been through this has the better ability to reach the younger generations. By sharing their story and giving insight to the reality of being stuck in the prison system because of poor decision making. Instead of locking us away and getting rid of us, use our experience and our voice to reach the community and the youth. A parole board hearing for offenders with a lot of time in the state of Illinois could make a huge impact by giving the offenders who truly has changed their morals, behavior and criminal thinking another chance. This ex-offender could assimilate the people around him to be a better product of their environment. I know that I'm only one individual but I would like to be a voice for the ones whom may never get heard again.

Thank you for taking the time to read my story. I pray that this may reach the hearts of the people who could make a difference in our prison system and our community.

Sincerely, *Zachary*
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