

## To: Spring 2020 Restorative Justice Group #29

### Title: *Voices from Prison*

It's interesting to think about whose voices we listen to. Sometimes, it's the designated leader...sometimes the loudest person in the room...sometimes the person who talks the most...sometimes the person who has decided that because of their experience or assumed power that other people need to listen to him or her. But, whatever the setting, we need to remember that there are many voices in a room when we come together, and each voice has something to offer. It doesn't matter whether someone has been around for years or is new to the game, we all need to listen to the different voices and respect the space that people inhabit when they are trying to offer us their ideas, opinions, feelings, and time.

You have privileged us with your voices. We asked you a couple of questions: ***What are you taking away from the weekly handouts?*** and ***What do you want us to know about you?*** Your responses were rich, heartfelt, honest, and helpful. What we want to do in this handout is offer your voices back to you with what we have learned from your responses. Your voices matter and will help us continue to improve the restorative justice work in your world.

Below are some themes and quotes from your responses.

### **New thinking and understanding about Restorative Justice**

**In spite of having only met once, many of you have an understanding of Restorative Justice and have already embraced the work and moved forward in your thinking as you have learned more.**

- *Why did I choose Restorative Justice. I chose it cause I wanted something new for myself and how to listen, learn and understand how my victims and other offenders' victims feel and how some are forgiving and just want to understand what goes through our head after we hurt and violated them.*
- *The circle taught me to be honest with myself and to find myself and my purpose. For so long I never knew that my upbringing affected my life and my choices.*
- *Restorative Justice itself has opened my mind and heart to do a lot of self-reflecting and discovering myself. I found out how to love, forgive, be selfless, considerate. So now I've grown to love myself despite my worst predicament. I have a different outlook on life.*
- *There are victims to my crime. I emotionally scarred someone, which may have changed their life. The fact that there's any one person out there still living their life after I've ruined it has torn me down. All I ask for is forgiveness and a second chance.*

### **How I've changed or want to change**

**Your responses describe many different ways that you have already changed or are looking to change. Here are some examples of those who are thinking about making changes.**

- *I've learned more about myself being here than I thought I knew on the streets. These groups work and help. We just have to want it to help and open ourselves up to change.*
- *There was a quote in the week #11 handout that stuck out to me. "I don't want to have a heart that is boiling like a volcano." Farid Ahmed...To me I think it stuck out because I really do want to try and make a change in the way I've been living. I'm tired of hurting people, family, friends and strangers alike. I've always tried the "easy" way when I already know*

*where I'll end up. I don't want that anymore. And with the help of you I feel like there is still hope for me.*

- *I need to be a person that's a help to the world, not a hindrance. I can't move forward unless I correct the mindset that continues to hinder my growth. So, I know if I use this program to adjust the things I have problems with, I think I'll have a better understanding on how to move forward with life period.*
- *I really loved the poems on a lot of them. They made me think of my family and what I have put them through. One of the handouts that really stuck with me was getting so mad you will erupt like a volcano, hurting everything in its path... That day I read it, I called my kids and their mother to say no matter what, I was sorry for everything that was done.*
- *I have come to realize that I have learned something new about me every time I have a group. I have become a better person because I allowed myself to be honest and allowed myself to put my pride aside and ask for groups when I needed the help.*

### **Finding meaning and purpose**

**Many of you have used this time to dig into your lives and look for new ways of being in the world. Some of these handouts have helped you uncover old ways of thinking and feeling.**

- *What I've been taking from the weekly handouts is I believe we all have something inside that we need to find meaning for. Most of us struggle with finding our own inner us. By the time we find out who we are or what we're not, we have already made so many bad choices, so now we are basically in a panic to re-claim our life.*
- *The best information I received is no matter what we all experienced and endured, we all can forgive and heal. Nothing happens over night but over time things can all get better. You have to want it. I have to start being mindful of everything and everyone around me. My actions will continue to affect everyone around me as well. Today I realize it's not just about me anymore. It's about making a difference. Being someone better than I used to be in my past.*
- *Later that day, I read something else about we will forget what others have done or what others have said but will never forget how others have made us feel... Ever since I read that, I have tried to make sure that anyone I care about feels good once I have said anything, too.*
- *I used to think that not many cared about me due to my past; and I used to think that everyone judges me based on my past. But, with reading those packets, I've come to realize that everyone don't judge, people do forgive, people do love, and most of all, people do change.*

### **Feeling support and a personal connection**

**Through your responses, volunteers learned about the importance of our coming to Fox Lake, but also how the handouts provided you with additional support.**

- *I'd like to say I could have done it on my own but thanks to all of you I now know that I need help and slowly am beginning to feel it's okay to ask for help I need.*
- *What you do when you volunteers come here to me is taking parts of your lives and spending some of your free time when you don't have to, to come into prison and share your lives. This is one of the most profound and personal actions that I've experienced since being in these places.*
- *I want to thank you for taking the time out of you day to reach out to me and my fellow inmates with words and packets of encouragement. I feel there are others out there who genuinely care about us. Personally, I don't have much support, especially the moral support, and so I felt each packet was a sign that others do care about my well-being.*

- *I personally thank you for the weekly handouts. They have kept me grounded during this all too crazy time in the world.*

## **How the handouts have impacted me**

**Reading some of your comments has reinforced for the volunteers that the time we spend on putting these handouts together is definitely worth it...if even one person finds it valuable.**

- *I felt connected to some of the weekly handouts cause they helped me think back and understand how others besides myself have to deal and cope with their own situations.*
- *During this last couple of months my life has been full of unplanned unfoldings that almost lead me back to my negative, selfish, self-serving ways, but with the info and help in the weekly pieces I was able to bite my tongue and wait it out through these rough waters.*
- *When I reflect on all the info that was sent to me, it first made me take a good look at my life, and then I was able to put myself in someone else's shoes. The little bit of this experience I've had has helped me separate between what I want to do with my life and what I need to do.*
- *You've been challenging me to really dig deep to find myself and my purpose. Sometimes when we're in these situations we feel forgotten and abandoned but you were able to brighten my day and make me feel remembered.*
- *Your weekly handouts kept me focused and on the right track in an environment full of distractions, hate and distrust. This love and support I receive from you is contagious and moved me to spread the love and wisdom I've received.*
- *I would like to thank you all for the weekly restorative papers. The time you all put in to see that we as a group have something to read and reflect on is nothing short of great. Even though we've all had one meeting it made me feel connected to a family and gives me the understanding that when one is released he/she could turn their life around.*

## **Thoughts about the future**

**Having a vision for the future or acting on new ways of thinking and feeling is a goal for the Restorative Justice program. Some of your responses reflect that idea.**

- *I now feel a calling to bring others into the RJ community. I only wish the coronavirus wouldn't have stopped some of our growth. I know we could have learned so much from one another.*
- *So Restorative Justice holds a place in my heart forever now. I've reached a point in my life where I'm far from healed and perfect, but now look forward to a role in helping others. While I do not have the exact ideas as how to do so, my main starting point is what I witnessed and experienced through the volunteers and groups of restorative justice.*
- *I have been doing a lot of thinking and reflecting and I decided that I'm pursuing a career as a substance abuse counselor. I also want to be a motivational speaker and mentor. Me and my mother plan to open a halfway house and create a program to help people in the community. We're so hurt and broken to hear how drug overdose deaths are at an all time high.*

Every time that we participate in Restorative Justice, volunteers are met with such gratitude and appreciation for our commitment to this program. What is hard to describe to all of you is how much we appreciate and are grateful to be part of this program and your lives. It's been really hard for all of us not to show up each week. We're hoping that it won't be too long before we see you again.

~ Ms. Caro-Bruce, Ms. Pugh, and Ms. Wallace