



We Shouldn't Judge People Who Have Been In Prison

By: Katherine Brown

*Note: this article is not referring to sex offenders, murderers, or domestic violence inmates

Do you remember a bad decision you made when you were 17? Try to think of the worst possible thing that you did.

Now, can you imagine being continuously judged for that one bad decision you made when you were 17 - even into your adult life?

That would be a complete nightmare, and hopefully, we've all been able to move on relatively well from our mistakes in the past.

However, this nightmare is a reality for prison inmates. They don't have the luxury of "moving on" from their mistake. Their whole life centers around one bad decision they made when they were younger. They are stuck in the past - in a continuous loop.

Many of these crimes are petty crimes, such as drugs or theft, that simply escalated into bigger charges. There are many reasons why a young person could fall into a life of petty crimes.

Perhaps they turned to drugs during a hard time in their life, or maybe they had to steal food from grocery stores to survive. In each of these situations, one bad thing led to another, and before they knew it, they were behind bars.

While in prison, inmates can feel alienated and like they have no one to turn to. The worst thing is that often, they're right. This problem really rears its head once they get out of prison. Their prior mistakes can really come back to haunt them.

Often, ex-inmates have trouble getting back on their feet after they are released from prison. This includes finding a home. In fact, a report found that, "formerly incarcerated people are almost 10 times more likely to be homeless than the general public" (Couloute, 2018, p.1). Another report notes that in New York City, "more than 54% of people released from prison moved straight into the city's shelter system in 2017" (Wiltz, 2019, p.1). Homelessness among ex-inmates is a problem, and it's only going to get worse if something isn't done about it.

And, what's worse, not having housing can lead back to the original problem - going to prison in the first place. Many inmates end up going back to prison if they don't have a home, furthering the problem. This could stem from doing things that could be categorized as an "offense", like

sleeping in a public place. One article notes, “Being homeless makes formerly incarcerated people more likely to be arrested and incarcerated again, thanks to policies that criminalize homelessness” (Couloute, 2018, p.1).

I think that the first step in solving the problem of homelessness among former inmates is eradicating internal bias against them. I think that many times we tend to demonize prison inmates, thinking that they’re all bad people. However, the truth is, many inmates are not. They are simply people that have made one bad decision in their life - like we all have. The only difference is that most of us don’t have to spend time in a prison cell for *our* bad decisions.

Secondly, we should commit to helping them get back on their feet. This includes not only helping them find a home, but all aspects of their life, such as helping them obtain a job. As I discussed in this article, many ex-inmates are left in the cold, with no assistance while trying to re-enter society. If we help them obtain the essential necessities of their life, we help them make a better life for themselves.

References

Couloute, Lucius. (2018). Nowhere to Go: Homelessness among formerly incarcerated people.

Retrieved from <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/housing.html>

Martinez, Alejandra. (2019). What Health Care Looks Like Inside Prisons And Jails in South

Florida. Retrieved from <https://www.wlrn.org/post/what-health-care-looks-inside-prisons-and-jails-south-florida#stream/0>

Wiltz, Teresa. (2019). Where 'Returning Citizens' Find Housing After Prison. Retrieved from <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2019/04/23/where-returning-citizens-find-housing-after-prison>