

## From Inside The Walls by Barry DeLeon

If you are planning for a year, sow rice.  
If you planning for a decade, plant trees.  
If you are planning for a lifetime, educate people.  
Chinese Proverb

I have been writing this "From Inside The Walls" column in the News & Views for nearly three years, and this will be my last. I am finally making the transition from prison to society, and as I progress my way through the halfway house system, I plan to pen a column titled "Beyond The Walls-Seeking New Horizons". My objective is simply to share with readers how SMART Recovery(r) has helped me change my thinking, gain independence from my addictive behaviors, and prepare for my release back into my community. I also hope to be an example of how Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy can be instrumental in a treatment program, especially for those behind bars.

The New Jersey Department of Corrections (N.J.D.O.C), in conjunction with Community Corrections Corporation, a private treatment and education organization, recently developed an assessment center called Talbot Hall. It is where I write from now. This facility and the program which operates within its walls serves as the transitional tool that the N.J.D.O.C. is using to assess and treat its inmates who are returning to society by determining whether or not they are ready for such a privilege. Talbot Hall is an alternative to incarceration, an informative, beneficial and opportunistic means for a prisoner seeking release to put the ordeal of prison behind him and prove that rehabilitation is possible and has been achieved. For three years, I have been writing about and advocating for such a program, and in states like New Jersey and Arizona it is becoming a reality.

In the mainstream media, being a convicted felon usually automatically disqualifies me as a commentator. However, my opinions are sharply informative because they are grounded in reality-the clarifying experience of dwelling within the penal system. The burden of my message is that this country has descended into a cruel era of social vengeance, as though the problems of crime and social deterioration will somehow be solved by the ever-escalating prison population and by devising more harsh and more extreme sentencing guidelines when deciding their punishment. There is an absolute need for punishing criminals. As a convicted felon, I am the first to admit that there is an absolute need for that. But, as I have tried to share these past three years, incarceration without rehabilitation is merely a façade that gives society a long-term, false sense of security and a misconceived peace of mind. In New Jersey, about 70% of prisoners will be released to society some time in the near future. If these men don't change their ways of thinking, their attitudes and behavior, and leave prison with the renewed determination of a positive-minded and committed man, society itself will be at square one with a resentful, bitter individual. The released offender will be more behind the times and ill-prepared to function in society that he was when he was locked up.

Thus, he will likely revert to drug use and/or crime and re-offend. He loses again-but so does society. Prison costs continue to escalate. A taxpayer falls out of the tax base, and the country continues to be burdened with the families left fatherless and husbandless. This is all preventable for a large population of prisoners with the right treatment.

Changing one's attitude and thought process leads to rational thinking and meaning and purpose in life. As the saying goes, "You are today where your thoughts have brought you; you will be tomorrow where your thoughts take you." This is so applicable towards every person capable of thought, and this simple concept must be conveyed to every man and woman leaving prison. They need to be shown how to look at their lives differently, as well as society with its laws. Anais Nin said that, "We don't see things as they are; we see things as we are." Changing the way we think will change who we are; and if that change is positive, we will get positive results to our actions.

I've been expressing this point, this ideology, for some time now, and I am extremely pleased to see treatment becoming a focal point of New Jersey's D.O.C. I am very grateful to participate in the N.J.D.O.C.'s assessment and treatment program. It is essential to the successful acclimation of oneself back into the community. This program envelops SMART Recovery's(r) concepts, as well as other self-help direction and instruction by a staff who is well-trained and committed to providing resident inmates, ready to rejoin society, with the necessary tools we need to avoid becoming another statistic. The revolving door can really stop here. REBT, Cognitive Thinking Skills, Life Skills, and SMART Recovery(r) taught in an environment and schedule that is structured, predictable and positive will give us the practical experience of living an organized life. That is what Talbot Hall is about, and I applaud Commissioner Jack Terhune, C.C.C. and the NJDOC for providing this opportunity to the prisoners of New Jersey. I suspect that if we can implement this same conceptual program into the prisons themselves, we can even better prepare prisoners for acclimation into the halfway house program and transition into society. The public must be shown that rehabilitation should be every bit the focus as punishment is. We must all seek new horizons.

Editor's Note: We are pleased that Barry will be transitioning from prison to society! We look forward to sharing his "Beyond the Walls" column in future issues, and we hope that Barry Grant, another talented inmate who writes columns, will continue to share his "Behind the Walls" perspectives until his transition occurs. Readers who wish to write to Barry DeLeon may now do so by contacting him at the following address: Barry DeLeon, 289753, Talbot Hall, 100-140 Lincoln Highway, Kearny, NJ 07032.