

From: MICHAEL KOEHLER
Date: 4/27/2020 9:22:59 PM
To: Jose Garcia

Attachments:

[Part 1 of Michael's story was contained in our June 2020 Newsletter.]

PART 2

I have to say at first the change was unwanted and scary. It was all I knew. I came into the department [of corrections] as a young 17 year old with no criminal record, pretty naive to the prison culture. I developed all these behaviors and beliefs and all these fake friends. it was all I knew. I also was afraid to walk away as that would mean I would have to walk alone, on my own in this dark lonely world we know as prison. I also knew I wouldn't have the protection or help from homies about my crime. as I had a lot of homies look out for me over my situation. so the change has blessed my life by allowing me to do my time and focus on my self reflection and being true to myself and bettering myself daily. I am not perfect and learn new things about myself daily. from 2001 to 2009 I have 5 positive accomplishments and 2 new assault charges that cost me 30 more months total incarceration. I have 6 IMU programs. I have 130 major infractions. from my change 2009 to 2020 I have 2 major infractions about 30 positive achievement certificates and NO VIOLENCE. I have completed many programs that helped me learn about myself: thoughts for change, parenting inside out, strait a guide, stress and anger management to name a few. in 2014 I lost my mother to pancreatic cancer. I now know the pain I caused the community and especially the victims family. I now hate that I was associated with a senseless homicide and I promised my mother that everyday I will strive to better myself and do the right thing as it's the right thing to do and get away from the prison political mindset. I am a firm believer of "make the change in yourself you wish to see in the world" by Gandi. so the change has helped me grow as a man, learn things about myself and to participate in programs and use tools to change and become a caring compassionate person again. Also I can exclude negative pessimistic people out of my life. before those were the people I wanted around me as I hated life. now I love life and want to return to society and advocate for people who need inspiration and to help give back to a community I took so much from.

I am not a yes man so I am not necessarily liked by other homies. I do not straddle the fence and a lot of homies don't care for me as they don't like that I am not with the drug scene or the violence. I also am not into the gossip. so I don't associate with a lot of ex gang affiliates as I believe a lot are not done in there heart, but the reality is I know who's who and I know who was with it and who really wasn't. so ultimately they just talk to make themselves feel important but the reality is this will be their life. I don't let their gossip or words faze my personal growth or dreams. I also have been put in segregation due to my past. I have hesitated participating in redemption as a lot of the facilitator's are fake and only manipulate staff and act different in unit.

so I find myself closing off.

I feel we should put our efforts into self betterment and change. we do hours and hours of burpies, gossiping, plotting, fighting. why can't we do hours and hours of business plans, self reflections, growth educational programs? it blows my mind how many homies want to hold on to that life when it puts them behind bars for most of their lives. not me I am done. I will succeed. I will make it and my testimony will help inspire someone.

Now I am the vice president of Hispanic Culture, and Hispanic Culture is partnering with second chance outreach. I believe Neaners and Smiley [David Lujano] are an inspiration to homies that really want to change their lives. and if your organization would sponsor or partner with Hispanic Culture it could be impactful and show physical proof we can become successful if we work for it. now there will always be individuals that manipulate things and thin things but there are a lot of individuals that really want to better themselves. it also could grow as guys get out and are serious and help by getting involved with Pro social groups and advocating change. providing, giving back and giving strength and courage to those that are in need. some are not mentally strong and need a lil nudge in the right direction. some will go their own way if not interested but at least they will know when they are ready we will be there to give them the tool belt with the tools of life. I want to start a similar organization or business called Homboys Resilience. that's what we are: resilient. that is a goal of mine. a dream. an aspiration. I also believe it will give a positive support network and place people will feel comfortable to voice and work out their personal struggles and fears. as for what we expect from second chance outreach I think I would have to think about it but I believe in showing success stories and getting resources and giving guys a platform to acknowledge positive achievements and to have a voice and feel validated with their life choices.

Michael