

Ask the Chief.....

Why Don't We Just Give Them Bread and Water in Jail ?

Some have asked "Why don't inmates just get bread and water in jail, stay locked down in a 4' x 8' jail cell 24 hours a day, have no television, no telephone calls, and get no exercise while they are incarcerated? Wouldn't this keep people from returning to jail and really make them learn a lesson?" Others have asked "Why not put them in tents and make them wear pink underwear like "Sheriff Joe" in Arizona, the toughest Sheriff in America ?"

It's a good question, and asked by the many of people who visit the jail each year. The simplest answer is that such housing and feeding deprivations are the least effective ways to bring about rehabilitation and correct criminal behavior.

Think of this scenario. You have been sentenced to live in your living room for the next 10 months. You get to keep your easy chair, television, cable and your comforter. We install a shower and bathroom for your convenience. We bring you three balanced meals a day. BUT you cannot leave the room for 10 months. The first few days you sleep because all of us work two or three jobs to survive today. But all of us have been sick to the point of being bed ridden for 2-3 days. Soon we begin to go stir-crazy. After this we flip on the television and watch our favorite shows. But after 2-3 days even these make us bored and we find out how little of value is on television today. But we still have 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ months to go ... and we still can't leave the living room. Soon our children tell us they are going out for the night. We tell them to be back by 10 or 11pm. They laugh and tell us we are in the living room and really can't do anything about it. Maybe they will be back at 1am, 3am, or maybe not all night. They will deal with the consequences in 10 months when we "get out". Our employer, as expected, terminates our employment because we don't show up to work. We begin to worry about the good paying job we just lost, and wonder how we will get such a good job in this market when we "get out" of the living room. Soon the mortgage company, the car company, the credit card companies begin to call looking for payments. We tell them of our predicament and explain we will catch up as soon as we start working again in 8-9 months, and ask them to just be patient. Of course they can't wait and begin to turn off the gas and electric, repo the car, and foreclose on the mortgage.

As you can see the punishment is not in the housing, it is based in the lack of control of one's life. People who are incarcerated are punished by loss of freedom, loss of income, loss of family, not by the housing conditions. Housing conditions help out the jail and its staff, as well as the taxpayers in order to efficiently house, punish, and rehabilitate offenders who are in jail. If inmates are not fed properly they become sick. When they are sick it is the jail that has to care for them with doctors and/or nurses, prescriptions, hospital stays. And medical treatment is expensive. Such treatment is not optional, it is mandated by law. Failure to properly care for the inmate population results in litigation which is costly, and civil findings can be very expensive to a County and its taxpayers.

Many people speak about a Sheriff out west as being the "toughest Sheriff in the United States" and how he makes inmates wear pink underwear, live in tents, and eat spoiled green bologna sandwiches. But what you do not hear is that lawsuits brought against that Sheriff by employees, former employees, inmates, and the families of dead inmates have cost the county millions. One lawsuit cost that County 8 million dollars, and the County had a million dollar deductible. Those deductibles come from the County, paid for by the taxpayers. Not to mention the fact that every person in jail has family (mothers, fathers, wives, husbands, children, sisters,

brothers) who are not criminals, but still love and care for their loved ones who are incarcerated. If it were your family member, would you want them abused?

The fact is that exercise programs, proper nutrition, proper housing and humane treatment saves the County money, lowers insurance rates, and most importantly, enables rehabilitation. It is estimated that 50% of the crimes in Ohio have drugs or alcohol related to the crime. Simply locking a person up for 3 months, 6 months or a year, does not solve drug or alcohol addiction. Under such conditions we simply return addicts back to the streets and to their children in worse shape than when they first arrived. These released inmates are still addicted, now jobless, and still untrained, ready to continue to prey on our citizens.

Since the inception of our drug and alcohol treatment program in jail in 1993 it is estimated that inmates who complete the program (along with proper diet and exercise) have a 60%+ success rate of recovery. Private programs see success rates as low as 20-30%. The jail makes significant inroads by using the time people are incarcerated to retrain them to be better prepared for employment, and thus better able to support their families and get them off of public assistance. GED programs have been designed for jail inmates and they have seen significant success in offenders obtaining their GED's. Combined with treatment for addictions, this brings a significant success rate for returning offenders back to our communities better than when they first came to our doors under arrest.

One would be remiss not to mention the significant problem of the mentally ill in our justice system. It is estimated that there are 33% more mentally persons incarcerated today, than there are in our mental hospitals. The number of schizophrenics, manic depressives, and other mental disorders populating our homeless communities, and the homes of our neighbors burdened by the lack of affordable care, are arriving at the doors of jail in increasing numbers. The work of Sheriff Dunlap, Judge Trebets, the ADAMHS Board, and all of the legal and criminal justice community has made significant impacts on building a better and safer community by helping deal with their plight.

Simply put, locking up offenders alone does not effectively deal with crime in our communities. It only delays the problem by isolating the offender for a short period of time, and then returning the criminal back to the community in a worse state than when they first arrived at the doors of the jail.

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