

OUTCOMES

We intend for our stories to:

- Break stereotypes
- Address stigma after release
- Highlight the need for drug and alcohol rehab access in the community. Easy access.
- Explore and explain collateral consequences—how a felony conviction affects/wrecks someone's life—so that we change what policies? Check the box requirement on job apps.
- Provide more impetus for dismantling the school to prison pipeline by sharing how we've seen it at work in our communities or our own lives
- Emphasize the need for positive male role models in the community and provide encouragement/generate energy around this happening. Families and mentors.
- Facilitate a conversation about cultural competency for teachers, potential jury members, social workers, police, who else?
- Generate a broad conversation about parenting skills and training.
- Create more awareness and understanding about violence prevention.
- Generate a civic conversation around jury duty. What are the policy changes that could occur?
- Changes on the ward in the past year and the effects of those changes

We can add to this list as we need. But this is a great start.

That means we need to talk about our personal experiences with stereotypes, stigma, drugs and alcohol, school/education, consequences of having a felony, role models, culture and social connection or disconnection/inequities, parents, violence, jury duty.

Who needs to hear these stories?

- Other prisons, wardens, administrators
- Large portion of white America
- Elementary age children
- Legislators
- Teachers, special education
- School administrators and counselors
- Kids at risk of ending up in the pipeline. Boys of color. Kids living in poverty.
- Law enforcement
- Religious leaders
- Community organizers
- Coaches, mentors, mentoring organizations

What do they not understand?

Most of the discussion falls into two general categories—the general public doesn't understand the person on DR/in prison and they also don't understand the place/experience of DR.

Person

- Rehabilitation v. Habilitation “They haven’t been schooled in humanity.” The idea that you can’t re-habilitate someone who wasn’t habilitated in the first place. Start from where people are.
- Cultural difference: The rules you were raised with. “Most of the things I was doing, I thought were right.” Moral ambiguity. The principles you were brought up with and how they determine your choices.
- That people on DR are just that—people. “The majority were your neighbor.” They have redeemable qualities. The group perception is that the percentage of DR incarcerated individuals who are “redeemable” ranges from 60-90%.
- Similar to the above, but that the men on DR are individuals who love and are loved. They are someone’s child, brother, father, etc.
- That the picture presented of someone at a trial is one-dimensional, superficial, inflated for the purpose of conviction. That the audience is being fed a carefully constructed picture that eliminates their humanity. But someone’s brother knows them as just that, a brother.
- The power of role models and who represents a role model in poor communities.
- The 2 Americas. How poverty affects a child/young person.
- That a person can learn and grow through introspection and guidance.
- The role of substance abuse. How that looks different in the 2 Americas. “They go to Betty Ford; we go to jail.”

Place/Experience

- That DR isn’t a very transient place. There is a strong community. The men on DR are able to live peaceably in this community.
- That there is no effort toward re-habilitation. In prison at all. But especially on DR. “We have to rehabilitate ourselves.”
- Appeals process over 20 years. How that affects the incarcerated person, as well as the community that surrounds him.
- There are levels of “guilt.” Judges’ discretion.
- That a jury of your peers isn’t. “If I can’t talk to you about sports, hop hop, and Black History, you’re not a jury of my peers.” “A jury of your peers can judge the facts, not judge the person.”
- How aggravating and mitigating factors can work in a trial.
- The side with the most skillful attorney wins. The DA is an actor, selling the jury.
- Your attorney will try to hide who you are. Put you in a suit and tell you not to talk. Because once you open your mouth, you’ve lost the jury. Because you aren’t “one of them.” So the jury never knows you.
- How money affects legal outcomes. “If I could meet the state dollar for dollar for my defense” I’d have a different outcome.
- The prosecution “science” may be fiction. Expert witnesses may not be.
- The system isn’t concerned with the reasons WHY something happens or addressing/correcting the causes. It’s just concerned with getting a conviction.
- What prison teaches you is how to be a better criminal.

What blocks their understanding?

Media—Bias. Lack of coverage.

Prosecutorial misconduct

Lack of understanding about the legal process. How the CJS works. Assumptions that the state is always right.

Lack of vested interest. Thinking that prison or DR is not part of their world/doesn't matter to them personally. Not relevant.

The people in prison/with experience of incarceration aren't the people they know. The 2 Americas. Not having connection/communication.

That the CJS/legal system isn't transparent.

OUTPUTS**What can we create to address these blocks?**

Writing, performance –monologues, interviews, spoken word, letters, etc.

Art – self-portraits, exploration with different media first.

Policy considerations.

OUTREACH**Who else needs to be involved? What other partners do we want to bring to the table to expand the reach of this project?**

Entertainers/Music artists

Social workers, Chaplains, Psychologists, Attorneys?

Others who are incarcerated?

What are we passionate about?

Participant 1—Justice within prison. Insuring that those who are incarcerated get a second chance to be more productive citizens.

Participant 2—Stronger connections. Building bridges with communities. Allowing the outside to see prisoners as people and as worthy.

Participant 3—Love to have outsiders understand that everyone deserves a second chance. That we are no longer the same person we were before.

Participant 4—Literary expression. Awareness of humanity behind prison.

Participant 5—Writing and learning things about myself. Encouraging others to do the same. Seeing others as human beings, rather than getting caught up in labels.

Participant 6—Passionate about life. Trying to be a good person. Want people not to look at us as animals but as people.

Participant 7—Helping myself to help others. Not be wasted.

Participant 8—Exploring humanity through art forms. For people to grow. To help others in prison to change and to show people outside that we can change, too.

Participant 9—Writing as a venue to change the criminal justice system.

Participant 10—Ministry. Strive to improve my life and the lives of those around me. Dismantle mass incarceration. Not just reform but complete overhaul.

Participant 11—Education and love for writing to reflect the injustice in this country. Voiceless people in America.