

Zach
Schmidkunz

Good morning Chairman Wanzek & Members of the Committee. My name is Zach Schmidkunz ~~and~~ I am a mentor in RR. I came to prison at the young age of 20, with a very lengthy sentence. As we know, the human brain isn't fully mature until at least 25 years ~~old~~ of age. I think we can agree that prison is not the first choice where we ~~want~~ want our young people's brains to mature. Learning to navigate my new life was a struggle. I tried taking an anger management class, & I was ~~the treatment~~ told ~~that~~ I did not qualify unless I committed an act of violence within the prison. So I ~~was~~ allowed ~~to~~ myself to be warehoused.

When the Restoring Promise initiative came to NDSP - focussing on 18-25 year olds, I wasn't interested in a baby sitting job. But then I learned of their values, & how they focus on creating living units in prison that allow people to heal, and become ~~becoming~~ part of a community.

I ask that you pass this bill for the budget, because to help these young men, we need all the help we can get. Some of this includes money for books to teach Curriculum, resources to provide areas for 1-on-1 mentoring, & the availability to give our Restoring Promise officers the pay they need to stay in our unit, while remaining part of our community.

the opportunity for authentic change in our lives rarely happens when we are expecting it, or sometimes even wanting it. ~~expecting~~

In a few months I will celebrate a sad reality, & that's being incarcerated for half of my life... a time I wasn't expecting to change.

Three years ago, on the same exact date, but a different year, a very close friend of mine was hit & killed by a car late one night. I knew one day I'd have the opportunity to approach the driver who took my friend's life.

After I became a mentor, I found out on accident that the person responsible was now a mentee in UNITY Village. After ~~serving~~ ^{stealing} on my hurt & anger for a while, I realized that I was living in a unit where I was supposed to be committed to help people serve their time & heal in a way that I didn't have.

One of our 4 core values in Restoring Promise is Restorative Justice. What better way to get rid of my hurt & anger, than in a restorative justice circle? ~~circle & healing~~

There are many doubters of what we are trying to do in Restoring Promise... Some of them are even in this room right now. So, for the committee, & all of the doubters,

let me tell you... this is what RP is all about at its core.

which
concentrates
on what
harm was
done, & how
to repair it
& move
forward.

I know first hand what it's like having to be in prison with people who were close to the person who's life you took - it's not comfortable.

This restorative justice doesn't happen between us in other housing units. Instead there is hurt, anger, & uneasiness between us.

~~When you spend enough years in prison with all of those pent up emotions, how well does that prepare us to be good neighbors upon release? Most of us will be released from prison eventually.~~

Members of the Committee... if you want us to be good neighbors to you, please pass this bill that will provide us more opportunities to prepare.

Because I believe so much in Restoring Promise, ~~I~~ that mentee I was just speaking of, is now my mentee & I his mentor to walk beside him, not against him.

Thank you.