

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Released Inmates Seek Community Acceptance

AVCP Newsletter
c/o AVCP, Inc.
P.O. Box 219
Bethel, Alaska 99559

Dear Editor,

Cama-i. Its been some time that I have attempted to write to you about some concerns I have in regards to people who are incarcerated and people who are expected to be released back to their home villages. This is in the area of stereotyped thinking or behavior towards those human beings, especially Alaska Natives from their families and relatives in the villages, or in the cities.

During the past years there have been a lot of Alaska Native people or Yup'iks that have been sent to state correctional centers to do their time for the mistakes or crimes that they got

themselves involved into, especially involving both the abuse of alcohol and drugs in the villages or larger cities. In one way or another those crimes have been involved with alcohol and drug abuse, or influenced by these drugs besides the conflicts involved in each specific situation related to the crime. Otherwise those predicaments or consequences would not have been in reality as we have experienced through the years.

Often times, like I heard it before from my parents, people that committed crimes and got sentenced for some period of time go to prisons to look back and think over what they had done wrong in their lives. A lot of Alaska Natives in prisons get in that

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type of mental framework, where they contemplate what went wrong in their lives and what they should do while serving their sentences.

Personally, I think a lot of Alaska Natives in prison are good people, aside from their past mistakes. They probably did a lot of good things with their people however eventually through alcohol and drug abuse, their mental capacities get distorted, thinking wrong things, and then commit those crimes with the use of mind-altering drugs. I think a lot of native people can understand this viewpoint through personal observances and experiences of those people who abuse alcohol and drugs. The individual

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Alaska Native changes behavior and thinking from such abuse and as we know, these once good people are then locked up for some time as punishment for wrong thinking and behavior.

Once inside, the Alaska Native has no direct access to alcohol and drugs — the person sobers up, thinks back of what happened to his life, how he can make changes necessary to better himself so he can help himself and others once he gets out. Personally, I know each individual has to make these positive changes about himself with the creator that gave him his life. Otherwise, there wouldn't be much fruit if done personally. This I think, is called rehabilitation — of pursuing positive changes to better oneself so he will not be considered a threat to society when he is released from prison.

I think a lot of Alaska Natives are probably doing that using their human resources, like in native cultural classes, native dancing, and other programs that could help the person in prison better understand himself and others. Additionally, there are college classes, alcohol and drug abuse programs, etc. that improves the chance of a person from not coming back into prison. All of these have positive and negative effects, depending on how a person looks at them.

I know that Alaska Natives do not belong in prisons — they belong with their families, friends, and relatives in the village or cities where they can share, love, and grow as individuals and villages collectively. I know over the years a lot of things have tended to separate us, especially those decisions from outside governments and institutions. One of them is prisons.

"...They belong with their families, friends, and relatives..."

Alaska Native people in the state correctional institutions want to come back to their villages and be a part of them, as friends relatives, and families...

One of the things these Alaska Native people in prisons will be facing is stereotyped behavior from their relations of the past crimes or mistakes. This conflicting behavior would not help relationships between families and people in the villages.

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This would aggravate negative thinking and behavior that once was part of being in prison with respective families that had relatives in prison.

I know we all want to be accepted as human beings and have equal footing with our people, especially our relatives. An individual may have changed for better, after thinking over

"...One of the changes is to accept our people..."

what had happened wrong in his life, and want to continue having positive relationships with everyone in the village. Unless this is done, there won't be much of a harmony in life as we used to experience some time back in each village. I know we can work problems ourselves, individually and collectively as a group for better as we have done for thousands of years.

In effect, changes are inevitable, and we have to make adjustments throughout our lives; for the better. Otherwise, we as Alaska Native people will continually face problems without our control — the outside institutions controlling our lives and survival. One of the changes is to accept our people, forgive them what they have done wrong, especially people who have been in prisons, and use those human resources and their experience to make better lives for the people in the villages. They also have a purpose in their lives, with their talents to make life meaningful for others, especially after facing hardships that could positively be benefit for everyone.

*Sincerely,
(An inmate at Fairbanks Correctional Center)*