



Podcast: Accountability Letter Bank

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Inmate 1: *What I did was inexcusable.*

Inmate 2: *I have been mortified of what I did.*

Narrator: These inmates...

Inmate 3: *Yes, I still have a lot of work to do. But I am a better man now. I'm truly sorry.*

Narrator: Are saying they're sorry. They've written letters to their victims, apologizing for the crimes they committed.

Inmate:

I've always wanted to reach out to you to let you know in some way that I deeply regret taking Daniel from you.

Narrator:

It's part of "Bridges to Life," a program that teaches inmates about the pain crime causes. In addition to writing and reading apology letters aloud, crime victims speak to inmates about how crime has adversely affected their lives. None of the people who speak at Bridges to life are victims of specific inmates in the course. But they're often victims of the same types of crimes the inmates committed.

Crime Victim:

(applause)

That was evidence of the kind of restitution we were talking about last week.

Narrator:

The letters go into an “accountability letter bank,” where they’ll stay until a victim asks to read them. The DOC Victim Services Unit launched the letter bank in 2015. Victims can choose to be notified when an inmate writes them a letter and whether or not they want to receive it.

Victim Services Manager Steve Eckstrom says the letters can give victims new information or answer questions about the crime which may not have been addressed in court. The letters may also help victims deal with tough emotions. Or at least stop wondering about the unknown.

Steve Eckstrom: *Receiving a letter from the inmate accepting and acknowledging his or her responsibility can, for some folks, help relieve the burden of carrying that unresolved anger or fear.*

Narrator:

For the inmates, it gives them a chance to take responsibility for their crime and express remorse.

Inmate:

For me, the best part of writing all these letters is, you know, once I have it black and white, I can’t deny it to myself anymore.

Narrator:

Victims who want to know if an inmate has written an apology letter can complete the victim services enrollment form at doc.wa.gov and make sure to check the accountability letter registration box.

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