



EMPOWERMENT THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES IN PRISON

The connection between higher education in prison and empowerment is undeniable. It is up to us to be **resilient** and **reinvent** the way we claim to rehabilitate. According to Northwestern Prison Education Program student Patricia Ouska, “rehabilitation is education.”



Education cultivates leaders

- ▶ Incarcerated students develop a stronger work ethic, study routines and critical thinking skills.²
- ▶ Education in correctional settings offers valuable benefits, such as social awareness and problem-solving skills.¹
- ▶ Formerly incarcerated students are more likely to get involved with education following release.¹
- ▶ Critical thinking skills gives incarcerated students the confidence to engage more actively in their lived experiences when navigating the challenges of reentry.³



Educational opportunities create social capital

- ▶ Participation in higher education behind the walls can improve a student’s conversational skills.¹
- ▶ Not only is learning to communicate effectively helpful with employment and housing, but also in building self-confidence and maintaining social relationships. Professional relationships with faculty allow for these interactions to begin before release.¹
- ▶ Students behind the walls benefit from increased confidence and hope, which fosters the capacity to take an active part in their lives post-incarceration.¹

Voices from the Inside



"Higher education provides greater space for incarcerated persons to reinvent themselves and live lives (contrary to) criminal convictions while investing in becoming greater assets to society."

Eric Watkins



"The Northwestern Prison Education Program is giving me some semblance of being a person. Of productivity. Of proof that I'm more than what society saw me as or what a judge deemed me to be. It has given me something to be proud of and something to look forward to. It has given me discipline and direction, and to me it's so valuable."

Chelsea Raker



"Although I have endured the adversity of incarceration for the past 23 years, higher education has provided me with clarity, determination and the tools needed to fulfill my purpose in life. That purpose is to reach out to at-risk youth to ensure they do not follow my lead."

Ricky Quezada



"The federal government has brought back Pell grants for prisoners. This is a good first step. But what is Illinois going to do now? All we want is a chance to prove that we can change and are valuable. Through higher education we can do that. My question for you is simple: are you going to allow us?"

Josh Kruger



"I believe education and knowledge is powerful and leads the way towards many paths for success. Having an education is also special when you know there are people who look up to you, it sets a great example for everyone who is looking."

Elbonie Burnside



"Higher learning is important to me because I want to educate myself and rehabilitate every part of me that is humanly possible. I was 17 when I got locked up and till this day have not been able to afford nor access a high-school/GED program to elevate my mind to the next level of my growth as a person."

David Leonardo

¹ Baranger, J., Rousseau, D., Mastroilli, M. E., & Matesanz, J. (2018). Doing time wisely: The social and personal benefits of higher education in prison. *The Prison Journal*, 98(4), 490-513.

² Evans, D. N., Pelletier, E., & Szkola, J. (2018). Education in prison and the self-stigma: Empowerment.

³ Binda, H., Weinberg, J., Maetzener, N., & Rubin, C. L. (2020). "You're Almost in This Place That Doesn't Exist": The Impact of College in Prison as Understood by Formerly Incarcerated Students from the Northeastern United States. *Journal of Prison Education and Reentry*, 6(2), 242-263.

Working to bring opportunities and hope to people who are incarcerated.

TAKE ACTION. LEARN MORE AT [ILCHEP.ORG](https://ilchep.org).

