



Punish or rehabilitate?

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Imagine walking into an animal shelter. Sad eyes look to you, nameless. All of them hoping to be shown kindness, all of them hoping for a second chance at happiness. Your heart goes out to them, but there are so many you don't have time to focus on each individual. They have food and water; they are alive—it will have to do.

Prisons are not so different. Desperation is palpable. People walk the grounds alone, shunned and forgotten. Sentenced to prison for criminal offences, they were promised care and rehabilitation to prepare them for a better life. And yet, the first reaction for most people when they see this is not empathy, but scorn. 'Help them? Why should we? Leave them there! They deserve it.'

Prison populations are the most surveilled population, but also the most invisible. Sensationalist stories are plastered all over the news, yet in-depth prison reports are never widely disseminated. The media

believes citizens do not want the truth about the dull misery inside. They want a story; they want drama.

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As it stands, prisons are disheartening places. They're spaces for punishment, very rarely offering rehabilitation of any kind. Politicians favour harsher punishments as a show of power and control. What they fail to mention is that around 95% of individuals sentenced to prison eventually

return to their communities. They will become your neighbours.

In 2018, a report by Crest gave evidence against the common belief that punishment and rehabilitation can never be effectively combined. It doesn't take much to offer a humane, educative environment behind prison walls. Prisoners need purposeful activity, focusing on education and on developing essential skills aimed at securing a job. We need to look at inmates and remember that they are, first and foremost, people, each with their own individual needs.

People with nothing to do find ways to pass the time. When no positive choices are available, it is all too easy for inmates to get caught up in the prisonization effect, teaching each other the tricks of the criminal trade. On the other hand, those engaged in training programs are at least three times less likely to reoffend, armed with an alternative to criminality.

Do you still think we should throw away that key? 