

December 2, 2019

Office of the Governor
Governor's FOCUS Committee on Criminal Justice Reform
State Capitol
1007 E. Grand Ave.
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

Re: Meeting with Incarcerated Individuals at Iowa Medical & Classification Center

Dear Governor Reynolds, Lt. Governor Gregg & Committee Members:

My name is Michael Eugene Blackwell, Sr., and I am currently incarcerated at the Iowa Medical & Classification Center (IMCC) in Coralville, Iowa. I am in my twenty-eighth year of two life sentences for a double murder I committed in 1991. I am a former gang member, liar, schemer, and violent person who refused to assume responsibility for anything. It was always someone else's fault for my actions. I do not think, or live, that way any longer.

I recently learned about your committee through the news. A member of the Oakdale Community Choir here at IMCC, Mrs. Dorothy Whiston, informed us of her invitation to speak before you on November 7th, as a representative from the Inside/Out Re-entry program. On November 12th, Mrs. Whiston addressed the choir and conveyed what she believed was a productive gathering. Furthermore, that she shared lyrics with you from the song I wrote, "Remember: Be Love." She encouraged us to write you.

In a statement on January 4, 2019, Governor Reynolds said, "...Iowans believe in the power of redemption and second chances and it is why we are focused on reducing recidivism and eliminating barriers to successful re-entry." The largest hurdle you face in reducing recidivism is the criminal mindset, as that is a delayed barrier to successful re-entry. I use the word delayed because most criminals *play the game* to get released, but upon release, allow the criminal mindset to prevail. In the world of Corrections, incarcerated individuals endure a different kind of deficiency: quality mentors. Particularly, mentors who once lived in the criminal mindset but have since made changes in their thinking that is reflected in their incarcerated lifestyle. Mentors who are willing to help those still trapped navigate the challenges of mental transformation from negative to positive. Having once dwelled in and around negative mindsets, I became intimate with its essence. I learned how its influence works, and experienced firsthand the power it wields. Today I endeavor to fight against its effect on each generation. We are seeing criminal behavior manifest itself in the lives of sports figures, police officers, clergy, and government officials. This pandemic creates the need for mentors not only in prisons, but in every field, across every racial group, in every classroom, as we work our way into every country.

Reversing this regression is what motivated me to create a program called Negative2Positive. Our mission is simple: "To guide people who have committed to breaking free of the negative thoughts, speech, and behavior plaguing their character, as they strive toward a positive existence." I am its first graduate. Our ultimate goal is to graduate changed people who will become mentors, return to society, and continue changing lives.

Committees of this magnitude create hope, but I have noticed that the prisoner's vital input and perspective is not sought. In the spirit of "Fueling Ongoing Collaboration and Uncovering Solutions (FOCUS)," I extend an invitation for your committee to come collaborate with a select few incarcerated individuals here at IMCC. Although I respect your efforts to make the transition from prison to society more successful, I struggle to comprehend how you make decisions concerning prison reform without speaking to prisoners. I believe our input will add options, and possibly cost-efficient solutions. I understand that political, financial, and societal-safety aspects are not areas we can advise you on. However, when it comes to reducing recidivism and eliminating barriers, the diversity of our experiences and insight represent a valuable *tool* at your disposal.

If you have any questions, and/or wish to send an agenda for a meeting, here is my return address:

Michael E. Blackwell, Sr. #0060156
Iowa Medical & Classification Center
2700 Coral Ridge Avenue
Coralville, Iowa 52241

We are looking forward to having a comprehensive conversation with your committee in the future.

Respectfully Submitted,



Michael E. Blackwell, Sr.
Program Director – Negative2Positive

Cc: Dr. Beth Skinner, Director – Department of Corrections
William Sperflage, Deputy Director – Department of Corrections
Warden Jim McKinney

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

The first decision you have to make is that you want to change your thinking, behavior, and the course of your life. Next, you have to decide that you want help changing. Then, come to our office right outside M-Unit and let's talk. Our conversations are kept confidential.



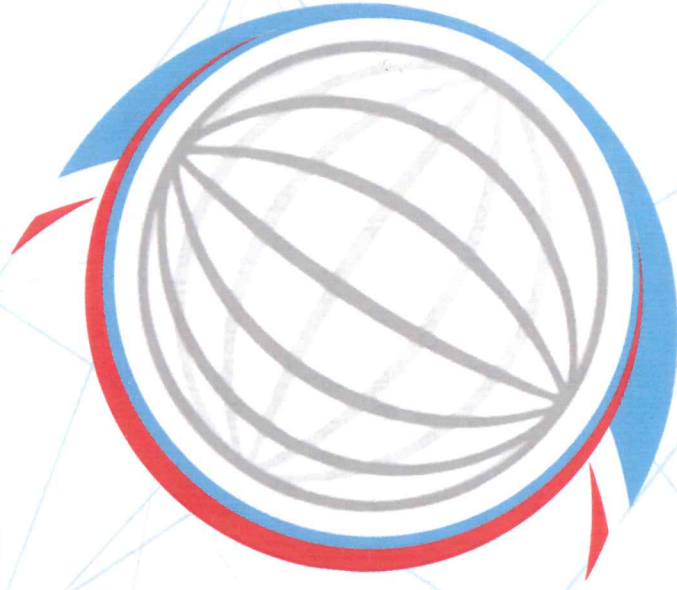
Please understand we are not here to control, manipulate, or dominate you during the process of change. We are here to guide you through what will prove to be one of the most challenging times in your life: going from Negative2Positive.



SPEAK YOUR TRUTH (2019) Reborn Studios Photography

Speak Your Truth is an event that takes place in the spring and fall of each year. People from all occupations outside of prison come inside of prison to share their truths, and hear ours. Topics range from "Free Pizza" to Cancer, and recited by murderers to college professors. This event is a time when humanity comes together to laugh, cry, think, relate, and love. Come join us and speak your truth.

BULLYING PRIDE PEER-PRESSURE HATE SELFISHNESS VIOLENCE
NEGATIVE
+ + + + +
POSITIVE
INTEGRITY RESPONSIBILITY PRODUCTIVITY LOVE RESTORATION COMMUNITY AFFIRMATION™
ARE YOU READY?



Iowa Medical and Classification Center
2700 Coral Ridge Ave
Coralville, Iowa 52241

OUR VISION

The world free of negativity and colonized with positive thinking, behavior, and solutions.

WHO WE ARE

We are an organization that mentors young men. We support and guide them through the labyrinth of changing the way they think. We teach them that the prison mentality, criminal thinking, and selfishness are wrong. We believe it is imperative they understand how their thinking is making them tenants in a world they claim to hate, but keep returning to. We speak with them about love, joy, peace, and patience. How those qualities deliver kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in relationships. We help them understand and develop integrity, responsibility, productivity, restoration, community, and affirmation. We want them to realize, as we have, that these are the true qualities of a man.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

Is sharing in the process of change. We understand the road can be overwhelming, scary, and lonely. However, "Two are better than one, because they have good return for their labor. If either of them falls down, one can help the other up." This concept is what connects humanity and facilitates changing the world one person at a time.

OUR MISSION

To guide people who have committed to breaking free of the negative thoughts, speech, and behavior plaguing their character, as they strive toward a positive existence.

"Our goal is teaching people how to deal with their problems constructively and affect their communities positively, while adding quality to their character consistently."

Michael Blackwell Sr.

WHY WE CARE

Negative? Positive cares because we have escaped the mindset of not caring. We have seen the devastation, destruction, and pain we have caused our victims, their families, our own families, and society. Seeing clearly the effects of our actions compelled us to live differently.

THE TEAM

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Michael E. Blackwell Sr.



FINANCIAL DIRECTOR

Mitchell K. Barta



MENTORSHIP DIRECTOR

Samual A. Blatcher



IF YOU ARE SERIOUS ABOUT YOUR CHANGE, SO ARE WE.

