



THE AWAKENING

TRANSFORMING FROM
THE INSIDE OUT

In Partnership with Walk in Those Shoes



NEWSLETTER

Aug 2023 - ISSUE #1

<https://awakeningexchange.sutra.co>



This Issue:

Upcoming Event

Register now and don't miss The Awakening's next Exchange, where a prisoner and a prosecutor have a conversation about healing, transformation and redemption.

A Conversation Between a Prisoner and a Prosecutor is sure to be an Exchange like none other. [Register Here](#) or at <https://forms.gle/RByaYQJvr7qrqNGBA>

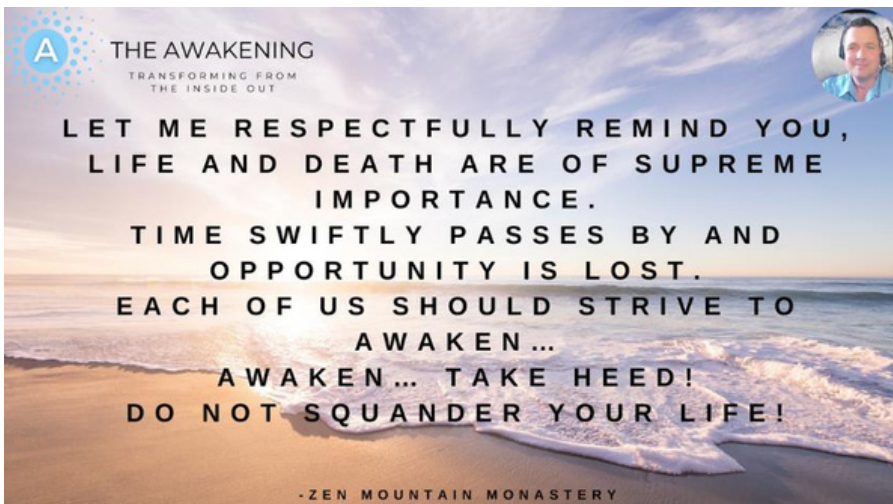
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The Awakening Exchange: Empowering Incarcerated Individuals Through Technology



PhD Researcher and Prisoner Harnesses Technology to Foster Change in Mass Incarceration

BY STEVEN MATTHEW CLARK

As I embark on my doctoral journey, exploring the intersection of technology and mass incarceration, I am driven by a deep passion to address the pressing issues within our criminal justice system. Through my research and advocacy, I founded the Awakening Exchange, an innovative platform that leverages technology to empower and support incarcerated individuals.

The Awakening Exchange stands as a testament to my commitment to creating meaningful change in the lives of those affected by mass incarceration. As a PhD researcher, I am dedicated to exploring the ways in which technology can be harnessed to provide support, resources, and a voice to individuals who have been marginalized within the system.

At the heart of the Awakening Exchange lies the belief in the transformative power of connection and storytelling. Through this platform, incarcerated individuals are given a space to share their stories, experiences, and perspectives with the public. It serves as a powerful tool for raising awareness, challenging misconceptions, and fostering a dialogue about the need for reform.

The Exchange offers a multitude of resources and support to those impacted by the criminal justice system. Legal assistance, educational materials, and mental health services are among the key offerings, providing individuals with the tools they need to navigate their journey towards rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

One of the driving forces behind the Awakening Exchange is my unwavering belief in the importance of social and human capital. I firmly believe that every person, regardless of their past mistakes, has the inherent potential to learn, grow, and positively contribute to society. By providing access to education, fostering meaningful connections, and amplifying voices, we can help individuals rebuild their lives and realize their full potential.

As a passionate advocate for social justice, I recognize the urgent need to address the systemic issues that perpetuate mass incarceration. Through my research and the development of the Awakening Exchange, I aim to bridge the gap between technology, academia, and real-world impact. By harnessing the power of technology, we can create innovative solutions that challenge the status quo and pave the way for a more equitable and compassionate criminal justice system.

As I embark on this journey, I am driven by the stories of resilience, transformation, and hope that I have encountered along the way. The Awakening Exchange is not just a platform; it represents a lifeline for those affected by mass incarceration, providing them with the support they need to rebuild their lives.

In my pursuit of knowledge and understanding, I am committed to shedding light on the possibilities that technology holds for addressing the complex challenges of our criminal justice system. Through the Awakening Exchange and my research, I hope to inspire others to join the movement, contribute to the dialogue, and work towards a future where every individual is afforded the opportunity to awaken their potential.

As I continue my PhD journey, I invite you to join me in this important work. Together, let us harness the power of technology, compassion, and human connection to drive lasting change and create a society where every voice is heard and every life matters.



Members of Our Exchange Community

You can join the Awakening Community at <https://awakeningexchange.com/>



Eddie Fordham was in high school and barely eighteen-years-old when he was sentenced to life in prison. He would ultimately serve 31 years, 2 months and 8 days within Florida's DOC. But Eddie's story didn't end there.

Having lived over three decades in prison, entering as a teenager, Eddie gained unique insight and wisdom that only he can have. It can't be learned in a textbook. His lived experience combined with his empathy, motivation and leadership skills have made him a force of change, impacting countless lives within the justice impacted community.

Today, Eddie shares his story and experiences with youth. He has the ability to meet people where they are, because he knows that place – he has been there. He shares his personal experience and insight into the consequences of crime and false friends. In addition, he fights for those he has left behind, volunteering his time as a parole advocate, giving voice to his brothers and sisters inside who are striving to be better.

Eddie created the consultancy firm, The Road To Reentry, focused on matching justice impacted consultants with organizations that need expertise in developing pathways to re-entry success, including Transitional Housing; Workforce Development; Higher Education; Wellness and Recovery; Volunteerism; and Mentorship. These voices need to be heard, not only during discussions, but also during the development and implementation of programs. Eddie Fordham is focused on ensuring those with lived experience have a place at the table, having a positive impact on the future.

While Eddie Fordham is dedicated to helping others, he is also an experienced speaker, sharing his experience as well as his message to Choose Your Friends Wisely at such places as the Florida Office of the Attorney General's National Conference on Preventing Crime. To hear Eddie talk about his experiences on the podcast *Prison to Promise*, go to: <https://open.spotify.com/episode/7zaCIPC0DwiZ2VB9WPDkPW?si=UJuGoSsfTsSoygrsWxtuKg>. To contact him about speaking for your school or organization, or to discuss Reentry With Purpose, Inc., you can contact him directly at eddie4dm@gmail.com.

Eddie Fordham doesn't view his many accomplishments, including receiving Miami Dade College's prestigious Academic Achievement Award as all about 'personal success.'

"I see them as an opportunity to pave the way for others by becoming an advocate and subject-matter expert. My goal is to help colleges and correctional officials better understand the challenges as they work together to unlock higher education in prison."

Valerie Cartonio & Prison POD Productions

PRISON
POD

Ranked #3 among the "Top 15 Prison Podcasts" by Feedspot!

<https://prisonpod.org/> | Prison POD, P.O. Box 294, Orono, ME 04473 | prisongram@prisonpod.orgtext

Valerie Cartonio believes in the power of compassion and empathy, and through the Prison POD podcast Valerie uses a combination of Sociology and Peace Studies to build understanding of self while providing tools for creating positive change from within, as well as supporting positive interaction with others. Prison POD maintains a space for those who live in prison to have their voices heard. While the podcast was originally accessible through Edovo tablets in 40 states, due to a new fee structure, the podcast will now only be available within Maine prisons.

While a disappointment for Valerie and her guests, the Prison POD is now available on YouTube, making it available to family and friends at any time. That alone makes Prison POD Productions invaluable. You can support Prison POD by visiting Valerie's YouTube channel and subscribing at <https://www.youtube.com/@valeriecartonio2025/podcasts>. You can also support Prison POD Productions by donating directly at <https://gofund.me/6ccbb6d6>.

Flikshop



Marcus Bullock, CEO and Founder of Flikshop, has been helping families stay connected to their incarcerated loved ones since 2012. Through lived experience, Marcus knows the value of strong family relationships and their proven impact on reducing recidivism rates. Maintaining family connections is Flikshop's priority and in doing so Flikshop is working to end recidivism through sending messages of encouragement, reminding individuals they are seen and valued despite their circumstances - affirming the hope they are not forgotten.

When Marcus was 15 years old he was arrested and sentenced to 8 years in adult maximum security prisons for carjacking a man in a shopping mall parking lot. By the time he served the first 2 years he became very dark and depressed, and his mom made him a promise while in a prison visiting room. "Marcus, I'm going to write you a letter or send you a picture every day for the remaining 6 years of your sentence."

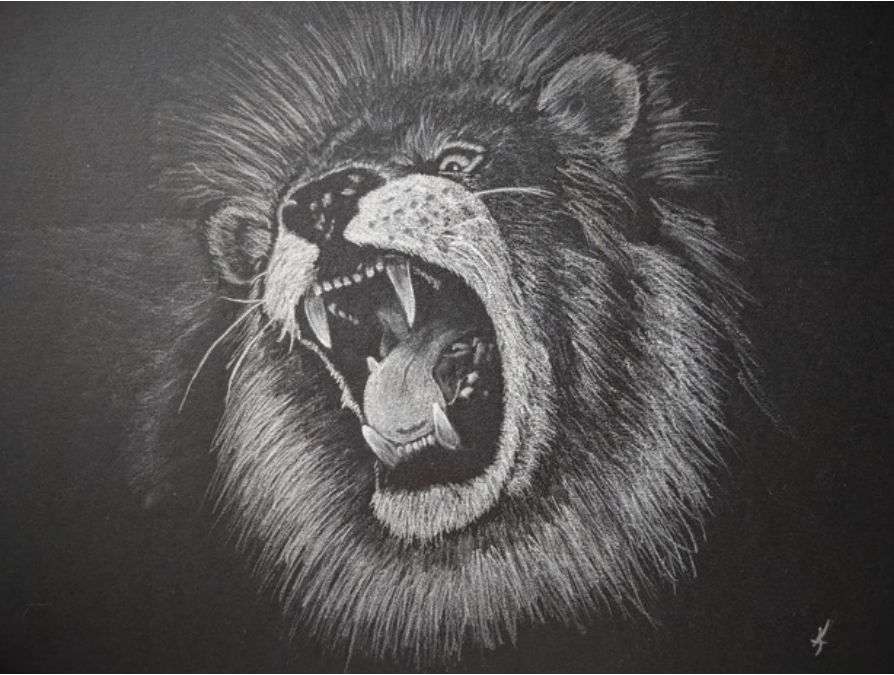
"Those letters saved my life!" claims Marcus. "I was able to see the world through my mother's lens and it gave me a clear vision to what my life would look like after prison."

Marcus Bullock knew we needed to leverage that kind of love to help end recidivism around the globe. Today, Flikshop works hard to keep every person in every cell connected to their family members and resources prior to their release... just like Marcus' mom did while he was in prison. To start using Flikshop and communicating through photographs with your loved one, go to <https://www.flikshop.com/>. It's easy, no subscription fees & Flikshop provides 2 free credits to start!

WALK IN THOSE SHOES, 501(c)(3)

www.walkinthoseshoes.com – P.O. Box 70092, Henrico, VA 23255 – contact@walkinthoseshoes.com

WITS is excited to partner with The Awakening Exchange in a monthly newsletter, consistent with our mission to support creative writing and reading within prisons. We are stronger together.



Art donated by Kirston Angell, Foothills CI, North Carolina

News from our Central Prison, Raleigh, NC, Death Row Book Club

Our original NC Book Club is still going strong. They are starting off August with *The Housemaid*, by Freida McFadden. The NC Club chooses their books on a rotation, each member making the decision on their turn, making for a lot of variety.

The group was excited to be asked to contribute an essay regarding their experience with the Book Club to the *Capital Punishment and Social Rights Research Initiative*, at the request of Dr. Barbara Laubenthal, political scientist, in partnership with Dr. Rick Halperin, Human Rights Program at Southern Methodist University Dallas. The Initiative can be found at <https://www.cpsrinitiative.com/>.

CURRENT WRITING CONTEST PROMPT – DEADLINE 8.31.23

Reflect on a time while you have been living in prison where you have either participated in or witnessed someone else being a part of making a positive difference in someone's life. Describe the circumstances, as well as what this experience taught you about loving others?

Entry Details: Only those who live in prison are eligible to participate, and we don't accept anything that has been previously published.

Submission is free – BUT, even if an entry doesn't win, we consider entry permission to publish and edit. Sometimes we get so many excellent entries, they can't all win, but they need to be shared. Entries should be 1,000 words or less. Poetry is considered, as long as it is inspired by the prompt.

PRIZES: First Place: \$75 | Second Place: \$50 | Third Place: \$25

DEADLINE: August 31, 2023. Decisions will be posted by approximately September 30, 2023.

MAILING ADDRESS:

Walk In Those Shoes
Writing Contest Entry
P.O. Box 70092
Henrico, Virginia 23255

"You make me want to work harder. You make me want to dream bigger. You make me want to up my game!" - Carter Cooper, WITS writer

If you would like to make a donation to WITS or read more from WITS writers, go to www.walkinthoseshoes.com

THE ECHOES OF YOUR LIFE, MY FRIEND...

By Keith Erickson, Pleasant Valley State Prison, California

Last night I called my wife, something I do every night, and we went through our extensive prayer list together. Five minutes later, I was alarmed to see a message left from her on the prison tablet. ‘Call home again’... I braced myself.

“Please sit down, Keith.” Her next words pierced right through me as she read the Instagram post announcing the loss of David Inocencio, founder of *The Beat Within*. My heart tightened and the tears began to form. Our last telephone conversation had been just weeks prior. I had not spoken with David much this year, unaware he had been battling cancer, and hearing his voice was always uplifting. He described to me where he was when we spoke that day, sitting on his patio, his soulmate Lisa cooking him breakfast, and the sunshine was especially beautiful that day. I never imagined it would be the last time we would talk, yet I look back now at that conversation and see it for what it may have been.

David, a man that came into my life as a stranger nearly ten years ago, became more than just a mentor to me during a time of soul searching and longing to be more than what I had been much of my life; he became like a brother to me, someone I admired for all he was in the community and the world around him. I wrote a letter to *The Beat Within* ten years ago after reading an issue, not expecting much in return. I merely wanted to give them a “shout out” for the outstanding work they do throughout California. David replied to my letter with personal recognition and praise for the work that I had shared with him regarding my own struggles and successes while incarcerated. I was touched by the fact that this man took the time to read my story, give me feedback and encouragement, and more importantly, see me as a human being who had experienced a tough life, rather than just someone who had lived life committing crimes and making poor choices.

I began sharing more of my story with David all those years ago, dedicating time and effort into providing artwork to *TBW*, and before long I became a recognized feature amongst the teens who would flip through the pages. David would tell me how they would ask about me when he would visit the juvenile facilities, wanting to know when I was going to do another drawing. It made me feel like what I was doing was bigger than just the time and effort of me putting my talents on paper.

“Keith,” he said, “your artwork inspires these kids to sit down and see possibilities they never considered before.”

I never saw the significance in what my art was doing until he said those words. I wanted to give others something from my heart, yet I was missing the bigger picture all along. David, my brother and friend, taught me how to see the bigger picture. I spent years of my life incarcerated in the local juvenile hall, and eventually the California Youth Authority at the age of fifteen. I could relate to the teens that would write their stories, hopes and dreams in the pages of *TBW* publications. These young people, in every sense, were just like me and needed to be heard. David, with no hesitation whatsoever, gave them a voice.

“Thank you for everything that you have done all of these years, Keith,” he said that last morning we talked. “I love you my brother, and I am so happy that I got to hear your voice.”

Perhaps he knew something I didn’t know that day and wanted me to always know how much he loved and appreciated me. Despite all of our initial conversations, that one conversation felt more heartfelt and sentimentally sound than any other. David always talked of me coming home one day, attending *TBW* workshops with him and Lisa, and I promised him we would have a nice barbecue with his family and mine once I earned the freedom that I’ve been fighting so hard for.

“David,” I told him that morning, “you, too, have been a great part of my journey, and I love you and appreciate all the confidence you have in me.”

There is never enough time to say goodbye, and even had I known it would be our last conversation, I would have never said goodbye to a man that will forever be present in my life, despite his passing. I grew to love this man with the better parts of me that he helped bring out over the years.

Earlier this year I was referred back to the courts for ‘resentencing consideration’ based on my accomplishments and positive changes to my life; David wrote a letter of support to the judge who will be making the final decision on my case(s) on any given day. I do not know what the outcome will be; however, I do know that even in his final days he displayed yet another act of compassion for me, and I will forever be grateful. I will walk out of these gates one day soon, I believe this wholeheartedly; and in spirit, the man that gave me a voice all of those years ago, as he has thousands of others in his lifetime, will be watching over me as I embrace my freedom for the first time in over three decades. Until then, I will continue to be the man David taught me to be through his own life’s legacy.

My brother, my friend, I love you and will miss you...