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Unexpected Benefits of Prison Education

By Christopher Zoukis, MBA

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More and more people are learning that prison education programs are instrumental in reducing crime

(https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/news/2018/03/02/447321/education-opportunities-prison-key-reducing-crime/) and cutting down recidivism (https://signaldc.com/prison-education/). It costs less (https://prospect.org/special-report/education-vs.-incarceration/) to educate prisoners (both in and out of prisons, which ultimately leads to lower incarceration rates) than to house offenders in the federal prison system, making education a key tax-reduction strategy as well. However, the benefits of

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prison education (<https://www.prisonerresource.com/prison-research-papers/the-importance-of-effective-correctional-education/>) go beyond dollars and cents.

While it's fun (and necessary) to tout statistics that show the greater good of education behind prison walls, we must not forget the inmate taking on these studies. Whether he or she will be released or spend the majority of their life in jail, education makes a huge difference on a personal level. Here are three benefits of prison education (<https://www.prisonerresource.com/prison-education-guide-book/>) that may not grab headlines, but are very important nonetheless.

Education = Confidence

The prison environment naturally lends itself to lowered self-esteem (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/me-we/201312/10-sources-low-self-esteem>). Individuals with low self-esteem can quickly enter a downward spiral. When the individual stops believing in themselves and their abilities, they make little effort for self-improvement.

For offenders that have parole coming up, this is very dangerous. Self-improvement means working towards rehabilitation and having a life (employment, better social circle, etc.) upon release. Education of any kind in prison (i.e., academic or vocational education (<https://www.prisonerresource.com/in-prison-programs/>)), be it cooking classes, hairdressing courses, or full-on college degrees, helps to build up confidence. The student learns they can succeed and develop their skills.

For many, as the prison system is skewered to the disenfranchised, success in these courses is the first time they receive validation of their skills. Once that validation is felt, the prisoner/student is much more likely to work towards rehabilitation and a sustainable life without recidivism.

Education = Paying it Forward

Not everyone gets released. Does education benefit lifers? Yes, it does (<https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2017/06/why-prison-education-is-about-more-than-lowering-recidivism/531873/>). In addition to confidence and self-esteem, those that obtain an education in prison often pass it on. Edward Sanders (<https://www.prisonerresource.com/prison-education/edward-sanders-proves-the-necessity-of-prison-education-programs/>), for example, helped his

fellow inmates with their court cases after earning degrees in behavioral science and paralegal studies. Cosmetology students in prison (<https://www.allure.com/story/prison-salons-helping-inmates>) help other inmates look and feel their best, and we all know the power of a good makeover!

Even if someone is spending their life in jail, education is never wasted. It improves the life of the inmate, stimulates their mind, gives them something to strive for, and often has the added benefit of that inmate using his or her newfound skills to the advantage of others.

Paying it forward is always important, whether free or behind bars. The education one of equates to the improved well-being of many.

Education = Less Disciplinary Action in Prison

There have been several studies (https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.ca/&httpsredir=1&article=1009&context=cjs_etds) that show a correlation between prison education programs and decreased disciplinary action.

The reasons for this are varied. Again, confidence comes into play. When the inmate knows there is more to him or her than the sum of their sentence, they are less likely to act in ways that disrespect themselves and others. Another factor is plain old “time.” Studying takes time. Studying engages the mind. A bored, frustrated inmate is more likely to lash out than one whose mind and hands are occupied constructively.

Education – There is no Downside

No matter which way you look at it, from a tool of re-entry (<https://www.prisonerresource.com/prison-consulting-services/prisoner-reentry-programs/>) to a political platform, from taxpayer savings to the impact it has on a personal level, education has no downside. Advocating for prison education programs is important because education is the best way to create lasting, positive, change.

← [Nebraska High Security Prison Chaos After All Cell Doors Open](https://www.prisonerresource.com/inmates/nebraska-high-security-prison-chaotic-after-error-causes-cell-doors-to-open/)

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About Christopher Zoukis, MBA

Christopher Zoukis, MBA, is the Managing Director of the Zoukis Consulting Group, a federal prison consultancy that assists attorneys, federal criminal defendants, and federal prisoners with prison preparation, in-prison matters, and reentry. His books include *Directory of Federal Prisons* (<https://amzn.to/3azDAOE>) (Middle Street Publishing, 2020), *Federal Prison Handbook* (<https://amzn.to/2PXNthf>) (Middle Street Publishing, 2017), *Prison Education Guide* (<https://amzn.to/2Typ2ZZ>) (PLN Publishing, 2016), and *College for Convicts: The Case for Higher Education in American Prisons* (McFarland & Company, 2014).

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