

Arizona, a “civilized criminal justice system” for the behaviorally ill or still a “hang them high” punishment?

By Carl R. ToersBijns

Today’ s question is simply based on recent events and media stories related to the way Arizona prisons are being operated and how the sick people inside our prisons are being treated or as the media has divulges - mistreated.

There appears to be only two ways sick people incarcerated inside our state prisons are treated for their behavioral disabilities or illness. They are either treated and provided sound health care [for those who can afford it and privileged with political assistance] or they are deliberately neglected, abused or ignored because they are prisoners and not worthy of the extra expense of treating them right and avoid needless suffering.

It has been often said that Arizona is still a “Wild Wild West state that has its own rules for punishment for crimes against the state or society. Arizona culture has long accepted the harsher option of justice to “teach them a lesson” thus denying persons with mental illness the kind of treatment they deserve.

Their code ranges in the forms of isolation, separation and condemnation of the mentally ill who should be dumped into a dungeon or other dark hole, out of sight and out of mind.

Their hardness on the rule of law is beyond judicial consciousness that reflects a civilized society that has evolved from those western ways of controlling the law and punishment methods, land barons corrupting state officials and political correctness influencing law making and law breaking.

Today we still struggle with these ideologies from the past as Arizona refuses to move into the millennium where justice is working hard to be part of a balanced social system that contains elements of fairness and equality for all persons regardless whether incarcerated or free men and women.

This problem of behavioral disabilities is wide ranging and not just limited to the prisons. It impacts families on a consistent basis and harms their ability to seek good help for treatment within the community, from law enforcement, the criminal courts and society as a whole.

It appears that nobody wants to address mental health issues today unless it impacts their own lives or their own families making it an involuntary commitment to seek change because of their own inability to deal with their own problems appropriately and according to those standards set to allow their relatives personal protection from further harm or worst, death.

Today's solution inside Arizona is forced segregation for those mentally ill because our laws, although some of the best in the country, do not provide enough incentives to use all tools available to avoid punishment as a final result. Forced segregation results or impacts us in various negative consequences within our communities as it may result in homelessness, incarceration along with violence including self-harm and suicides.

Our laws if applied appropriately should and can provide various degrees of treatment as alternatives to "legally" segregating these persons and eliminating such harm by giving them the help they need to cope and function as a human being among the rest of us.

The answer to behavioral disabilities is not incarceration but rather rehabilitation and recovery treatment to allow them to sustain daily life as a free person and void of chains and shackles. We are describing our children, our families, our neighbors and our friends that may be in need of help.

Today, more war veterans are being incarcerated than ever before. They are victims of our country's war policies and are often ignored once discharged from the service leaving them on their own to cope and function with various service connected disabilities that range from extreme psychotic episodes, flashbacks, anxiety attacks and more including PTSD. We owe it to our veterans to find a solution and we owe it to our behavioral disabled to keep them out of jails and prisons for the rest of their lives.

They are not demons possessed by evil but rather human beings that are imprisoned, either physically or psychologically, into a black hole where they will be morally depraved of their civil rights and sentenced to be harmed, killed, tortured or imprisoned for life. Today's tolerability of zombies and vampires makes this condition even more morally acceptable than ever before.

If this sounds like the ideology of the Dark Ages, it should because today viewpoints are exactly the same as those of the 15th Century to many people who propose to “lock them up and throw away the key” just they did before.

It is true that “mass deinstitutionalization” is the primary cause for prisons filled with the severely mentally ill. When government stopped funding state hospitals and removed this treatment option from the public, the prisons became a proxy for those who needed to be hospitalized for treatment but were rather incarcerated for psychiatric care that was nil in existence or availability. Limited resources today still do not meet the requirements needed to appropriately treat those who are severely ill.

As financial resources dwindled in a poor economy, these prisons were left defunct of required resources to maintain treatment and stabilization programs for these persons. Incarceration instead of hospitalization became the standard for treatment of the mentally ill and once inside prisons, they were ignored or neglected providing them poor skills to cope and function but also provided them no support to prepare themselves for reintegration back to society making them high risk repeat offenders with no hope of ever staying out of prison.

To do nothing is “unacceptable” and time is not on our side. We have to stop blaming these behaviorally disabled persons for the commission of crimes or mistakes in our communities and help them cope and function in a free society and not inside a prison.

It is time to change the way we think, we act and the way we isolate the mentally ill persons today in Arizona. We need change and they deserve it.

Source:

<http://davidshopeaz.org/documents.html>