

# Center For Constitutional Rights

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

**<https://ccrjustice.org/home/blog/2017/06/23/released-solitary-you-must-literally-start-over-again>**

### Public Facing Advocacy Writing

The CCR blog

*To mark the 23rd of the month, invoking the 23 hours per day that prisoners spend isolated in special housing units, activists throughout California are taking action to bring attention to prison conditions. Below, Michael Zaharibu Dorrough, a class member in [Ashker v. Governor of California](#), shares his experience of being released into the general prison population after years in solitary confinement, following a settlement in the case that effectively ended long-term solitary confinement in CA prisons.*

I was transferred to general population here at Solano State Prison November 6, 2015 from the CSO Corcoran (SHU) where I spent the last few years of an almost thirty year term in solitary confinement.

Like the vast majority of prisoners housed in solitary confinement, I was placed in there for non-disciplinary reasons. The fact is I was housed in the SHU for all those years because they could do it without any repercussion. Fortunately, as a result of the coalition building that occurred during the peaceful protest, many prisoners in the same situation as myself was released from solitary confinement.

Being released to general population after being in isolation so long, requires that you must literally start over again. I did not have a clue what to expect in an environment youve been isolated from. But, many of us consciously or unconsciously understood that if the opportunity presented itself for us to somehow be placed in general population a tremendous amount of patience would be required. Many of us understood that what was lacking culturally within the Afrikan community was a by product of our being buried in solitary housing units especially in Pelican Bay. Several of the younger prisoners who did not know was abandoned by people who gave up on them.

For a number of years while housed in solitary confinement I would always say, I cant wait to be released to general population. I think this mentality helped with my transition. I was also blessed to have a old and dear friend with me whom was also housed in solitary confinement, Clyde Abassi Jackson, as well as other SHU released prisoners V. Underwood, R. Sessions. Ive also met some very good people since my arrival here.

I did not realize how many areas of my life that I had to unlearn until I was actually in that moment. Even though I have been housed in general population for almost two years the transition is ongoing.

I received my first contact visit in close to thirty years in December 2015. It was fantastic and the first time in a very long time I felt welcomed. I could not help but notice the nearness of my visitor. I constantly found myself wanting to touch her, just to hold her hand to see what she felt like. I had hoped that I would have an opportunity to hug my parents upon my release from solitary confinement but, they passed away prior to my release.

I was reintroduced to a much better quality of food in the visiting room (As well as the general population) Yogurt, Pineapples, Strawberries, Steak burritos and Ice Cream. I just found myself jumping right into it, Smile!

I had to rediscover being able to have a conversation with someone, listen to music of my choice, look up at the night sky and other things people take for granted. I find myself trying to hang on to every word that I am listening to during a conversation. There is not a day that goes by when I dont hear some Miles Davis or Jill Scott. I had completely forgotten how incredibly mysterious the night sky is. There is a view of the mountains thats the first thing I see in the morning on the way to breakfast Sometimes you can look up at the clouds over the mountains and they look so close that I think I can just reach up and touch them, its breath taking.

I have been involved in a number of self help programs (anger management, victims awareness, denial management, etc) There is also a program here called ManUp which is a mentorship program. These programs as well as other programs has helped me to stay focused on my transition and my overall development. Some might say I would make a positive mentor, yet I have benefitted from these programs and I truly needed them. I have had a job as a counselors clerk for almost a year which affords me the opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue with the prisoners in the building I work in.

There is a program that I am involved in that makes it possible for me to fight back with like minded people called L.W.O.P. (Lifers With Optimistic Progress). It consists of people with Life Without Parole sentences and long term prison sentences. We are committed to overturning those sentences, also appropriately called the other Death Penalty, there is a website ([Liferswithoptimisticprogress.wordpress.com](http://Liferswithoptimisticprogress.wordpress.com))

There are still some things that I continue to struggle with as a result of my being to solitary. I still have my moments in which I will withdraw to myself. I wonder if we will ever be able to overcome the harm that has been done by our long term confinement in solitary? And of course I continue to fight in the hope that I will succeed in having my wrongful conviction overturned. I am now in possession of statements from witnesses who were willing to testify that I was not at the scene when this shooting occurred, but who were never called to testify on my behalf. The struggle continues.

It is extremely important that we continue to forge with each other, the kind of coalition building that was so very effective in making it possible for our release from solitary.  
And changes in the way that this must now be done.  
Especially now that fascism is so obviously in our midst.  
We are capable of creating the kind of society/world that we want to live in, because we have already put in motion the building blocks to do so.

In every age, no matter how cruel the oppression carried on by those in power, there have been those who struggled for a different world. I believe this is the genius of humankind, the thing that makes us half divine; the fact that some human beings can envision a world that has never existed.  
Anne Braden

Love and Struggle  
Michael Zaharibu Dorrough, on behalf of the NCTT [N.A.R.N. Collective Think Tank]

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