

Open Forum  
Times-Call  
April 12, 2009  
Marian Head

Re: "Incarceration System Needs an Overhaul," April 5, Open Forum

No kidding! There are 2.3 million people in U.S. prisons, nearly five times more than the world's average. While the reasons are complex, one thing is clear: Our focus on punishment isn't working. The national average of ex-cons who return to jail is a shocking 69 percent. In addition to the human toll of incarceration, 68 billion of our taxpayer dollars are paying for this travesty.

Longmont has the foresight to provide citizens with an alternative to the revolving door of the penal system. Thanks to the vision of the Longmont City Council and individuals who contribute personally and through community foundations, the Longmont Community Justice Partnership is able to offer restorative justice processes for offenders who take responsibility for their crimes. They are given a chance to meet with their victims and community members in a respectful process during which they can learn the full impact of their crimes and agree to repair their harm. On average, 90 percent of offenders complete their agreements and are welcomed back to the community. What a different model from "lock 'em up!"

Teaching Peace, the non-profit parent of LCJP, reports that in 2008, the re-arrest rate for Longmont's restorative justice participants was 4.3 percent, as compared to the 69 percent national criminal justice system's recidivism rate. Why aren't more tax dollars being moved from the broken penal system to more cost-effective restorative justice programs?

A March 29 Parade cover article said of our prison system, "We are wasting billions of dollars and diminishing millions of lives." Of Longmont's restorative justice alternative, I say, "We are saving our taxpayers' dollars and uplifting thousands of our citizens' lives."

Please contact Teaching Peace to find out how you can support this option for justice at 303-776.1527 or [info@teachingpeace.org](mailto:info@teachingpeace.org)

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