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AN ALMOST NINE-YEAR
MANDATORY SENTENCE.**

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STEPHEN WAS INCARCERATED AT AGE 16 FOR A NON-VIOLENT CRIME.

A rigid state law that mandated he be tried as an adult meant a mandatory 100-month sentence with no chance of appeal, early release or parole. Stephen would have to serve the full sentence.

Today, Stephen holds a master's degree in global supply chain management, has a full-time job, loves rock climbing and is learning how to code at night.

"I'll be honest, with what happened in my life as a kid, being incarcerated probably saved my life," he says. ***"I think I'd probably be dead otherwise."***

His story begins like those of many other incarcerated youths - with an extremely challenging family environment.

Born into a household of anger, drama and abuse, the odds were already stacked against him. Even though that in time, Stephen would come to understand that serious mental illness was at the root of his family issues, it didn't change the difficulty of his life as a child. Homeschooling started at age six, partly because his mother's mental illness made her crave having her children close. But home schooling was also a way to hide the physical abuse from teachers in public school.

For a time, homeschooling was working out well enough for Stephen. He was learning and having regular lessons. But at around age 10, it all stopped, and for the next five years, Stephen was on his own, doing little more than watching TV and playing in the yard all day. He had no friends, no social skills, and no ongoing education.

At 15, he made the decision to run away, ultimately staying with a woman and her daughter he had met randomly. It was a decision that went from bad to worse as this woman would coerce him into the mistake that would lead him to a secure juvenile justice facility, and where he would spend close to the next nine years of his life.

What he did with during that time is inspiring.

Stephen remembers thinking, ***"I was like, my life is over. I'm here for almost nine years, that's more than half as long as I've been alive. This is nuts."*** Locked up in a secure facility there was a lot to deal with - power dynamics to understand, instances of racism, and violence. Having no social skills made it that much more challenging. Then, depression set in.

He began taking advantage of the mental health support available, finally getting good advice from an adult he could trust. But what truly changed his life was that every youth in custody is required to go to school. For Stephen, that's when a light bulb went off. ***"I just loved it and soaked it all up."*** It was the first real school he had ever attended and the first real social interaction with kids his age. ***"The teachers I had there were great,"*** he says. ***"They encourage you to do things the right way, and the more they gave me to do, the more I asked for."***

School became his salvation. ***"I loved getting good grades. It was proof I was on the right track. I ate it up."***

In time, he completed his high school requirements and started asking about college. He says, ***"I remember the day I told one of my teachers that I was going to get a bachelor's degree with a 4.0 and be Summa Cum Laude."*** He saw some raised eyebrows, but he didn't hear the word no.

He decided to apply to Portland State University for a business degree because they had an online program. He was up front about his situation and the school did all they could to help. It took time and patience to make it all happen, but eventually, he was enrolled.

THIS IS WHERE THE PERFORMANCE-BASED STANDARDS (PBS) AWARDS PROGRAM ENTERS HIS LIFE.

"I have to say that PbS was a huge part of my success. I applied for and won two college scholarships through them, plus I was able to take advantage of their employment matching grant, all of which I put towards school," he says.

When he was almost seven years into his sentence, about to finish his bachelor's degree (where he did meet his 4.0 goal), he met with a facility director who casually asked if Stephen had ever thought about the possibility of getting his master's degree. Another light bulb went off.

"I never considered anything like that. But I couldn't get it out of my head," he says.

Once again, with time and patience, Stephen applied to and was accepted into the Portland State University graduate program, and about six months after he was released, finished the work to earn his master's degree in supply chain management. He is currently working full-time and starting to build community and everyday routines.

Today, life is good for Stephen. But he will tell you there are so many other kids like him still incarcerated. All they need is an opportunity. ***"I met so many kids like me who just need a chance."***

For many of those kids, the PbS Education and Employment Foundation can help give them that chance. Executive Director Kim Godfrey says, ***"We'd like to offer all of those kids the same awards we offered Stephen because the more kids we can help, the fewer kids who will end up returning to juvenile facilities. Because we are limited financially, we established the new foundation in July to raise money to help more youths get real second chances to turn their lives around."***

This is all about second chances.

Your donation will make those second chances.



SO MANY KIDS DESERVE A SECOND CHANCE. WILL YOU HELP US GIVE IT TO THEM?

The PbS Education and Employment Foundation was created with the sole mission of reducing recidivism among young offenders and giving them their best chance for successful adult lives.

We are asking you to help us do more to give them that best chance.

While the work we do includes helping juvenile justice agencies, facilities and residential care providers assess and improve all they do, we also support the youths directly.

We support these kids directly because the



evidence is clear - youths in custody who focus on education, employment, and life skills have a better chance to live productive adult lives.

Currently there are more than 2 million youths, some as young as 10 years old, who enter the juvenile justice system every year, many for non-violent, low-level offenses.

Once in the system, they are in desperate need of support if they are to lead successful lives upon release.

With your help, we offer that support.

THREE AWARDS. THREE KEY AREAS OF FOCUS.

For those youths who best demonstrate the qualities of honesty, diligence, dedication, empathy and positive behavior, we offer incentive awards in the following areas that can have the greatest impact.

- 1. Support Education Opportunities:** *The PbS Scholarship Fund* is a higher education tuition award, paid directly to the school, that financially supports youths and staff pursuing post-secondary education.
- 2. Teaching and Promoting a Positive Work Ethic:** *The PbS Employment Matching Award* program matches any money earned by youths while incarcerated as a way to promote a strong work ethic. Funds are distributed upon their successful release.
- 3. Helping Successful Transitions:** *The Reentry Award* assists youths with the transition to life in the community. The award is given to those youths who have demonstrated progress preparing for release and comprehensive aftercare planning by their case manager. Funds can be used for everything from job interview clothing to household items such as plates and linens, from diapers for their children to transportation to work.

INCARCERATED YOUTHS CAN SUCCEED, OR FALL BACK INTO THE SYSTEM. YOU CAN BE THE DIFFERENCE

PLEASE HELP.

Donate online and learn more about all we do at <http://pbseducationemployment.org>.

