

WORDS MATTER

**WE ARE**

*humanizing*

**MORE**

*versus*

**THAN**

*stigmatizing*

**A**

*language*

**LABEL**

# WHAT IS THIS ZINE ABOUT?

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Words shape and are shaped by our lives, experiences and imaginations. They have the power to heal, grow connection and liberation, and reduce stigma. They also have the power to relegate and reinforce myths and stereotypes.

## Words and word choice have a *true* human-impact.

This zine is an invitation to use humanizing - person-first - language when communicating about community members with justice histories. It is an opportunity to expand our community practice of choosing words that honor each other's full humanity.

Please share this resource with others! Open conversations and listening help to make sure we are engaging in respecting people's identities. While this zine offers suggested language, please always defer to what an individual asks to be called.

# WHO ARE WE?

This zine was proudly created by community members of The Fortune Society in collaboration with designer Laura Cerón Melo. We believe in the healing and transformative powers of imagination, creativity and radical hope. This publication and the sentiments herein are rooted in the vision and wisdom of Eddie Ellis and The Center for NuLeadership on Urban Solutions. We offer gratitude to all advocates whose lives have intersected with the (in)justice system that work tirelessly for our collective futures.

The Fortune Society's mission is to support successful reentry from incarceration and promote alternatives to incarceration, thus strengthening the fabric of our communities.

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## WHY WORDS MATTER

Today, there are over two million people incarcerated in the United States' jail and prison system.

People with justice histories are referred to in an array of dehumanizing labels, such as “inmates,” “criminals,” “prisoners,” “convicts,” “delinquents,” “felons,” and “offenders.”

Even after people complete their sentence of incarceration and return to the community, oftentimes these labels follow.

Terms like “ex-inmates,” “ex-prisoners,” “ex-convicts,” “ex-felons,” and “ex-offenders” are used to categorize and stigmatize people affected by the criminal justice system.

Dehumanizing labels stereotype and marginalize people rather than support them while they rebuild their lives. Individuals with justice system involvement are not defined by their conviction history.

**The words we use to reference people should reflect their full identities, and acknowledge their capacity to change and grow.**

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**We encourage you to use humanizing language—your example will inspire others.**

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## WHY WORDS MATTER

NO

- ~~Offender~~
- ~~Inmate~~
- ~~Felon~~
- ~~Criminal~~
- ~~Convict~~
- ~~Prisoner~~
- ~~Ex-offender~~
- ~~Ex-con~~
- ~~Ex-prisoner~~
- ~~Parolee~~
- ~~Probrationer~~
- ~~Detainee~~

**STIGMATIZING &  
DEHUMANIZING**

- ~~Juvenile~~
- ~~Offender~~
- ~~Juvenile~~
- ~~Delinquent~~
- ~~Sex Offender~~
- ~~Mentally Ill~~
- ~~Homeless~~
- ~~Infected with~~
- ~~HIV/AIDS~~
- ~~Addict~~
- ~~Substance~~
- ~~Abuser~~

NO

HUMANIZING

with justice system involvement

impacted by the justice system

previously incarcerated

with justice history

currently under parole supervision

on probation

in detention

with sex offense conviction(s)

young person with justice system involvement

with mental health needs

in need of/currently receiving mental health services

currently or previously experiencing homelessness

living with HIV

with a history of substance use

**PERSON or  
INDIVIDUAL**

VALUES LANGUAGE

# I WANT YOU TO SEE ME

I'M A RESPONSIBLE  
GUY THAT ONE DAY  
WILL BE A SUPERSTAR

I am a  
caring  
person

I'M A FLASHING LIGHT

I am a cisgendered male, lover of  
love, social worker, dreamer,  
writer, a port in a storm

I AM HERE.

I AM PRESENT.

I AM.

I'm a father, a man of  
many distinctions, a  
positive thinker, a  
man of listening

I AM LOVE

I AM LOVE

I AM LOVE

I AM LOVE

I AM LOVE

I AM LOVE

I AM LOVE

I AM LOVE

I AM LOVE

I AM LOVE

LOVE

I AM LOVE

I am a woman,  
mother, student,  
creative, open  
minded

I am your neighbor

I am a boy

WORDS DONT DEFINE MY HUMANITY

ALLOW ME TO LIVE A NORMAL LIFE

I am a smart individual  
caught up in trouble trying  
to change my life and make  
my family proud

I AM A GIANT

I am a taxpaying, hard  
worker, loyal mets &  
knicks fan, brother,  
son, good man

I am  
extremely  
gifted

I am humble

I am Ryan, I'm  
bluestone. I'm a part  
of the blues and the  
tones it creates. I'm  
part of the stone, as  
blue as it is.

I AM  
PASSIONATE  
ABOUT  
IMPROVING  
DAY  
BY  
DAY

call me by

MY NAME



SAVING ONE LIFE

*being a leader for the children I never had*

being able to make

**be successful and healthy**

have my own nonprofit and help others

*taking care of my family*

opening a juice bar for a better environment

MORE

CHANGING MY LIFE AROUND, DOING SOMETHING PROACTIVE

SEEKING THE METS AND KNICKS WIN

JOY

a place to live in the world  
one day becoming a terrific writer

To paraphrase another dreamer, I dream of being judged by the

*give back what was given free to me*

PEACE

*winning the lottery*

BY SHARING MINE

MORE LOVE IN THE WORLD

a lot of personal growth

dreams come true

BETTER COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PEOPLE

HAVING A SPORTS CAR

a better tomorrow

being financially stable

*get wall street small enough to drown in a bathtub*

being respected

being a superstar

FINDING OUT WHAT TO DREAM FOR

freedom, breaking walls that keep us separated, away from happiness

becoming a counselor

*a free America*

BEING ABLE TO SEE MY KIDS GROW, AND MY KID'S CHILDREN

content of my character rather than by the color of my skin

BECOMING A MINISTER

MORE SMILES

# CONTRIBUTORS

**Lionel "Doc the Edutainer" Limange** enjoys learning and teaching through the arts. Self-taught while incarcerated, he plays keyboards, writes songs and poetry, records and produces his own material. He is a proud member of the Fortune Society music and creative writing programs. IG: @smash4202

**Helen Taylor** is a poet and proud Fortune Society community member. Love is love.

**The Great Mr. West** I am very interested in progressing every day.

**Rafael Zarzuela** Optimistic, Believes that there is good in this world.

**Marquis Wade** I am a strong believer in hard work and dedication!

**Blustone** is a poet and photographer. He loves exploring nature and spirituality. IG: @Signed.x.blustone

**Felix Guzmán** is a poet and organizer committed towards building healthier communities inclusive of all. IG & Twitter: @felixguzman81

**Becky Jane Dunham** is a lifelong student of Mother Earth and is now learning how to grow with words.

**Roslyn Svendsen** I'm beautiful. I'm kind. I'm gorgeous. I'm love. I'm happy.

**Néstor "Panama" Eversley** is a poet and proud Fortune Society community member.

**Hilton N. Webb, Jr.**, is a formerly incarcerated cis-gendered man who loves the speed and danger of Harley Davidson motorcycles, the smell of fragrant blossoms, and the laughter of small happy children. He is also a writer who believes poems are the sharpest arrows in literature and that love is the strongest force in the universe. Twitter: @Bear\_Claw @BearCla27494242

**Deacon Ireal K. Jacobs** A poet from Brooklyn, NY. After years of being in and out of incarceration and realizing that he was headed for no man's land, he made the conscious decision to become a deacon, and to serve the Lord with all his heart and soul.

**Jose Martinez** I am interested in learning new things every day in work and education. I also love working with animals. My goal in high school was to be a veterinarian.

**Nysaiah Marrero** I like to work hard towards my goals, dream and to be financially set. All you need is \_\_\_\_\_.

**Vickie Darden Empath.** Lifelong lover of people and the Arts. Lifelong learner.

**Jamie Maleszka** Believer in radical love. Director of Creative Arts at The Fortune Society

**Laura Cerón Melo Queer.** Colombian. Design practitioner. Into social justice, honest + vulnerable relationships, collaboration, and spiritual growth. IG: @lacerona\_\_\_

**Waldemar López** Cómic book enthusiast and writer.. Creator of Con★star héroes league.. Fortune member and supporter....

**Erobos Abzu Lamashtu, OKA, "E"** is an extraterrestrial, extra-dimensional being imprisoned in human form for reasons that remain unclear. "Middle aged" according to the lifespan of earthlings, formerly imprisoned in several penal colonies throughout The State of New York: "Excelsior!" For the majority of His existence, He was referred to as an "illegal alien." The consensus has currently settled on "undocumented immigrant." An unwanted stranger by any other name is still...He resides at the behest and upon the auspices of The Fortune Society. IG: @eroboslamashtu Twitter: @ErobosAbzuLamas

# CONTRIBUTORS

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Thank you, reader.



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Art Portal



