



# Shelby County Sheriff's Office

*Bill Oldham, Sheriff*

January 10, 2018

Mr. Rodney Williams  
c/o Mr. Charles Mitchell, Attorney  
246 Adams Ave #201  
Memphis, TN 38104

RE: Incarcerated Youth Speaking Out for Change

Dear Mr. Williams:

Thank you for your key role in the Shelby County Sheriff's Office Incarcerated Youth Speaking Out for Change program. We are impressed by your insightful solutions to youth violence and ways in which our community can do more to break those cycles. You competed to be selected in the program, coordinated by BRIDGES, while you were housed at Jail East, after being transferred from Juvenile Court to be tried as an adult. Your work has continued at the Jail.

You competed to be in the Incarcerated Youth program by writing, reading, debating, exhibiting leadership skills, and, most importantly, the willingness to look deep inside yourself with honesty and a willingness to share your story with others. Your personal message is powerful. It has moved many youth to commit to a different path.

The Incarcerated Youth group's request to speak directly to middle school students before they make choices that will lead to incarceration was heard loud and clear by the Shelby County Schools Board of Education and there is always a waiting list for you to speak at schools and churches.

Your work with the Rotary Club was instrumental in their "50 in 5" program. Their goal is to reduce crime by 50% in 5 years through outreach to youth.

Since the Incarcerated Youth program began almost two (2) years ago, the group has spoken to over 4,500 community leaders, Shelby County School Board members, middle and high school students, Leadership Memphis, and church youth programs. You participated in the BRIDGES Youth Ignite program, competing against high school



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students across Shelby County and your team won. You have presented your ideas to Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative community forums as well as at the National Juvenile Justice Conference when it was hosted at the University of Memphis Law School.

You always receive a standing ovation and your call to action has led to hundreds of men volunteering to mentor youth in the community and in detention facilities. Many adults have committed to tutoring and volunteering with our community's youth. Beyond that, you have inspired many others who personally want to assist you.

One of your many accomplishments has been receiving your certification as facilitator in the Alternatives to Violence Program. You are one of the first inmates in Tennessee to achieve that certification. More importantly, you have brought AVP to the Jail. You now serve as a mentor for others in the Jail and your work has helped in keeping officers and inmates safe. .

You have become a reader and have worked to complete your high school requirements.

BRIDGES is a nationally recognized organization that "unites and inspires diverse young people to become confident and courageous leaders committed to community transformation." Working with youth in my custody was a first for BRIDGES and the Shelby County Sheriff's Office and I thank you for helping make it a tremendous success. The BRIDGES partnership will continue based on the outcomes we have experienced.

Your dedication to helping youth, conflict resolution, and bettering yourself has personally touched my heart. I am committed to improving the way our juvenile justice system approaches our youthful offenders. Now that I have personally seen how much can be accomplished by listening to our youth and providing positive opportunities to them while they are incarcerated, I want to provide a safer place for youthful offenders to be housed and trained/educated to return to society in the best way possible.

You may wonder how any of your work matters. We think of you as a pebble in a pond and your ripples are turning into a tidal wave for change, in the schools, in the

I hope and pray that you will be able to use your AVP facilitation skills, all of the lessons you have learned, and your leadership skills to make the world around you a safer and more productive place. Please continue your education in every possible way. Do not give up.

Always remember your friends in the Shelby County Sheriff's Office. We are proud of you and want you to succeed. You will never be alone.

Sincerely,



Bill Oldham, Sheriff

Shelby County Sheriff's Office

cc: Cynthia Hamm, BRIDGES, President and CAO

Dana Wilson, BRIDGES, Vice President of Bridge Builders

Joyce Anderson, Shelby County Sheriff's Office Juvenile Manager

Robert L. Moore, Shelby County Sheriff's Office Chief Jailer

Kirk Fields, Assistant Chief Jailer

Debra L. Fessenden, Sheriff's Chief Policy and Statutory Compliance Officer