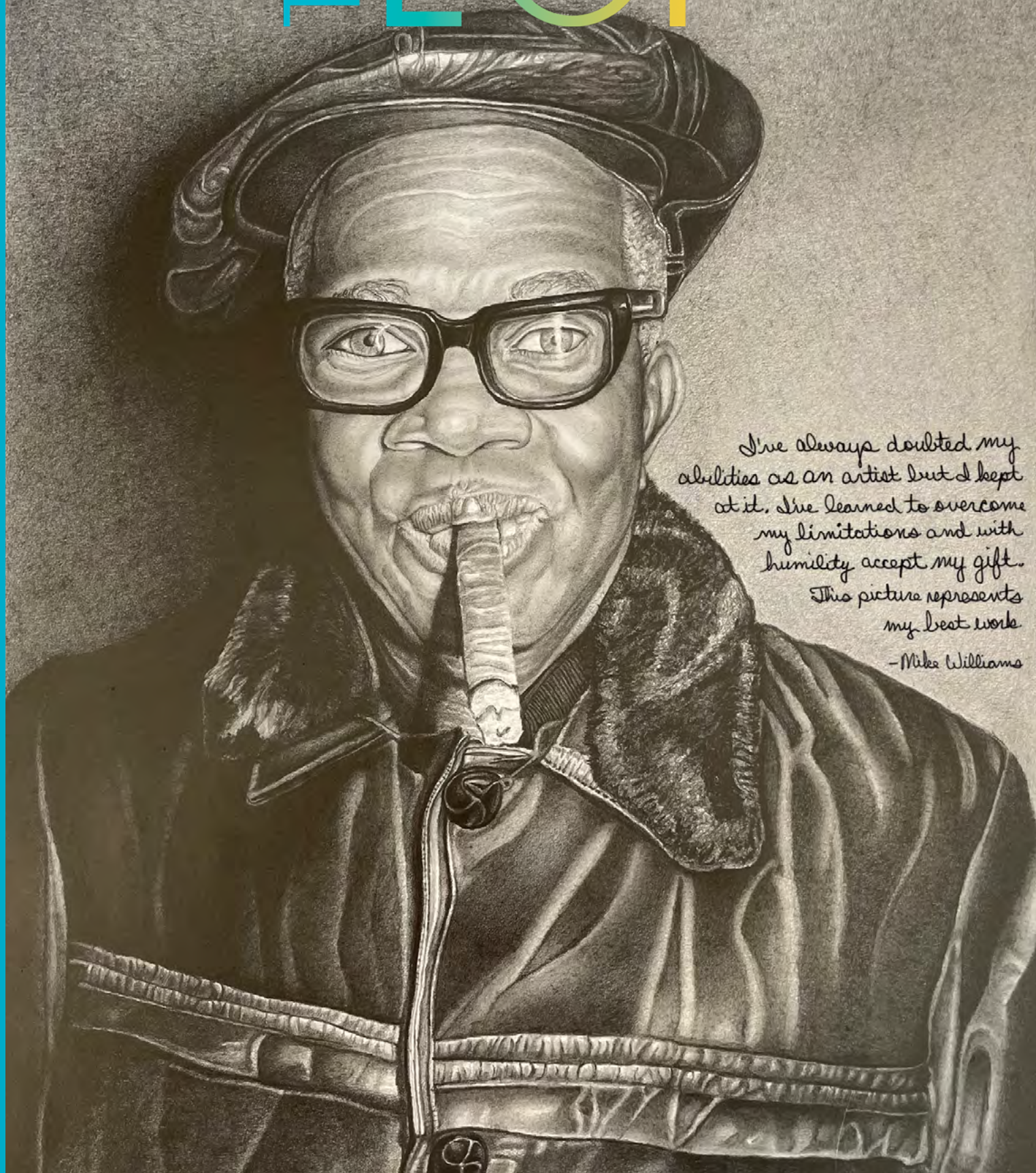


THE LOOP



I've always doubted my abilities as an artist but I kept at it. I've learned to overcome my limitations and with humility accept my gift.

This picture represents my best work

-Mike Williams



At Shining Light, we believe each one of us has the potential to shine light wherever we are, regardless of our circumstances. Through human connection, creativity, and mutual learning, we can unlock this potential in ourselves and maintain - even brighten - that light in ourselves and in our community. The more lights in the room, the brighter the collective light can shine, until the whole environment of prison is changed from the inside out.

The Loop is more than a magazine; it's how our community of light bearers communicates with each other. It's a source of belonging to something positive, creative inspiration, a reminder that we're not alone, a push to keep going, and a compass to guide the way. It can even be a touchpoint for meaningful connection with loved ones! (Every issue can be viewed online at shining-light.com/theloop)

If you are new to The Loop, we'd love to consider you part of the Shining Light community. One way is to "subscribe" by sending in the card on the back, so you can start receiving your own (free!) copy with your name on it. And when you're ready to join in the ongoing conversation of The Loop, know that we're always glad to hear from you!

Though we are unable to respond directly to the hundreds of letters we receive each month, it is you - the readers and contributors - who make The Loop so special. Your stories of engagement with exercises and the impact it is having, your creativity and insight, and your willingness to invite your peers to subscribe, is what keeps momentum going.

With limited space and a growing number of contributors, we are selective in what we publish. As a community focused on unlocking the potential for good in each other, and the environments and systems we find ourselves in, all content is filtered through the "Community Codes" we seek to live by. These codes are sent to everyone who requests a copy of The Loop, and we encourage readers to refer to them often.

In addition, please review these guidelines so you know what we're looking for:



SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

- We will credit contributions with first name, last initial, and state, unless you clearly indicate otherwise.
- If you write anything in a letter that you do NOT want to be shared in The Loop or other Shining Light communications, please note that clearly.
- We reserve the right to edit your contribution as needed to fit space and/or theme.

CONTENT

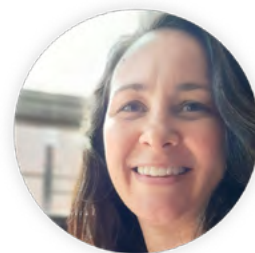
- Submissions should have a positive intention, which may include creative expression, encouraging words, or a constructive release of negative emotion.
- Remember to be inclusive of people of all faiths and backgrounds.
- Avoid details of your case and keep criticism of the institution/DOC constructive, focused on ways to create something better.

FORMATTING

- Write as legibly as possible (or type) so we can all read what you wrote!
- If possible, submit artwork and writings on blank paper.
- Be concise. Featured writings must fit legibly on 1 page. Responses to activities, questions, prompts, etc should be limited to a short paragraph or two so we can include more people!

PLEASE NOTE: We are limited in the practical services we can provide at this time, and therefore cannot fulfill requests for legal or reentry support, penpal relationships, or assistance with publishing creative work.

Ever meet someone who thinks they're the best things since sliced bread, and is sure to let everyone know it? They may talk a humble game because they don't want to come across like a jerk, but their body language and treatment of others tell another story. It's often not hard to spot false humility, but what does true humility look like? **Author C.S. Lewis famously wrote, "True humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less."** In other words, it's not about downplaying your abilities and strengths, but balancing that with recognition of the abilities and strengths of others. True humility also does not mean bowing to others' every need or demand - or always putting others ahead of yourself - to your own detriment. This is a tricky one, for sure! Thankfully we've got some great perspectives to consider in the following pages...



Kelly

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

IN THIS ISSUE: Ms. Naomi (p. 14) shares some "hows & whys" of exercising humility in prison, from her 37 years of experience inside. Kurt (p. 15) shares how humility made a difference for him when it came time to face the parole board. And Dormen (p. 19) shares his journey in understanding what true humility is, and what it isn't, using his years in the prison weight pit as an example. Leaders of a new Loop Group at Pickaway CI (Ohio) share the challenges of using humility in prison as it relates to the community code "Brush off the small stuff" (p. 18). On p. 20, five writers pay tribute to various "Humility Heroes" - after Travis encourages you to consider who that might be for you (p. 17). And we've included lots of other insightful comments from readers on humility throughout (see p. 13 and the Constructive Debate section p. 22-23).

Congratulations to **Mike Williams** (PA) for his 1st Place entry in our Cover Art Contest! Not only is this a stunning piece of artwork, but his comments represent the definition of humility we are focusing on. Mike, and other fantastic artists (see page 6-7), are not hiding their talent, but offering them humbly with an understanding that others, too, have great things to share. And we're all better for it!

Many thanks to the 129 readers who shared your insights, artwork, and other great contributions through postal mail and tablets. Keep it coming!


Note: We've decided to suspend our email account for in-prison contacts. Please send your submissions and subscription requests to the address on the back page. When you get out, you will still be able to reach us at theloop@shining-light.com

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Look for the  that notes the various prompts and activities. Then write to us about your experience so we can keep the conversation going!

TO: **YOU**
FROM: **JEFF**



Jeff

FOUNDER &
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Greetings to our new and old friends in The Loop community!

With the character strength of Humility as our theme for this issue, we are focusing on the practical application of VIA's definition, which includes the following:

"...Truly humble people think well of themselves and have a good sense of who they are, but they also are aware of their mistakes, gaps in their knowledge, and imperfections... Humility is a strength that helps you manage habits and protect against excess."

This definition emphasizes action. How does humility apply to how we choose to act, especially in our encounters with others?

The first challenge is to think well of ourselves. Dwelling on my weaknesses and mistakes is a habit I can easily fall into. For our readers in prison who have faced arrest, accusations, court, and prison walls, this challenge can get really difficult. We do need to be *"aware of our mistakes, gaps in our knowledge, and imperfections,"* but this does not mean we let negative voices, circumstances, or bad habits define us. Humility involves choosing to think well of ourselves while also recognizing our flaws. If you are dealing with trauma, mental health issues, or emotional baggage that makes this choice feel impossible, we encourage you to get help.

Knowing and leaning into your Character Strengths can be very helpful in seeing yourself in a positive way. Identify your top strengths and constantly remind yourself, "This is what I can bring to the world and my community." Regardless of circumstances, life events, or past choices, you possess these strengths and can approach each day knowing you have something good to offer.

The VIA definition continues, *"...It is not bragging, not doing things in excess, not seeking the spotlight, not drawing attention to yourself, not viewing yourself as more special or important than others."* The power dynamics of prison create some incredible challenges to this. It's necessary to interact with staff and peers who can make it extremely hard to live this out. However, in addition to thinking well of ourselves, examining how we view others can help us act with humility. I have been surprised by how often I have heard people say that when they started noticing character strengths in a harsh CO or threatening peer, they could begin to respond and act in ways that would fit this definition.

Our mission is to help people in prison unlock their potential. Every person reading this has great potential. Make a choice today to act with humility, embracing your strengths and other people's strengths while acknowledging we all make mistakes, have gaps in our knowledge, and live with imperfections.

Enjoy the magazine, share it with others, and send your submissions for the next edition!

P.S. Positive news:
the "Victory Garden"
at the Veteran's Services
Unit here at SCI Muncy
grew + donated over 3,500 lbs
of produce to the Central
PA Food Bank and the
culinary Arts class in
the prison.

-Jillian P. "justj" R.



Photo: PA DOC

At Shining Light, we want to be a community that helps each other focus on the positive in the midst of the challenges and painful situations we can't avoid. (We're not ignoring the bad; we're just finding a way to rise above it!) This page is all about celebrating accomplishments and good news, so tell us...



**POSITIVE
NEWS**
FROM INSIDE

5

Logo Idea from K. Daniel O. (AR)

Marty, a resident here, has been working diligently for 3 years to put together an art exhibit which showcases prisoners' art. In the end, 23 works of art and 23 writings were selected. According to Justice Arts Coalition, this is the first publicly displayed art exhibit completely curated by justice impacted people. The exhibit - "Prison Reimagined: Residential Portraits Project" - ran from January 5 through February 19. This endeavor shows our character strengths in action! -Albert R. (NC)

WHAT WENT RIGHT?

- What accomplishments are you proud of?
- What good news are you excited about?
- Are you or someone you know coming up on your release date?
- _____

"I just received my 15th certificate of completion and hit 10,000 points simultaneously on the Edovo app! Also, I still have a little more than three years left on my sentence, but my mother just bought a house, and is saving me a room until I'm reestablished and back on my feet."

-Zack F. (NY)

"I'm close to getting my G.E.D."

-A. Gibson (OH)

"I will be singing, stepping, and praise dancing in our annual Black History Month event. I am so excited! I have learned my passions and am doing them everyday! Thanks be to God!"

-Courtney B. (SC)

"I'm hopeful positive developments are on the way! I'm looking to get back more heavily into my writing."

-Christiana (AR)

THE BIGGEST WHAT WENT RIGHT FOR ME SINCE LAST ISSUE IS THE SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF THE SPOKEN WORD EXTENSION COURSE. NO MATTER HOW MUCH GROWTH I'VE SEEN, SHINING LIGHT KEEPS ME MOVING EVEN MORE. THANK YOU.

-JAKE L. (ND)

"Someone actually wanted to sit down with me and set goals! 'One small step for man, one large step for mankind...'"

-Emmanuel C. (VA)

"I will be out of prison by October :) Staying conduct free, being free."

-James S. (IN)

I'm alive in good health. I am using my artistic skills in art on the yard by doing art for the loop group, myself and the warden. I have a release date and 2 people in my dorm leave February 1st. -Eric Y. (SC)

"I have been locked up for 16 years and I only have 11 months left. This whole time, I haven't been able to talk to my now 17-year-old son, who was 19 months old when I was incarcerated. He contacted me on the Getting Out app and he now wants to build a bond with me and he sent me his phone number. Last month was the first time I have ever heard his voice and it was just the best moment of my life.

He reached out to me and that means the world to me."

-Danielle B. (SC)

"After 8 long months my child's father finally answered a court ordered video visit. The way my little girls face lit up with that smile made me feel and know that deep down she still needs her Mom."

-Janell N. (PA)

I am encouraged and hopeful after hearing about the new incentive prison programs now being implemented in Florida and some Texas prisons. -K. DANIEL O. (AR)

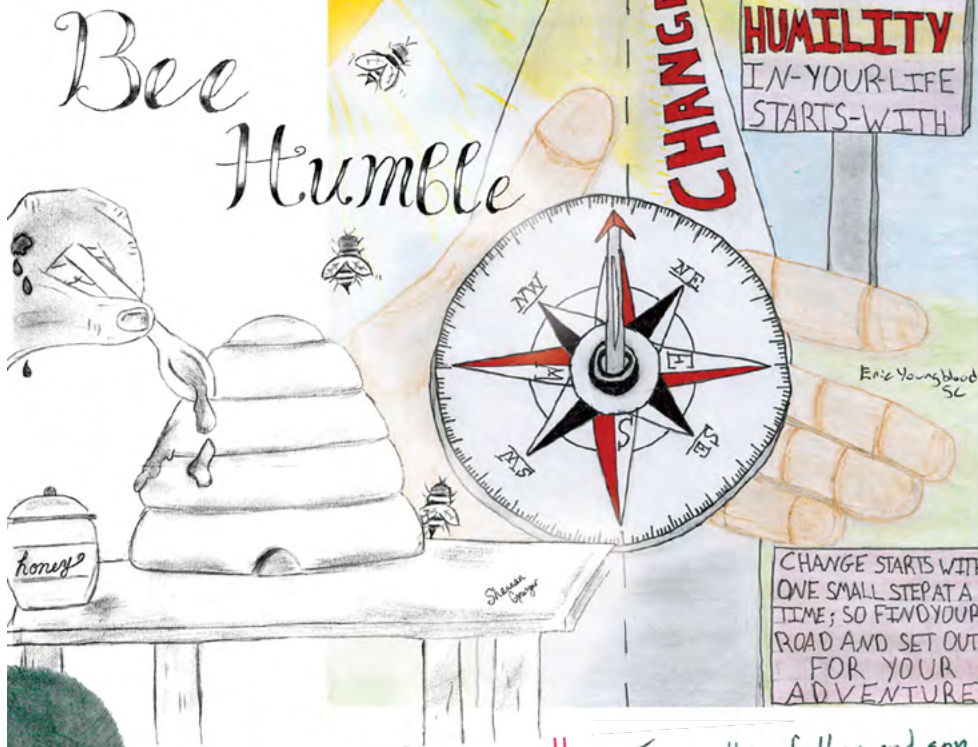
"Talking about childhood sexual abuse is difficult as it is. This is even greater in a male prison where hypermasculinity dominates. I was able to get approval to run a group for 18 weeks where we speak on surviving childhood sexual abuse. I'm looking forward to helping others reduce or even remove the shame and guilt of these unfortunate experiences."

-JC R. (CA)



Logo Idea from Gary F. (SC)

(Clockwise) Submissions by:
K. Daniel O. (AR), Aaron K. (OH),
Milan R. (AZ), Shannon G. (SC),
Eric Y. (SC)



In the night, the moon is there reflecting the sun, giving hope of a new day. In the dark times of life, an humble friend can be a reflection of God, giving hope of a better life ahead.

Be that friend.

I saw this father and son on the front cover of the Arizona Republic newspaper. Apparently after realizing that he could not provide food, clothing, shelter, safety or opportunity to his wife and young son this man fell down on his knees and cried out. He said he realized there could be no salvation or grace without humility. Humility is not a weakness. It takes strength to ask for help.



COVER ART CONTEST

This is a chance to share your artistic creativity & help The Loop make a strong first impression across the country!

**2ND
PLACE**

ALISHA KLINGER
NY

**3RD
PLACE**

JAMES BRYSON
OH

PRIZES

- 1st Place - \$50 // 2nd Place - \$35 // 3rd Place - \$15 (All winners receive a Certificate of Excellence)
- Prized pieces and honorable mentions will be published in the "Creative Expressions From The Loop" collection on tablets and in our online Art Gallery at www.shining-light.com/showcase.

CRITERIA

- Originality, artistry, and connection to the theme. Include 1-3 sentences describing your piece.
- Positive, appropriate, affirming imagery (see *general Submission Guidelines p. 2*)
- Must be portrait format (**Keep in mind The Loop logo will be added at the top**)

UPCOMING THEMES

- **Leadership** (*What are the marks of a good leader?*) **DEADLINE: April 25, 2024**
- **Fairness** (*Justice for all, without bias or prejudice*) **DEADLINE: July 15, 2024**

PLEASE INCLUDE

- Your state-recognized name and ID#
- Your name as you would like to be recognized in The Loop or online, should your work be published
- Clear instructions on how to send funds directly to you should your piece be awarded a prize AND the name and contact information of an outside designee in case we are unable to send funds directly to you

All mediums are welcome, though SL and DOC facilities cannot be responsible for providing supplies.

Please note that we are not able to return original artwork. To send a digital copy, email TheLoop@shining-light.com.

Artists retain all rights to their work, and no proceeds will be received from their display.

(By submitting artwork, you are granting SL permission to publish in The Loop, on our website, and other related SL publications.)

REMEMBER - LOOP SECTION LOGOS - Do you like graphic design? Sketching logos? Now's your time to shine! We want to redesign the section logos for The Loop and we want it to come from you! So if you have a logo idea for *any* of the sections, send it in! (*i.e. Positive News from Inside, SL Community Spotlight, Strength Spotting, Real Talk, etc.*)



PROGRAM UPDATES



The SL Academy celebrates inclusion of **Heart River Correctional Center (HRCC)**, the first women's group to embark on the Foundations Course! In their goal-setting module, the seven women have set a goal to complete the Academy with perfect attendance, and halfway through they are well on their way to achieving this! The group anticipates a celebratory graduation in April.

State	Facilities w/ Active Academies	# of Graduates (to date)	# of Current Participants
North Dakota	Heart River CC, James River CC, NDSP	103	53
Ohio	Belmont CI, Noble CI	42	19
Pennsylvania	SCI Coal Twp, SCI Dallas (VSU), SCI Waymart	50	33

"The Academy allowed me to open up and become vulnerable. I started to feel comfortable with my talents and now pursue them without judging myself. I want to write more and explore new career paths. I feel comfortable where I hadn't before. I feel more confident." - D / SCI Dallas (VSU) PA

**The SL Academy includes 50 hours of SL-facilitated interactions through video-conference and requires full support from the hosting facility. We are not able to offer this program everywhere, and the process for getting set up can take months, even years. But if you are interested in having this program at your facility, the first step is to ask a staff person or administrator to reach out to us for more information.*



DID YOU KNOW?

You can access digital copies of nearly every issue of The Loop on tablets wherever the free education app **edovo** is used.

Just look for the icon, set up an account, and search "Shining Light." There's a lot of other great SL content on there as well, like:

Courses for Educational Credit

Learn Your Strengths / Apply Your Strengths
Playwriting Lab / Spoken Word Lab

(NOTE: If you complete these courses and write to us with proof of your work, we'll send you a certificate!)

Peer-Inspired Videos

(Creative work by incarcerated writers, performed by outside professional artists)

Creations of a Caged Bird: Volumes 1 & 2
When Light Appears - A Christmas Collaboration

Original Work from Incarcerated Peers

Creative Expressions from The Loop
Writer's CoLab Collections (2)

This year we hope to start getting our tablet content on more platforms, so more of you have access. If your tablet has an education app other than Edovo, please let us know what it is so we can look into it!



*All across the country, groups of readers (“Loopers”) are getting together to discuss the content of *The Loop* and encouraging each other to respond in ways that are meaningful to them. Formally or informally, these gatherings are proving to be really positive experiences that are having ripple effects throughout the facility and beyond.*

Each Loop Group (LG) has the common foundation that is provided by the magazine and our core values, but there’s no limit to what your group does from there. Here are a few of the latest examples **happening in South Carolina**:

The Loop Group at **Allendale CI** has been going strong since 2022. At any given time, about 35-40 participants are involved in discussion and shared creative expression. Peer facilitator Cornelius D. says guys keep coming because **“people writing in this actually know what we feel, and we know what they feel, and it makes a difference.”** In February, for the facility’s Black History Month celebration, the LG contributed this collaborative art display.



The Loop Group in the Character Building Unit (CBU) at **MacDougall CI** is still alive and well. Every quarter, a new group of participants meets weekly to interact with *The Loop*, and when there’s extra time, they explore the ins & outs of poetry. Peer facilitator Gary F. humbly shares his knowledge, passion, and expertise in this area by incorporating elements of the poetry class he teaches. It’s no wonder so many issues of *The Loop* include a creative writing contribution from MacDougall! Gary also strategically uses the SL video labs on Edovo - Spoken Word and Playwriting - to inspire and embolden participation in events like a Poetry Slam and an upcoming “Drama Night.”

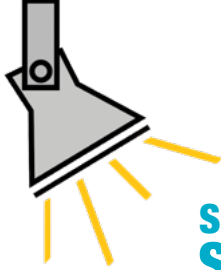
A brand new Loop Group is getting started at **Leath CI**, one of South Carolina’s women’s prisons. Led by Associate Warden Carter, this group of about 15 participants is unique in that their experience is two-fold. Part of their time together is spent engaging with *The Loop* magazine, in typical fashion. The other part is spent collectively producing their own magazine (“The Juice”) to distribute in-house, as a way to share the Loop-like positivity, creativity, information and inspiration directly among their peers. The AW’s goal is to give the participants **“a whole new way of being able to express themselves through poetry, writing, and drawing [and] to open up a way to review things from different perspectives.”**

An official Loop Group at **Ridgeland CI** is up and running! Peer facilitator Adam F. shared what a positive, growth-filled experience this has been for all those involved, and his deep gratitude for the “unwavering support” of their Programs Warden and Director of Education who have allowed the time and space to make this happen.

In response to last issue’s Community Code prompt, Adam had this encouragement for anyone wanting to see a Loop Group in their facility: **“You can put the CC of ‘Speak life’ and ‘Start simple’ into play by starting a Loop Group session with one or two of your fellow inmates, and using ‘What Went Right’ as a jumping off point. You will be speaking life and starting simple all in the same moment.”**

Are you part of a formal or informal Loop Group? If so, please tell us:

- How often do you meet? How many (on average) are involved?
- What do you appreciate most about this experience?



SL COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

KYLE MEDEIROS

SL Post-Release Group Member



Kyle first connected with Shining Light in August '23 when he was released after 6 years inside. He had heard of SL through The Loop and through peers on his Character Unit who had put together programs using the SL video series on the tablets. Once he hit the streets, after some encouragement from a friend (thanks Gary F!), Kyle found our website and reached out.

The timing couldn't have been better, as SL was about to pilot a post-release group as a way to offer support for folks as they come home. Kyle showed bravery, hopping right into the first-ever group - encouraging others and engaging in meaningful discussion around topics similar to those in The Loop. In hearing him share more about his journey of incarceration and reentry (in an interview for this article), it is clear that humility is another strength that has led to Kyle's success.

As soon as he got to prison, Kyle was bunked with Rick, an "ol' head" who was about to start his third bid - of 25 years. Kyle says Rick sat him down and told him the best way to survive in prison was to not get involved in anything you don't want to, and to do everything you can to show the state how you have changed. Kyle humbly listened and did the best with what was available to him for the rest of his incarceration. He spent the majority of his time in Character units and did as many programs as he could, even repeating some in the process which helped things to sink in even more.

In the midst of all this, Kyle says, the difference maker was getting to serve as a Teaching Assistant in the GED program at the facility. He felt as though he could make a real impact on someone else's life. It meant the world to be able to say that, "I not only used the time inside to focus on myself, but used the time to positively impact others." This allowed Kyle to see himself not just as a felon, but as someone who gives back to others.

Kyle explained that his role model is Superman, because he finds that Superman makes a difference in the world even though he doesn't have to. He doesn't do it for fame or glory and keeps his normal life as Clark Kent, but finds his worth from doing the right thing. Kyle encourages everyone to find that "something" you can do to be like Superman, to find your worth from doing the right thing just because it's the right thing.

By giving back as a TA, Kyle built the confidence to hit the ground running upon returning home. He is currently working full-time with a demolition company while simultaneously pursuing a Bachelor's degree with the University of Advancing Technology - a connection he made while he was still inside after a teacher encouraged him to pursue a college degree ASAP upon returning home. Kyle is part of a program that will allow him to continue right into receiving his Master's in Cybersecurity and Game Design & Management. He shared that it will take 6 years to accomplish this goal, but he is committed and excited that he has been able to get started.

Kyle's encouragement to everyone on the inside is: "No matter when you got locked up, keep your head up. Don't stop. Keep pushing. Although things are different in the world, don't let it stress you out - you can make it."

NOTE: We are continuing to pilot the post-release groups, figuring out how to offer something meaningful and encouraging for folks as they return home.

More to come as more clarity develops!



STRENGTH SPOTTING

HOPE

"Strength spotting" is the intentional act of noticing when someone uses one of the character strengths. It can be a helpful way to become more aware of strengths in both oneself and others, and especially when it is shared with the person using the strength, that can be incredibly encouraging.

"My buddy Dom was sentenced to two consecutive life sentences in federal prison with a couple other multi-decade sentences that are running concurrently. I met him when he came back to a County jail on appeal after having already served 13 years in a max federal facility. He has just recently had both of his life sentences overturned on said appeal and now potentially only has a few years left on the remaining charges considering his good time and time already served. Even before the decision, he displayed an unbelievably enviable ability of being hopeful and even confident that justice would be done for him and he'd have a second chance at life. His showing of hope really showed me how powerful it can be during both the seemingly hopeless situation of a life sentence, and the scary periods before your fate is decided, like his was on his appeal."

- Zack F. (NY)

"On my dorm is a bunch of women who have been down from 34 years to only a few months, and we are in the process of making a sober/safe dorm where we all have a clean environment to grow ourselves individually and collectively. It is in its infancy and it's rocky but the hope that we have for not just this dorm but our yard is seen and shown everyday! These women are phenomenal!"

- Courtney B. (SC)

THIS ANSWER CAME TO ME IMMEDIATELY SPURRED BY, BUT NOT LIMITED TO, ONE PERSON. THE GUYS I'VE SEEN IN HERE WHO ARE RECONNECTING WITH THEIR FAMILIES, ESPECIALLY THEIR KIDS. THIS HOPE, THE EXPECTATION OF A FUTURE WHERE YOU ARE INCLUDED AND INVOLVED IS AMAZING TO SEE. GONE ARE THE HARDCASES, HARD FACES REPLACED WITH A PRICELESS IMAGE OF HOPE.

- JAKE L. (U.D.)

I see people using HOPE around me everyday... When people continue to work on their Mental Health and fighting against whatever it is that has a hold on them. ∞ Wayne G ∞
NJ

Several people spotted hope in the **long-timers or lifers** around them:

"My brother...remains upbeat and determined to get his sentence overturned after almost 23 years."

- Michael R. (SC)

"My friend Gary...keeps hoping that California really will let us all get a chance to go home. So he keeps on doing the right thing waiting for that 'HOPE' to become a real reality!!! - Scotty W. (CA)

"...No matter how long they have been fighting their current circumstance, they maintain their faith and have hope that one day they will be free. A few of them have been commuted, others have had the opportunity to give time back through the courts, and that has only reinvigorated the others in their pursuit of freedom."

- Timir W. (PA)



For the next issue, tell us where you spot people around you using **HUMILITY**

Now the bible says... Faith without works is DEAD
 And Faith is the substance of things HOPED for
 the evidence of things unseen — ENOUGH SAID
 And so, with that being said
 Without Zest - HOPE wouldn't have a leg
 To stand on - long enough to have even the smallest goals met
 Through all the ups and downs
 The smiles and the frowns
 You must take the good with the bad
 Now that's the power of Hope And Zest
 When you put these character strengths to test
 And let that positive energy connect
 So believe in yourself at all cost's
 Because as long as you keep the HOPE alive
 There's no way you have lost
 All gas, no brakes - you must stay persistent
 In order to gain progress for the HOPE that your Givin'
 No drowning - keep swimming!
 You gotta push it to the limit
 And Beyond... to Achieve the very goal(s) intended
 Zestfully and Hopefully — the two compatible
 Attachments - you must have Attached with it
 I keep Hope and Zest EVERYDAY - AND I lead BY EXAMPLE
 So please SAMPLE AND follow MY EXAMPLE
 THAT I blessed you with in this POEM

—Tyreece "Swiper" S (SC)

PREVIOUS PROMPT: "FROM ZEST TO HOPE"

We asked for a short poem about the hope that comes from believing in yourself and ways you plan to draw out your zest & put that hope into practice!



Joyce

PROGRAM FACILITATOR

I have a spark, a sense of zest,
 Pushing me forward ready for any test.
 That comes my way, I'll crush it,
 On a positive tip, straight legit.
 Straight forward pushing relentlessly,
 Wish those R.I.P. could witness me.
 Well maybe they can so watch this,
 Stevie Lopez, knowledge is bliss.
 This is for you, my Mom and ancestors,
 I'll keep achieving thank you for everything.

- Louis (CA)

The hope that inspires is the hope that never tires
 When in motion it hits like a wave from the ocean
 You get caught up in the tide and find yourself in the
 best of life's ride!

- Karl J. R. (CA)

"METAMORPHIC HOPE" HAIKU

Knowing success is
 Within, makes one Burst through change
 Like a butterfly

- JC R. (CA) -

Hope!

It comes from the heart, that feeling
 you get when a glimmer of a better life
 Reflects in your mind. It makes you eager
 to take on another day, It's the Image
 in your mind as you stare out the bars
 on the window, the one where you're with
 family and friends. Hope is my new dope!

T. Hohenberger - OH



NEW PROMPT HUMBLE LEADERS

True humility means being open and honest about both our strengths and our limitations. **How can being humble in this way help to make someone a good leader?** Try to write a poem, song lyric, or heartfelt paragraph about being a strong but humble leader.

If you'd like your piece to be considered for publishing in *The Loop*, please keep it to 200 words or less.
 (Longer entries may be considered for our "Creative Expressions" collection on Edovo)

“How might developing the strength of Humility help you also increase your Hope?”

Emmanuel C. (VA) - “Humility helps serve as a reset button to our daily routine. It invites open-mindedness, which cultivates creativity.... Creativity, then serves as a strong catalyst for hope.”

James S. (IN) - “Because helping fellow humans helps make us feel better which in turn makes us feel more hopeful.”

When I first started my prison term I had zero Humility. All I could think was who I could blame for me coming to prison. Now that I'm finishing the 9TH year and I've taken programs and been in the first Shining Light Academy at Noble Correctional (OH) and an Academy Assistant, it gives me Hope. My next goals are to get a Loop Group going here and I want to use Perseverance to benefit other inmates. I've got 11 years left to practice Zest to see every OHIO prison get access to the Shining Light Academy.

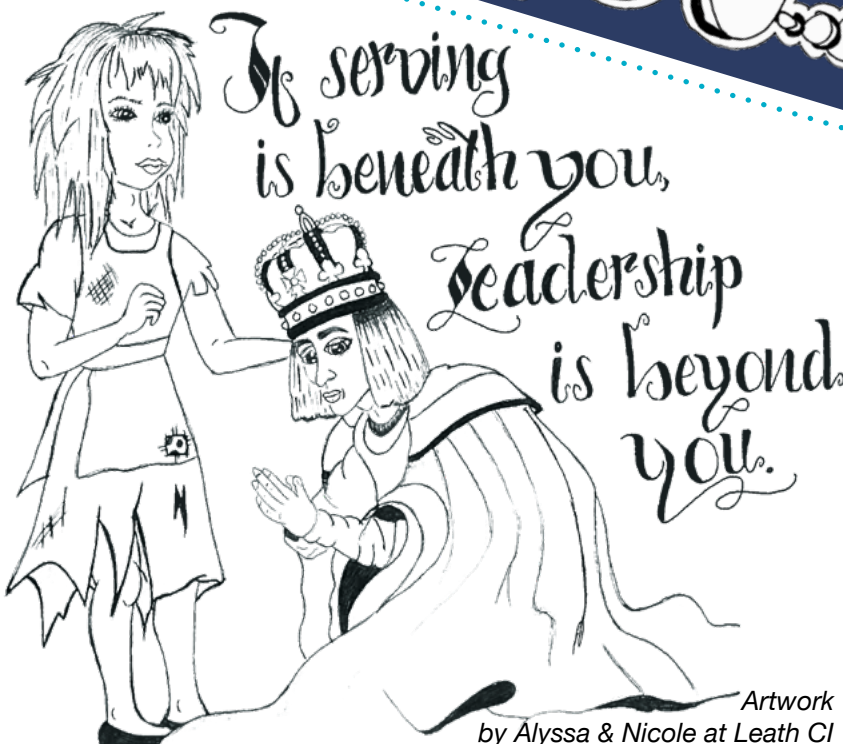
-DAVID D. (OH)

No one enjoys being around a braggart. Boasting and egoism can drive a wedge between you and even your most devoted friends. No man is an island. Success springs from hope and hope is seldom maintained without friends.

-Gary F (SC)



Tyreece S. (SC)



Artwork
by Alyssa & Nicole at Leath CI

Zach F. (NY) - “If you have a low-level of humility, I think it's safe to say that you probably have an overinflated ego. When this is the case, you believe you are capable of more than you actually are. Your expectations are then unrealistic and you're setting yourself up for failure. Increase your humility, and you're more true to yourself and you can admit your imperfections. You're able to discern what is realistically attainable and avoid having false hope.”

Aaron B. (OH) - “Developing Humility will help me increase my Hope by making me focus on helping others and not worrying so much about what might happen in my own life.”

Harvey E. (SD) - “Humility Overcomes Phobias Exaggerated. Humility allows hope to come to fruition if that makes sense. If self or ego is fueling the desire then there is no satisfaction of realizing the fruits of our achieved hope.”

Real Talk



Naomi

PROGRAM FACILITATOR

COMMUTED LIFER & ACTIVIST

My name is Naomi Wilson and I am 73 years young! In 1982, caught up in a drug and alcohol addiction, I found myself sentenced to die in prison by the state of Pennsylvania. (No, I didn't kill anyone but I was with someone who did, and at the time, that automatically meant LWOP - life w/o the possibility of parole.) I served 37 years, keeping myself educated as the laws began to change. And finally, in 2019, after five different attempts - and the grace of God - I made parole through commutation. Ever since, I've been working with Shining Light and other groups to help bring awareness about prison to people on the outside. While I was inside, I was called Aunt Naomi, Grandma, Mom, because I just love people and everyone knew that no matter who you are, if you come to me, I'm gonna give you the truth...with love.

"You can use me, but don't misuse me." I let people know this all the time. I'm sure of myself; I'm a unique individual and I have unique gifts, and I want to be generous with those gifts, but I'm not a doormat. You can't take advantage of me and walk all over me. I have a heart for the underdog and I choose to help because I can, but I don't make a show of it. My grandmother used to say, 'do it in secret.' You don't have to talk about it. Sometimes you don't even have to let them know you're doing it for them. You find a lot of people inside who were braggarts, just showing off: "I gave her this and I gave her that." If you are really doing it from your heart, you don't need to talk about it. Just do it because you see someone in need.

Being humble in prison really carries you a long way because not only are your peers watching you, but staff as well. Staff are really the ones who have a say in what happens to you in the future. They're the ones who will give you the recommendations. And the good ones can recognize a humble spirit. If something comes up - parole or commutation - they can speak highly of you because they see humility in you. You don't have to talk about it; they see it. These people are with you all day, all night, for years and years. They see your everyday walk.



ASK ANYTHING And if I can't offer any advice, I'll ask someone who can!

**Please note that while we will maintain a professional level of confidentiality, we are legally required to report any information that involves a serious threat or existence of harm to yourself or others.*

Q: Being a fellow lifer, how do you keep pushing when the board flops you and feels like they are going to keep me until I die here?

MS. NAOMI: Well for me, I thought that I was never getting out and the board denied me five times! So of course, I didn't think I was going anywhere. And then even on that fifth try, the board still denied me. But I wrote that letter of reconsideration and all those no votes turned into yes vote. So if you were to just continue to keep hope alive and know that all things are possible, you'd be surprised at what God can do. So just keep that faith; keep on pushing. Don't give up. Don't ever ever give up.

Q: How does one reconcile the prison demand to mind one's own business and stay out of others' conversations, and the biblical command to be a peacemaker? Is this a judgment call?

MS. NAOMI: Unless it's an emergency, mind your business. I've been in situations like that quite a few times, and if it ain't got nothing to do with you, mind your business. But if it's somebody that you truly care about, pull them aside and talk to them later, friend to friend. Or talk to both people individually and privately. Don't try to be out there in front. Talk to them in love. You can be a peacemaker because if you say the right things in love, they may think about what you said when they have time to reflect.



HUMILITY - WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR? ABSOLUTELY EVERYTHING, INCLUDING PAROLE



Kurt

FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
TOMORROW'S NEIGHBORS
SL ALUM '18-'20

People often say, “prison humbles you.” It literally and figuratively strips off all the masks, status, and possessions we hide behind to make others believe we are better than we are. In prison, we are found naked in a new world, forced to look at who we are at our core.

When I came to prison at the age of 18, I quickly realized that the self-image I had created in my mind was a lie. And so were the notions I had about what it really takes to survive in prison. It wasn't about getting physically strong to prove myself; it was about strengthening my mind and forming a realistic image of myself - my whole self - the good, the bad, and the ugly. In essence, I discovered that surviving prison, and being ready to leave one day, meant developing true humility.

I learned to pick my battles (eventually). I stayed in my lane. I was aware of my flaws and limits, and never viewed myself as being better than anyone else. And I respectfully relied on the strengths and skills of others to compliment my own.

Humility served me well over my 24 years in prison, but never more so than during my parole interview. A Parole Board member once told me that the Board asks many questions, but what they truly want to know is this: 1) **Who you were** at the time of your crime, 2) **Who you are** today, and 3) **How you got there**. None of this can be answered adequately without genuine humility.

Those who go before the Parole Board with humility make no excuses for their offense(s). They truthfully describe their role and their distorted thought process at the time. They then describe the steps they took to become who they are today. When speaking about their achievements inside, they describe them accurately, but not arrogantly. They understand that they are providing this information to assist the Board in making their decision, not to make themselves sound good.

In contrast, the biggest mistake people make in a parole interview is minimizing who they were and overstating who they are today. For instance, someone may blame their offense on drugs or poverty, but downplay their own personal responsibility. Or they may go into an interview focused exclusively on their stack of certificates, while downplaying their recent misconducts. In either scenario, the applicant is diminishing their own poor choices (*i.e., my crime was not my fault*) and/or overinflating their accomplishments (*i.e., certificates make up for a crime*).

Exercising humility is not an easy task. It requires you to be honest with yourself and others. It requires you to be vulnerable about your shortcomings and deficits. But it also fosters growth because it forces us to recognize that we have space to grow.

By adopting a humility approach to life, you will not only increase your chances of being granted parole, you will also make strides towards establishing or rebuilding trust with loved ones and in other relationships in your life.



Whether you're facing parole, a work situation or a relational opportunity, how might presenting yourself with genuine honesty and humility be beneficial to everyone involved?

*Kurt is the Founder/Executive Director of a reentry nonprofit in central PA called “Tomorrow’s Neighbors.”
For more information, call (717) 241-8375 or visit www.tomorrowsneighbors.org*

VIA DEFINITION: HUMILITY

“I see my strengths and talents but I am humble, not seeking to be the center of attention or to receive recognition.”

**CHARACTER
STRENGTHS**

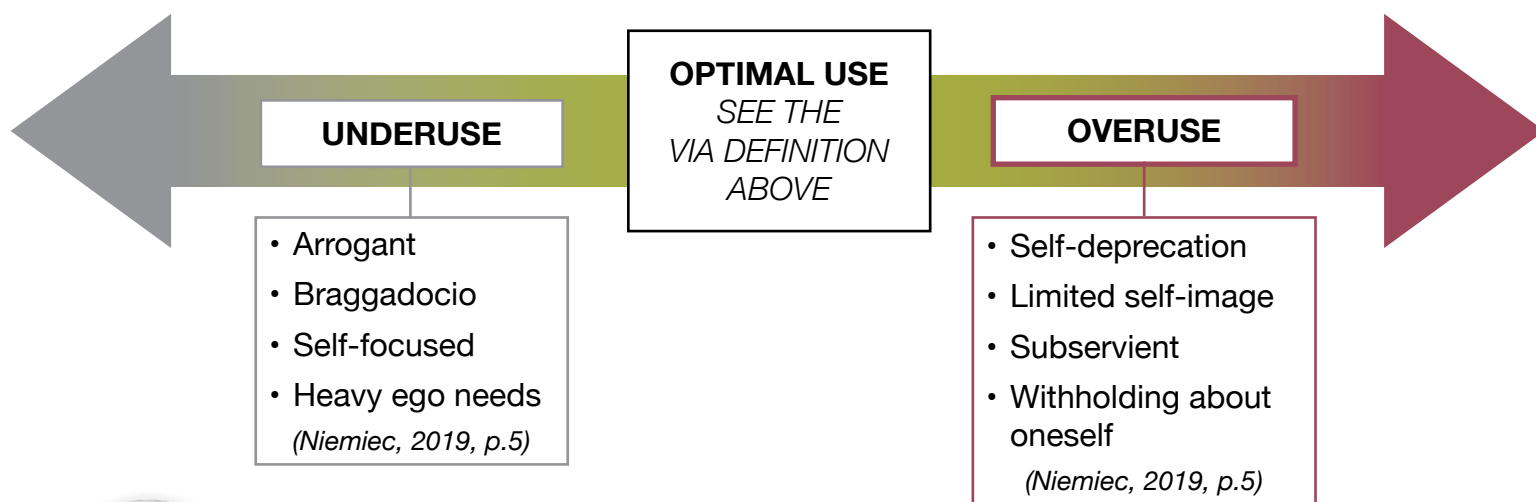
DEEP DIVE

“Humility means accurately evaluating your accomplishments. It’s easy to describe what humility is not — it is not bragging, not doing things in excess, not seeking the spotlight, not drawing attention to yourself, not viewing yourself as more special or important than others. On the other hand, it is not bowing to every wish or demand of another person and it is not being highly self-critical. Truly humble people think well of themselves and have a good sense of who they are, but they also are aware of their mistakes, gaps in their knowledge, and imperfections. Most importantly, they are content without being a center of attention or getting praised for their accomplishments.

A common misconception is that humility involves having a low self-esteem, a sense of unworthiness, and/or a lack of self-focus. However, true humility involves an accurate self-assessment, recognition of limitations, keeping accomplishments in perspective, and forgetting of the self. Humble people do not distort information to defend or verify their own image, and they do not need to see-or present-themselves as being better than they actually are.”

(VIA Institute on Character, 2023, para. 1)

<https://www.viacharacter.org/character-strengths/humility>



Travis

PROGRAM DEVELOPER

Jeff broke down many aspects of this definition on page 4. To look at the strength from a different angle, let’s revisit the criteria used in identifying the 24 character strengths. Ten criteria were initially used to narrow down the list to the 24 strengths we see today. The first one, met by all 24 strengths, states that “A strength contributes to various fulfillments that constitute the good life, for oneself and for others” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, pg. 17).

Now, take a moment to contemplate the definition above. Consider individuals you know who may embody humility as a signature strength, and reflect on your own experiences with this strength.



- ***In what ways does humility contribute to a fulfilling life for myself?***
- ***How does my humility contribute to a fulfilling life for others?***

As a way to help reflect on how humility may contribute to a fulfilling life for yourself and others, let's take a moment to think of some examples of people who are strong in this characteristic.

First, consider your "Humility Hero." Who is one person you can think of that resembles this description? It could be someone you knew from your past, someone in your life now, or even a fictional character. If you need some ideas, check out the examples on pages 20-21, where Joyce invited us to consider this in last issue's writing prompt.

Then, try to capture how this Humility Hero shows their strength of humility. Write down a few actions or behaviors you've noticed that make it clear to you that they are living with humility. Maybe they listen more often than they speak, or they brag about others' accomplishments instead of their own, or they seek out constructive feedback.

Take a moment to reflect on how their humility has benefited you or others around that person.

MY HUMILITY HERO

ACTIONS/BEHAVIORS THAT SHOW THEIR HUMILITY:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

How has their humility benefitted me personally, and/or others around them?



Finally, circle one of the actions/behaviors from the list above. Try to intentionally practice it over the next couple of weeks and notice how it makes you feel.

The following is collectively written by the peer facilitators of the Loop Group at Pickaway CI (PCI) in Ohio: Eddie S., Edward P., Randon L., and Brandon G.

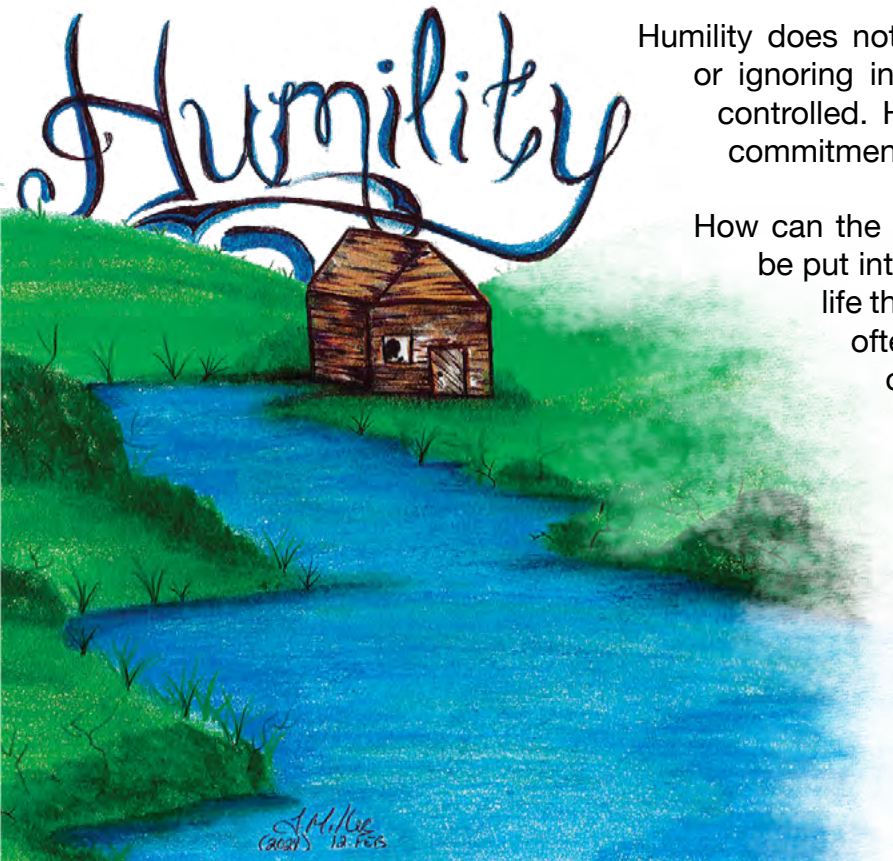
At PCI we facilitate a group of 50 individuals weekly. Our members consist of both the general population and offenders from a special unit - Frazier Medical Center - which is for people who require constant or chronic medical care. Our Loop Group is very engaging. It brings fellowship and shines a light on those it touches. We do informal group therapy, peer support and character strength building. In doing so we create a positive "shining" environment, helping to grow PCI's Shining Light community, one light at a time. - Edward P.

NEW

BRUSH OFF THE SMALL STUFF

Humility is about how we carry ourselves. It's about having a meek strength, knowing your value and place, and using them to the best benefit of a greater purpose. It's about knowing how you can best serve yourself and others, and when to let someone else take over when their strengths are a better fit for the situation. Many people think the opposite of humility is pride, but it's okay to be proud of your strengths and accomplishments, as long as it doesn't grow to the point of a "better than" attitude.

We express humility every day while being locked up. We dance on the line of accepting authority over us and still expecting a certain amount of respect due to us. While we are still in prison, we are also still people with many special talents and a lot to offer. Remembering who we are, other than a number, while still navigating the pitfalls of incarcerated life is an exercise in humility. Sometimes the things that happen to us or how we're treated feel wrong or unacceptable. As long as we keep our goals in mind and remember who we are, the rest doesn't matter. If it don't apply, let it fly. As long as we have the strength to endure, we can remain humble and continue to thrive. - Randon L.



Humility does not mean passive toleration for what I don't like, or ignoring injustice, or allowing myself to be victimized or controlled. Humility is active, positive, assertive, a creative commitment to make use of my situation. - Eddie S.

How can the community codes of "Brush off the small stuff" be put into play? By finding humility in yourself. Every day life throws up a hurdle, some bigger than others. More often than not, it's the small stuff that throws people off the most. By brushing off the small stuff, we are given an opportunity to work through issues and grow from them. - Edward P.



What does it look like in your life to practice the character strength of humility with this Community Code?

Artwork by Loop Group member T. Miller

SHINING LIGHT COMMUNITY CODES

SELF-CARE

- Be open, Be curious
- Brush Off the Small Stuff
- Accept Non-Resolution
- Start Simple

CARE FOR OTHERS

- "Speak Life"
- One Mic
- Step Forward/Step Back
- Speak from the "I"
- Debate the Topic, Not the Person
- Listen & Learn Before Offering Advice
- Confidentiality



What's up, my fellow Loopers!

It's that time again to tackle another character strength. In all Humility, I have to admit this was challenging for me, because I had to learn that my understanding of what this word really means was skewed. That's why I believe it is important to talk about what Humility isn't rather than what it is...



Dormen
PROGRAM FACILITATOR
SL ALUM '18-'20

I believed humility to be the act of debasement and lowering oneself. If you're like me, we are here to set the record straight. I had to approach this character strength with a new perspective and a new lens. I asked my older brother what did humility mean to him? He said being kind, courteous, pleasant and having restraint. And I thought to myself, "Yes, and..." Then when I received a phone call from my brother Leem who is still on the inside, I asked his thoughts. He said, "It's always looking to the Creator first and foremost, knowing that our abilities are gifts from Him" and again I thought, "Yes, and..." I kept waiting to hear something about lowering ourselves, thinking less of ourselves, even demeaning ourselves. But now I know true humility is not thinking less of ourselves. It is actually the exact opposite!

I often use weight lifting as an example because so much of my 25+ years inside was spent in the weight pit, either training myself or facilitating others in meeting their goals. And I believe the physical, mental, and spiritual are all connected. So whether your interest is in working out or not, my hope is that you will have a picture of what I'm painting in words and can apply it to your own health and wellness.

Whenever someone walked into the gym or the weight pit with me, I would tell them, "Check your ego at the door. You can also leave your pride there, too!" Working out will teach you a lot about humility if you let it. Lifting weights is one of those things that forces you to respect the law - the law of gravity, lol! I remember my humble beginnings in the pit. Moments of acceptance that I can't lift this; I need a spotter. I also learned that instead of acting like I know all the answers, it is okay to say, "I don't know!" By accepting these things with humility, I actually had a better pathway to get stronger and was able to avoid being further humbled by an injury. And eventually, I enjoyed the satisfaction of helping others learn how to work out properly in a safe way, which was far more rewarding than promoting my own glory and success.

In all of this, nothing has been more humbling than realizing that what I thought was humility was not true humility. I now see that humility is acknowledging my capabilities and walking in confidence, while at the same time realizing that I also have limitations and may sometimes need the assistance of another. It is regarding myself as a good person with much to offer others in my community, while also admitting my mistakes and moral shortcomings. Turns out, maybe my brothers were right.

Last time, we asked what H.O.P.E. acronym describes how you see hope.

Here were some responses:

Humility Offers Power Efficiently

Adam F. (SC)

Hurtling Obstacles with Perseverance & Endurance

Ramelle K. (CA)

Having One's Purpose Envisioned

Gary F. (SC)

Hope Only Precedes Experience

K. Daniel O. (AR)

Having Optimistic Perseverance Everyday

Tyreece "Sweeper" S. (SC)

Helping Others Project Energy

Eric Y. (SC)

Helping Others Pursue Excellence

Jake L. (ND)

Honorable Operative Personal Elevation

Larry S. (PA)

Try This

Make a humble, accurate assessment of your physical state - mobility, strength, endurance, etc. Recognize the capabilities you have in these areas as well as your limitations. Then challenge yourself to take a new step towards physical health. Lean into your capabilities, and see your limitations not as an obstacle but as a realistic hurdle to overcome, and then approach it in a safe way. With humility, you might discover you are stronger than you think!

PREVIOUS PROMPT: **HUMILITY HEROES**

We asked you to tell the story of a person who, in your view, embodies true humility...

Humility Hero: Glenn F.

I met Glenn at a prison in San Luis Obispo. He often trekked the yard's walkway, avoiding clusters of joggers and seemingly not welcomed in the rambunctious crowds that litter the field. Pale, wrinkled, and gangly, his perpetual scowl would repel most, but whenever he and I crossed paths, his polite nod and friendly greeting conveyed he welcomed company, or at least mine. He told me how a motor accident had nearly taken his life, pointing to the jagged scars that crossed his face and had left his eye permanently damaged. Over brief discussions, I discovered that beneath his homely appearance, he possessed a wealth of knowledge on a variety of subjects: literature, politics, terrestrial sciences, theology, sports, you name it!

How could someone with such humility be so intelligent? He had to be a fraud, flashing bits of clever phoniness as a street musician would a card trick. Occasionally, I'd mention the most random subject I could think of to stump him.

During one of these intellectual jousts, a passerby joined our conversation, stumbling over facts and misquoting authors. I nearly burst with anticipation for Glenn to correct him. But when the guy walked away unimpeded, I quickly turned to Glenn.

"Didn't you hear all the stupid things he said?" I asked. "Why didn't you correct him?"

"If you flaunt knowledge and correct people on everything they say, you'll be a know-it-all with no one to speak to. Wisdom is knowing how to use knowledge," he said, before crediting an anonymous source, "and our humility should exceed our ability."

- Ramelle K. (CA)

"Tim is an amazing artist, but I believe his greatest talent is humility. With each stroke of his pen or brush, his aim is never to please his own ego; it's to bring joy to men in mental health crises. And not just joy alone, for his artwork in itself are teachable moments. His creations rival the craftsmanship of Wright, and the beauty of Picasso, yet their origins come from ordinary items most consider to be trash: cardboard, toilet paper, emptied ice cream containers and jalapeno pepper jars, etc. Lighthouses, castles, palm trees, Christmas decorations, and more. And his lesson? If he can transform trash into art, imagine what God can create in us! That's humbling indeed."

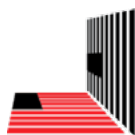
- Derek C. (SC)

"There is a person I have met while in prison who embodies true humility. His name is Gary. He helps other people who are trying to get their GED, but he doesn't brag about it as though he is trying to make himself feel superior to others. He is always there for people if they are having a difficult day. He doesn't speak harshly about people as though he is better than they are. He is the epitome of true humility."

- Aaron B. (OH)

"The person who I believe demonstrates true humility? District Attorney Pamela Price. As the new D.A. of Alameda County, California she is a beacon of hope and humility. With so much despair in society and social injustices, change and understanding is hard to find. As a civil-rights attorney, District Attorney Pamela Price has set out to bring trust and understanding between law enforcement and the justice-impacted community. This is no easy feat in Alameda County, which includes Oakland - a huge population of criminal justice-impacted peoples."

- John C. (CA)



AMERICAN PRISON
WRITING ARCHIVE

The American Prison Writing Archive (APWA) is a public internet-based collection of non-fiction writings about direct experiences within the U.S. prison system. Their mission is...

“...to replace misrepresentation of prisons and imprisoned people with first-person witness by those living in legalized confinement.”

Their guidelines note that ***“Anyone with first-hand experience inside US carceral institutions today is eligible to submit essays. This includes prison employees and volunteers, who materially shape the day-to-day conditions in which incarcerated people live, and who are in turn deeply affected by their work.”*** Length should be less than 5,000 words (15 pages typed and double-spaced, or 25 pages handwritten). They are not currently accepting fiction, and accept poetry “only when related to criminal justice experience.”

Full submission guidelines can be found at <https://prisonwitness.org/how-to-submit/>

Send
Submissions
To

American Prison Writing Archive
Johns Hopkins University
3400 N. Charles St.
Baltimore, MD 21218

Johnny B (NC) who gave us this recommendation says,

“I’ve submitted a couple of pieces to them. And anyone who enjoys writing about their experiences in prison may want to submit some pieces as well.”

Thank you for the tip, Johnny! If you have writing resources to recommend, please write to let us know!

“We have a teacher here that I believe embodies the true definition of humility; the act or quality of being humble.

He has worked here tirelessly for years, and before working here, he worked with disabled children as a teacher. He gives his all every day to help hundreds of students learn and grow. He never puts himself above others. He has always exhibited a compassion for everyone around him that knows no bounds. He should be the example by which we should all strive to mirror.

His sacrifices for the students here at RCI (SC) are too numerous to count. We all respect and appreciate him as the unsung hero his humbleness requires. You know who you are.”

- Adam F. (SC)



Kelsha B. (PA) sent in this
picture of her children's father



NEW PROMPT: **LEADERS WHO UNIFY**

According to the VIA Institute on Character, “Leadership involves setting goals and accomplishing them, enlisting effective help, building coalitions, and smoothing ruffled feathers.” **Write a poem or brief essay about the art of bringing people together and helping them get along**, inspired by someone you know who is especially good at this. (Maybe you’re good at this yourself!) Try starting with the line, ***“This smoother of ruffled feathers is”***

Joyce



PRODUCTION DIRECTOR

CONSTRUCTIVE DEBATE

Welcome to our Constructive Debate Team! One sign of a healthy community or relationship is the ability to disagree respectfully. We want to provide a chance for you to share your differing ideas in a safe, constructive way and practice critical thinking, hearing different perspectives, and carefully crafting a respectful argument. Life throws us situations where we need these skills all the time, so think of this as your practice ground.



AGREE



IT'S COMPLICATED



DISAGREE

"No, I do not think humility is overrated. It is not recognized enough."

- Gwen M. (NC)

I think we need to take inventory of ourselves at times to avoid such statements. Our radar should be on the look out for pride and egotism which lead to a path of destruction. Meanwhile, humility opens the door to greatness. There is nothing wrong with taking pride in one's work but when we center everything on ourselves, problems arise. The more humility we demonstrate, the less pride exists. Humility is a must when working with others and most importantly GETTING OUT OF PRISON!

- Leonard T. (PA)

"Humility is overrated because everyone needs to have pride for themselves and to know that they can get things done right and try their best and not to worry about what other people think of them."

- Adam B. (NC)

Last issue we proposed the statement...

"HUMILITY IS OVERRATED."

"Humility is more about BALANCE rather than overrated or underrated. Some commingle humility with belittling or undermining themselves which is not healthy. It suppresses their full potential..."

- Emmanuel C. (VA)

I strongly ~~disagree~~ with this statement, most individuals in prison (and out in society) take humility as being weak, soft, less of a man or woman. With humility comes respect, honor. Those who lack wisdom fail to humble themselves. From a spiritual perspective, we are called to clothe ourselves in humility. Humility comes from wisdom. Humility means proper respect for God and others, not self-depreciation. Humility gives you a more accurate perspective of yourself. I encourage everyone to remain humble in every area of their lives. "HUMILITY IS NOT OVERRATED"

- Jimbo L. (PA)

"I disagree. It is underrated. Even in prison I know a lot of humble people. I only hang with humble and positive people. They lift me up when I am down and knock me down when my ego gets too big. That is a true humble friend."

- Harvey E. (SD)

"I disagree, I believe that humility shows the true growth and strength of a person. I try to surround myself with people I want to be like and the men around me have shown me that humility is important."

- Michael M. (CA)

(please note: some answers have been abridged for space)

"Humility is not overrated; It can save your life in prison. Being humble is an essential tool that everyone should know how to use. Being prideful, boastful, and acting as if you're bigger and better than everyone is a sure-fire way to get hurt in prison. Rather, you should be humble before your fellow man. Being humble is not a weakness it is a strength."

- Adam F. (SC)

It's a bit complicated. Many people tend to confuse humility with humiliation. No one wants to be humiliated anymore than a person enjoys a braggart. Being humble comes seemingly natural to many and humility can be the antidote to egoism. The hallmark of a true leader is humility. -Gary F. (SC)

I disagree, because I have talked with numerous correctional officers and have had to correct their thinking for some of them. We all need a bit of humility, we are all someone's child, brother, uncle, father, cousin, grandchild, and so on. We are people too, and we have feelings too. So in a prison environment humility is essential. You don't know what the next guy is going through, and you are in jail too - we are no better than the guy next to us."

- Mark S. (OH)

I don't think Humility is overrated at all. I know I can be a prideful person. IN my life I messed up a LOT OF opportunities, jobs, relationships, and Friendships cause I thought I was greater than the situation at hand. when I was IN my Thirties I was looking for that right job, The one I was qualified for, The one that would put me on the map with great pay. But IT never happened. I never got hired. I wasn't able to provide for my family at that time. Something inside me forced me to show some Humility and Apply AT McDonalds, which I thought I would never do. Come to Find out, I got hired on the spot, only making minimum wage at that time, but was able to work my way up to that pay I desired. On top of that, they provided educational resources also. Most importantly I WAS ABLE TO provide for my family. But IT took Humility.

-Charles S. (PA)

"Humility is never overrated when used and judged properly and also when it is used purely and not just for attention. I have witnessed people use great acts of humility and never speak of those acts again, it was just pure and from the heart. That's real humility when it's natural!!!"

- Demarcus L. (IL)

I both agree & disagree! "Humility is overrated" can be true due to the simple fact that people walk all over you & think you are weak. However sometimes humility is the best answer to conflicts. Especially in prison, it is pointless to argue with C/Os & other people in authority.

~Danielle A. (IL)

For the next issue, do you agree or disagree about the following statement:



**"SOME PEOPLE ARE BORN
TO BE LEADERS - SOME AREN'T"**

*Help us come up with our next debate prompt!
In 10 words or less, what is another statement on LEADERSHIP
that could arguably have more than one opinion?*

*Across many faiths -
Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism, Judaism,
Christianity, indigenous faiths and others -
spiritual humility is a virtue.*



Nina

PROGRAM FACILITATOR

Spiritually speaking, humility can be defined as the honest recognition of our own worth, as the Creator and/or Universe sees us. It is the delicate balance between recognizing our failures and shortcomings, yet knowing how much we are loved and valued by the Divine, who is greater than us.

The Examen meditation exercise below is adapted from a technique described by Ignatius Loyola to help us to deepen our spiritual relationship, so we can live in this balance of humility. It is a daily technique of prayerful reflection on the events of the day to notice the Divine's presence and discern the direction for our lives.

Below is a five-step routine for our daily Examen. If this is new for you, consider starting with just 1-2 minutes in each step at the end of your day. Read the sections to yourself one at a time, pausing to reflect or listen to whatever comes to mind after each one.

GIVE THANKS. I begin by giving thanks for all the things I'm grateful for today. I allow my mind to wander as I reflect on the ways I am blessed today. I allow big things and small things to arise—everything from the gift of my faith, to the gift of my family, to the gift of breath.

ASK FOR THE SPIRIT (OR LIGHT) TO FEEL PRESENT. I ask to be filled with grace and self-forgiveness. I remember that I am imperfect, that setbacks are inevitable, but that I am held by Someone who has a purposeful plan for me. Otherwise, I'm liable to hide in denial, wallow in self-pity, or seethe in self-loathing.

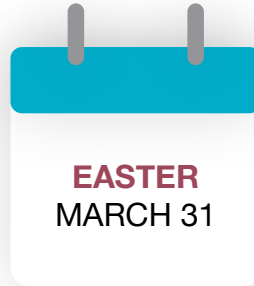
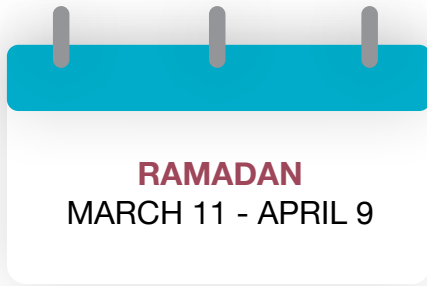
REVIEW AND RECOGNIZE FAILURES. I look back at my day and ask to see the moments when I have failed in big ways or small. I take a sobering look at the mistakes I've made today. This point of honest reflection can be difficult, but I understand it is necessary.

ASK FOR FORGIVENESS AND HEALING. I ask for divine forgiveness, and healing of any harm that I might have done – towards others and myself. I ask for help to get over it and move on. I also ask for wisdom to discern how I might better handle such moments in the future.

PRAY ABOUT THE NEXT DAY. I ask for insight to show me how tomorrow might go. I imagine the things I'll be doing, the people I'll see, and the decisions I'll be mulling over. I ask for help with any moments I foresee that might be difficult. I especially ask for help in moments when I might be tempted to fail in the way I did today.

Adapted from "Reimagining the Ignatian Examen: Fresh Ways to Pray from Your Day" by Mark Thibodeaux, SJ





At Shining Light, we try to approach experiences and people groups that are unfamiliar to us with what is called “cultural humility.” This basically means acknowledging that I don’t know or understand something that is meaningful to you, and I would like to learn more. With significant holy seasons for **Islam, Christianity, and Judaism** coming up, we have a chance to practice this.

Interfaith America (formerly Interfaith Youth Core) has created this diagram to show that **“according to social science research, relationships, positive attitudes and appreciative knowledge are closely related to each other... An increase in one leads to an increase in the others.”**



Besides religion, where can you apply cultural humility?



Black Forest cake is the English name for the German dessert Schwarzwälder Kirschtorte, meaning “Black Forest cherry torte.”

Thanks to Gary F, you can make your own - see next page!



WHAT WE'RE READING

BIOGRAPHY

JEWISH TIMES: VOICES FROM THE JEWISH AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

by: HOWARD SIMONS

“(This) lets me feel connected to other Jews and relatable experiences in Christian America”
Michael C. / SC

from Google Books: A carefully crafted portrait of Jewish life in America, drawn from a series of remarkable interviews conducted by noted journalist Howard Simons. The story of a very special immigrant group and its 300-year effort to realize the American dream.

FICTION

THE LUCKIEST GIRL ALIVE // by: JESSICA KNOLL

“It is so good, I just couldn’t put it down. I read it last week in one day, that’s how captivated my mind was.” - Sadé S. / NC

“Follows an unforgettable young woman striving to create the perfect life—until a violent incident from her past threatens to unravel everything and expose her most shocking secret.” (Amazon)

NONFICTION

IN THE REALM OF HUNGRY GHOSTS: CLOSE ENCOUNTERS WITH ADDICTION

by: DR. GABOR MATE

“This book not only enlightens my path on addiction recovery, but also provides a comforting supportive embrace in reminding me that I am human and am worth the benefits of a compassionate approach. Dr. Gabor Mate is a Giant! His impact has explained my disease of addiction and included a solution”
Roger L. / CA

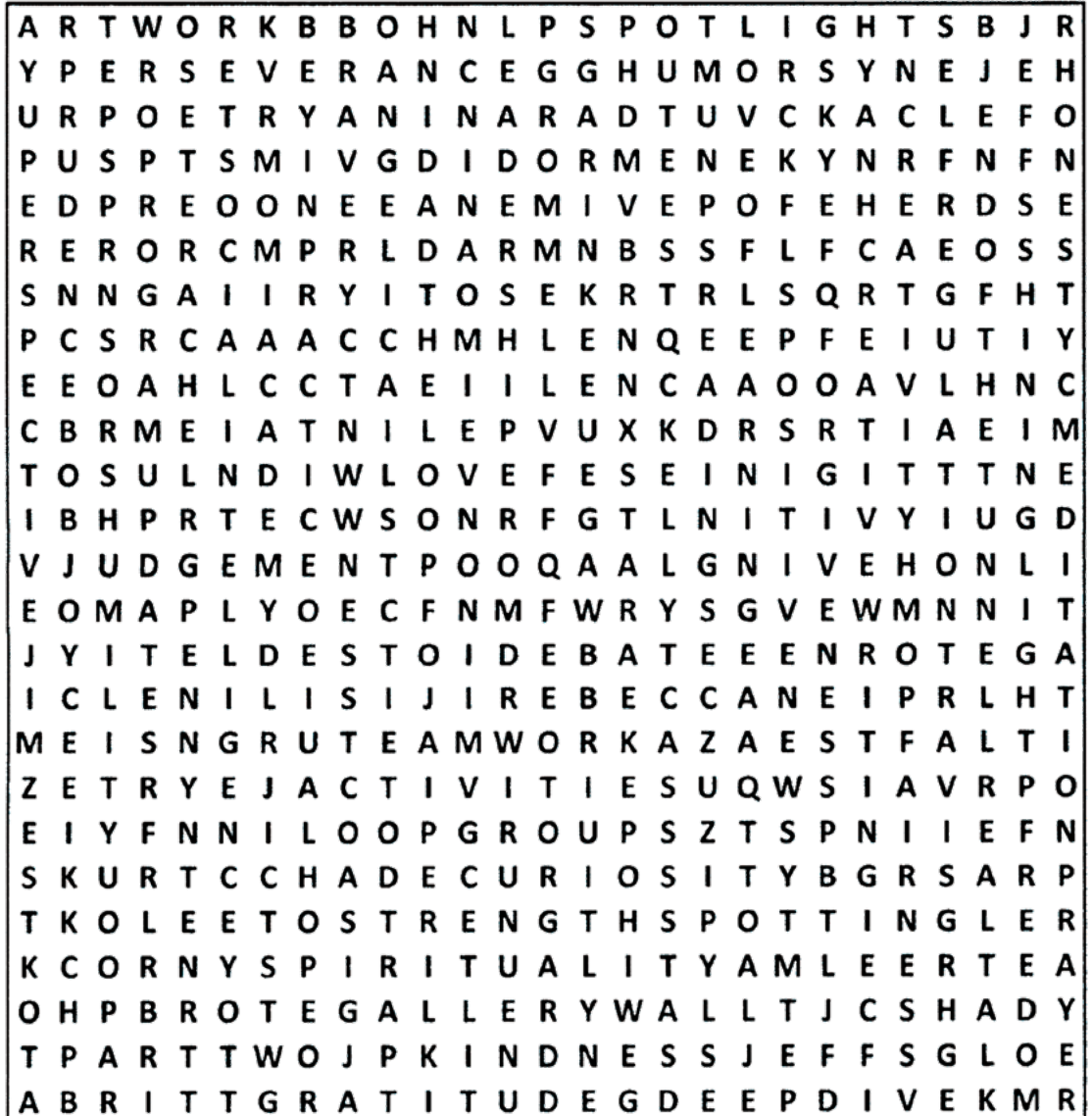
GAMES & ACTIVITIES

Character Strengths

Appreciation of Beauty
Appreciation of Excellence
Bravery
Creativity
Curiosity
Fairness
Forgiveness
Gratitude
Honesty
Hope
Humility
Humor
Judgement
Kindness
Leadership
Love
Love of Learning
Perseverance
Perspective
Prudence
Self Regulation
Social Intelligence
Spirituality
Teamwork
Zest

SHINING LIGHT WORD SEARCH

Designed By: Harry (OH)



VIA Institute on Character (2021) Character Strengths.

The Loop

Academy
Activities
Artwork
Corny
Corner
Creative Writing
Debate

Deep Dive
End of the Tunnel
Events
Gallery Wall
Games
In Practice
Just for Fun

Loop Group
Meditation/Prayer
Part Two
Poetry
Positive News
Program Updates
Reading

Real Talk
Shining Light
SpotLight
Sponsors
Strength Spotting
The Loop

The Staff

Angelica Kurt
Dormen Lee
Freedom Naomi
Jeff Nina
Joyce Rachel
Kelly Rebecca
Travis



WINTER MATH ANSWER FROM LAST ISSUE

The lampposts are the number 15, the snowmen are the number 4 and the trees are the number 3. Then in the last equation, a light post with only one light would represent the number 5. If you go by the order of operations, 3 multiplied by 4 is 12. Then, if you add 15 and subtract 5, you'll get 22.

(You aced it, Aaron! Way to go!)



Have a math or word problem you want people to try & solve? Send it in!

Black Forest Cake

- 10 Oreo or chocolate, creme-filled cookies
- 10 chocolate chip cookies
- 6 Tbls non-dairy creamer
- 1 cup water
- 1 .31oz squeeze cream cheese
- 3 Tbls cherry flavor drink mix

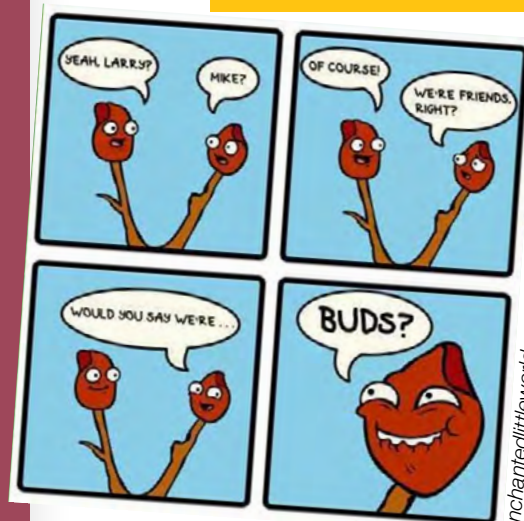
Submitted by
Gary F. (SC)

JUST

FOR

FUN

Remove the creme filling and set aside. Place chocolate cookies into bowl with the chocolate chip cookies and crush into crumbs that are very fine. (Tip: a ziplock bag can work well for this). Set aside. In a cup, mix creamer and water. Stir to blend. Add to cookie crumbs and mix well. Stir in cream cheese (Tip: an equal amount of mayonnaise may be substituted). Spread cake batter into an 8" microwavable bowl. Microwave 5 minute on High til set. Center should not jiggle. Let cake cool then carefully remove and place on plate. Microwave creme from cookies for 30 seconds. Add cherry drink mix and 1 Tbl water, mix. Add more water if needed. (You can add another squeeze cream cheese if desired, to enhance frosting). Frost cake when cool.



HEALTHY RECIPES

Now that we've featured some more decadent recipes, let's balance with some health & wellness (we see you, Dormen - p.19). So send in some recipes that your body will thank.

MS. NAOMI'S CORNY CORNER

WE KNOW YOU CAN'T HELP YOURSELVES

Why does a chicken go to the gym?

To work on his pecks! - Michael R. (SC)

Why can't you trust the king of the jungle?

He's a lion. - Michael M. (CA)

Can you describe yourself in 3 words?

Yes. Lazy.

- Witty & Wise Publication

What do you get when you chase a car?

Exhausted.

What do you get when you jump in front of one?

Tired. - G. Martin. (NC)

How's that new universal remote control?

It changes everything.

- Witty & Wise Publication



SPECIAL THANKS TO THESE 65 CONTRIBUTORS:

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*Thank you to everyone else who submitted work we weren't able to include. Please keep writing in!
We are encouraged and inspired by all of the letters, artwork and other expressions that come our
way, and we hope that you find something meaningful in the process, too!*

NEXT ISSUE'S THEME LEADERSHIP

SEND US YOUR BEST COVER ART!

UPCOMING THEMES: LEADERSHIP & FAIRNESS



Separate from moral qualities of an effective leader - like humility, for instance - part of the VIA Institute's definition of leadership includes "the tendency to organize and encourage a group to get things done, while maintaining good relations within the group." It has both practical and interpersonal aspects. In your opinion, which of these two aspects is more important, and why?



SUBMISSIONS FOR NEXT ISSUE DUE BY APRIL 25, 2024



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Through **edovo** more and more people are accessing *The Loop* and engaging in other video content, too. If you have Edovo on your tablets, be sure to check out our channel and tell your friends!



IF YOU ENJOYED THIS ISSUE OF THE LOOP, HERE ARE SOME THINGS YOU CAN DO NEXT...

- **Tell your friends!!!**
- **Write to us with your feedback, responses, writing, or artwork**
- **Find more creative inspiration through our "Creations of a Caged Bird" videos or our new Writer's CoLab Anthology.**
- **Hone your own creative writing skills through video-based courses like Playwriting and Intro to Spoken Word.**
- **Continue developing your character through our Learn Your Strengths and Apply Your Strengths video courses.**
- **Share your experience with loved ones on the outside and invite them to read *The Loop* online at shining-light.com/theloop**

"Wow, what a find...we acquired new tablets [and] this new learning app called Edovo. Looking & searching, I find this course called Shining Light and The Loop. What an answer to prayer..Our new tablets have been a blessing & you are now a major part of my life. I can't get enough." - Harvey E. (SD)