

THE GREENSTAR FAMILY INITIATIVE: ADDRESSING BARRIERS TO REHABILITATION

BRANDON LEWIS[∞]

In this letter, Lewis describes the Greenstar Family Initiative, an important program he is helping spearhead that is a product of his revolutionary education, and an initiative he holds dear. By focusing on helping the families of the incarcerated, providing targeted assistance to victims, and strengthening political engagement, GFI aims to address several major barriers to rehabilitation.

Greetings,

I thank you for this opportunity to speak about the one fruit of my revolutionary career that I am most proud of. It is called **The Greenstar Family Initiative**.

The Greenstar Family seeks to be a nonprofit with three major parts.

Part One is focused on the families of the incarcerated.

One fact is that families of the incarcerated do the time with the incarcerated. So much attention has been placed on prisoners that many times their families have been forgotten, when in reality family assistance is key to rehabilitation. Greenstar Family is seeking grants to help with the D.O.C.'s high priced phone calls. It costs \$5.00 for one 20-minute phone call! Also, families help with the over-priced commissary, sending books and other reading material, paying for stamps and legal expenses. Most of all, it is the families that make sure children of the incarcerated have gifts at birthdays and Christmas, clothes for school and even food on the table. They are doing this time with the incarcerated and they need financial assistance!

They also need assistance with information! How do I sign up for a video visit? How do I get on a visitation list? What is the information for a shuttle bus? Where do I find an affordable but effective modification lawyer? If my incarcerated family member reports some sort of abuse, what is the number to their prison? When I call, who should I ask for?

These and many more questions are barriers to rehabilitation when the answers are hard to find. This is why the Greenstar Family seeks to make one site, where people can submit their questions and receive answers within 48 hours.

Lastly, The Greenstar Family Initiative helps with connectivity. We want to connect families with other families that are going through the same struggles. This will activate both empathy and sympathy, fighting the stigma attached to anything related to prison.

Families deal with depression, anger, resentment and sadness, especially with newly incarcerated loved ones. They need someone else to call and talk to that understands how they feel and can counsel them through their many emotions. They

[∞] Brandon Lewis is a writer and author who has been incarcerated for the last thirteen years and has engaged in revolutionary work for the last seven. He has written novels, screenplays, articles and essays, and hopes to continue developing his prolific literary career for years to come.

need that extra sense of community, and that is something that The Greenstar Family Initiative seeks to provide.

Part Two of The Greenstar Family Initiative is targeted assistance to the victims of crimes.

How can we support criminals and not support the victims of the criminals' crimes? The truth is, both the criminal and the victim are broken, and for the sake of a healthy society they both need to be made whole.

The Greenstar Family Initiative seeks to start a victims' fund, made mostly from donations off of offenders' prison accounts to go straight to victims of crimes in direct cash payments. We also endeavor to open up lines of communication between victims and offenders so that criminals can understand the harm they have caused, and so that the victim can get closure by understanding how the criminal became a criminal and why the crime was committed at all. The hope is that this will bring about both accountability and forgiveness to a process that needs it so desperately.

Part Three of The Greenstar Family Initiative is political.

When you sign up as a "Greenstar Family Member," you are agreeing to dedicate your vote to the political operative that will bring light to Greenstar Family issues! This may be a person in Congress or a mayor or governor. It may be a prosecutor or even a school board official. Anyone who is elected to office needs to be held accountable for their policies! So, the more members we get, the more votes can go towards a Greenstar Family representative who can bring light to high priced phone calls, low quality prison meals and even mandatory sentences.

One important question is, who can be a Greenstar Family Member? If you think our criminal justice system is broken; if you think families of prisoners or families of victims need support; if you feel unheard and alone, I present to you a system through which our collective power can be focused into a scream! You are welcome to The Greenstar Family Initiative.

My Focus Group comrade is the main person keeping this much needed initiative functioning. For more information, visit our Facebook Group at "Greenstar Family Initiative."

Again, I thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak about something dear to my spirit. God bless. Stay busy!

L.B.