

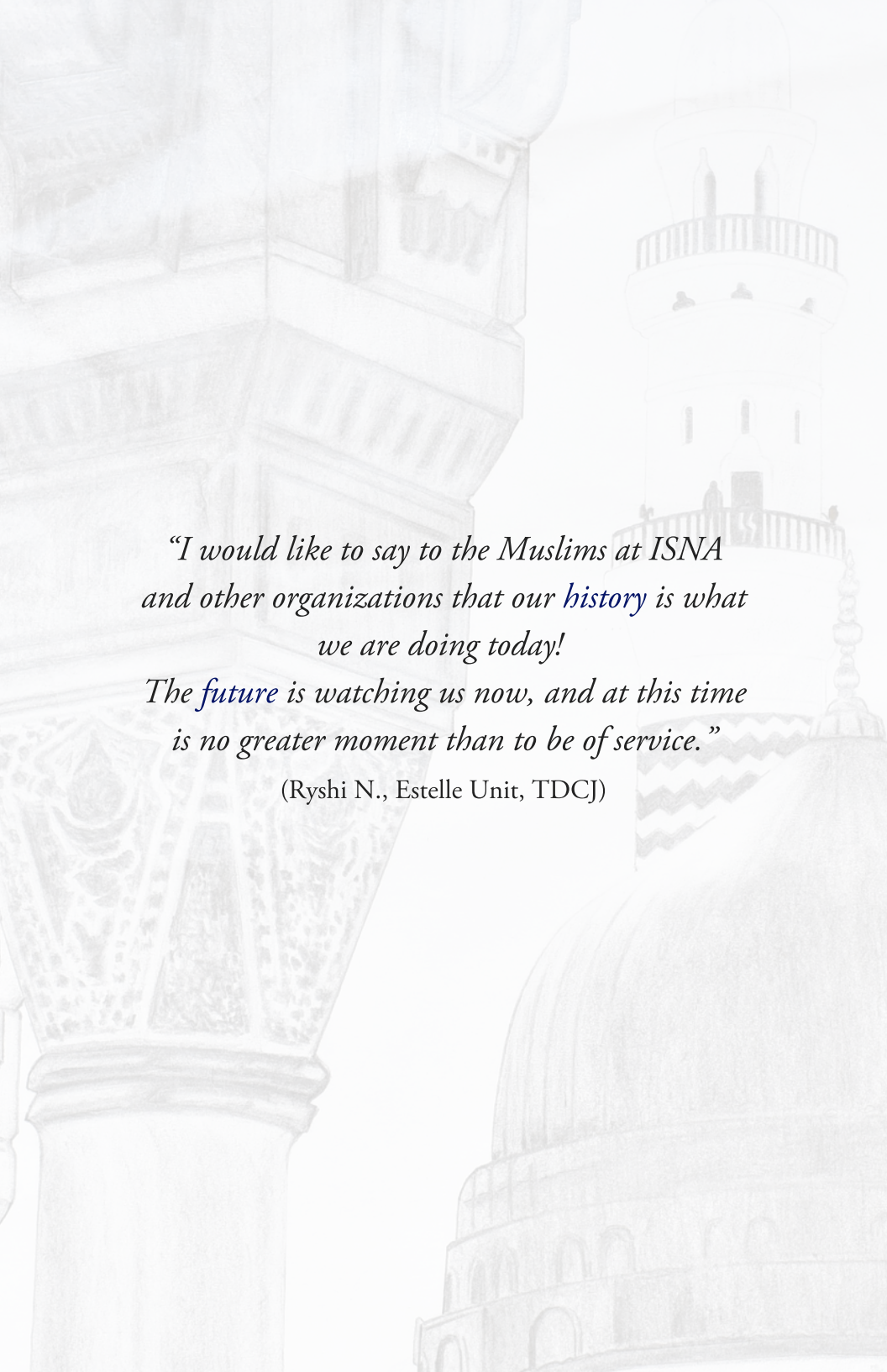


TAYBA FOUNDATION
Freedom Through Education

MUSLIMS in Texas Prisons

Reality of Muslim
Prisoners in the
Texas Department of
Criminal Justice (TDCJ)

Tayba Foundation Survey Findings



*“I would like to say to the Muslims at ISNA
and other organizations that our **history** is what
we are doing today!*

*The **future** is watching us now, and at this time
is no greater moment than to be of service.”*

(Ryshi N., Estelle Unit, TDCJ)



Table Of Contents

Tayba Foundation: A Brief Introduction	1
Tayba's Work in Texas	2
Incarcerated Muslims in Texas: A Survey	3
Summary of Findings	4
How Muslims in Texas can help Tayba	12
How Tayba Can Help Your Community	13

Full responses from the Survey Participants can be viewed online at taybafoundation.org/survey

Tayba Foundation: A Brief Introduction

Roughly 120,000 to 350,000 Muslims are incarcerated in U.S. prisons. The majority embraced Islam inside prison.¹ These men and women, our brothers and sisters, have very little to no help from the muslim community in free society both while incarcerated as well as when they are released from prison. Just like the story of Yusef, peace be upon him, they usually refer to themselves as the forgotten believers.

Since its founding in 2004, Tayba Foundation, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, has been dedicated to serving individuals and families impacted by incarceration. Tayba's work is organized into three interrelated program areas: Education, Life Skills, and Re-entry. Tayba courses are exclusively developed by Tayba's Academic Department to fit the needs and to answer the many questions and situations the inmates experience.

So far this year, Tayba foundation has offered Islamic Education, Life Skills and Re-entry services to 5,937 incarcerated Muslims across US federal and state prisons. This year alone we have so far delivered free Islamic Education to 1,551 Muslims (24 of whom are women), across 34 states. Thirteen students are benefiting from our reentry services and fifty from our life skills courses.

Due to financial restrictions, Tayba has had to waitlist many applicants before they can enroll and have to wait to take advantage of the services that we offer. Also, because of lack of State and Federal funding for chaplaincy and life skills services within prisons, we expect the number of applications to Tayba Foundation to keep growing in the coming years.

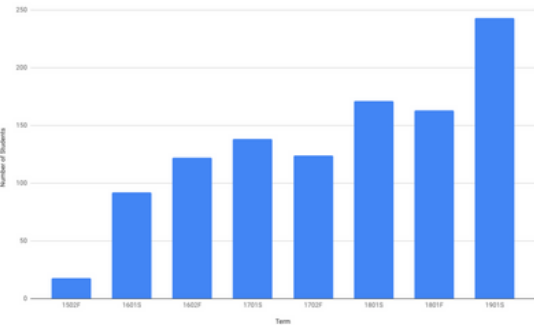
¹ These are only estimates from literatures and surveys.

Tayba's Work in Texas

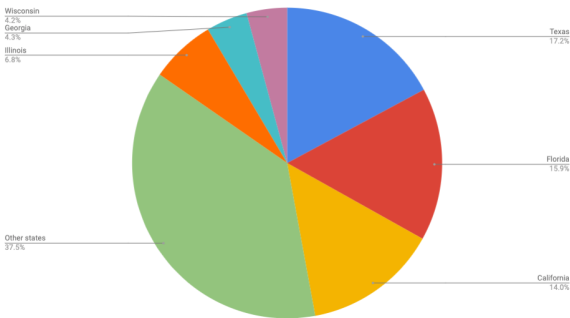
Since 2015 the number of Tayba's students in the state of Texas has been increasing steadily. From only 18 students in 2015, the number has grown to reach a total of 334² in 2018 (1st and 2nd semesters combined) and 245 in the spring semester of 2019. This has made our student population in Texas the largest of any other state.

With 1020 students, Texas has become the largest beneficiary of Tayba Islamic Education program surpassing Florida and California which are second and third consecutively. Although there might not be one answer as to what has made the number of Texas students expand at this rate, this survey has given us some clues to better understand their situation.

Also note that we were only able to find 2 to 4 Muslim chaplains in the TDCJ system serving a population of Muslim prisoners estimated at 7000 distributed among 61 prisons. This can explain the dire need for Islamic education and other services that are requested by our incarcerated brothers and sisters.



Number of enrollments



² This number represents only active registered students in 2018. The total number of students Tayba has served in Texas surpasses 1000.

Incarcerated Muslims in Texas: A Survey

Tayba Foundation reached out to its program beneficiaries, referred to as students in this report, in both federal and state prisons with a four-question survey. Tayba intends to share the findings of the survey with local and national organizations attending the 2019 ISNA convention in Houston with the goal of creating partnerships and collaborative opportunities that can advance and support the most undeserved Muslim community in the U.S., the incarcerated Muslims.

Texas Department of Justice is home to an estimated 7000 Muslims in state and federal prisons. Tayba's survey was sent to 450 students in 51 different TDOJ prisons. We have received 155 answers, a little over a 34% participation rate.

All the answers received are included in this report (Appendix A), and to enable the student's voices to be heard properly, we include their answers as they were sent with very few edits. Please reflect on their heartfelt efforts to express themselves despite, in some cases, inability to do so, reflecting their lifelong lack of education.

It takes courage to open oneself in this circumstance. It is particularly poignant when some answer the questions with only a du'a for Tayba. Tayba students are teaching us the Deen of Islam as much as we teach them. The following summary of findings will help you understand the landscape of the incarcerated Muslims in the TDOJ in particular and the U.S in general. Also, please note that the findings are presented, for each question, to prioritize the most relevant issues of the students.

Summary of Findings

Question One:

What is your greatest struggle presently as a Muslim in prison?

1. Religious Practice:

The biggest struggle expressed by Tayba's students is being restricted from the Ta'leem sessions. Ta'leem for Muslim prisoners refers to the time allowed by the prison administration for any faith group to gather for prayers, group studies, wellness programs etc. According to the surveyed population, the reason of this inequitable treatment from the administration is the lack of Muslim volunteers visiting the prisons. According to the surveyed population, the reason of this inequitable treatment from the administration is the lack of Muslim volunteers visiting the prisons. Based on the amount of volunteers/visitors from each religious group, the administration will permit more or fewer of these gatherings. Therefore, since very few to no Muslims are visiting Muslim inmates, the administration refuses to allow these Ta'leem sessions under the pretext that there are no volunteers to oversee and assist with these programs.

³ Tayba received more students' responses but we were unable to include them in this report due to time constraint.

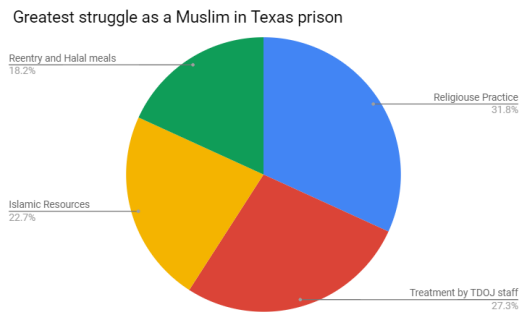
Tayba students mentioned that prisons in the TDCJ have Christian gatherings and programs on a daily basis due to the number of organized volunteers from churches and other establishments of worship.

2. Treatment by the TDCJ staff:

The second expressed struggle students undergo is the unjust and unfair treatment from the TDCJ staff towards Muslims and Islam. Muslims are denied basic rights that are granted to other faith groups, such as the Jewish prisoners, even when small in numbers. Some examples of unfair treatment mentioned in the survey's answers are: mishandling of mail, negative comments about Islam, not having access to the few Islamic books in the libraries.

3. Islamic resources:

In the third place, the most common struggle shared by Tayba students is lack of Islamic resources in prison libraries. Many incarcerated students mention, for example, that a whole unit housing many prisoners will only have one or two copies of the Quran let alone other Islamic literature, media or Islamic resources.



4. Reentry and Halal meals:

The fourth and fifth consecutive struggles expressed by Tayba students are lack of Reentry services and Halal meals. Indeed, many incarcerated brothers and sisters who will be paroling soon have expressed their desire to be able to stay in a Muslim supervised halfway house, and have access to reentry services offered by Muslims in order to increase their chances to stay on the Deen and successful parole. Reentry services such as housing, job placement, networking, clothing, transportation, just to name a few, are not offered or rarely offered by Muslim organizations which leave the released Muslims with no alternative but to go to Christian and other faith-based organizations for support.

As for Halal meals, there is a constitutional right that is not observed by the TDCJ. Muslims still have to eat meat substitutes as beans and peanuts to avoid pork and other meats (knowing that the Jewish prisoners, although small in numbers, have their own kitchen and kosher meals).

Other struggles expressed have to do with self-development or life skills programs based on Islamic principles such as anger management courses, family development, addiction, etc.

Question Two:

What can you benefit most from the Muslims in Texas regarding service offerings? (Please be specific in sharing what each of you may require that is not currently being offered to those of you who will be returning home as well as for those of you who may not have the opportunity to do so).

1. Reentry services:

By far, the number one service offering students express they will benefit from is reentry services. The services voiced from our surveyed population include halfway houses, job placement, clothing transportation etc. Many inmates are well aware that with no Muslim-managed transitional houses and other support from the Muslim community, their chances for a successful reentry are slim. Many incarcerated Muslims have no choice but to parole with their Christian family, if they have one, or Christian transitional housing where the setup is not very appropriate for a practicing Muslims. Current recidivism rate in Texas means that 21.4% of the parolees will return to prison within three years.

2. Visitors and volunteers:

Requests for more visitor and volunteers are the second most requested services students may benefit from. Note that the majority of Muslims in prisons converted inside prison. They have not met or dealt with Muslims in the free world. Therefore they desire the opportunity to meet with Muslims of the community to connect and get a sense of how Muslims act and behave. In addition, as explained on page one, Muslims in the TDCJ cannot have Ta'leem unless more volunteers and visitors are willing to assist and oversee the programs. Accordingly, this may give some weight to the Muslim cause, as the administration will see more presence of the Muslims.

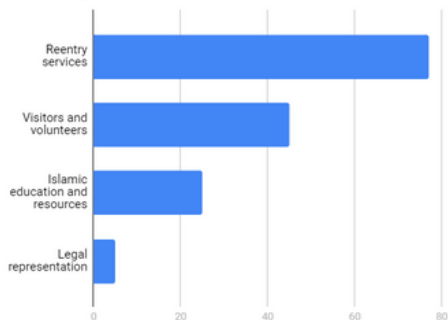
3. Islamic education and resources:

In the third place Tayba students state that they long to benefit from more Islamic education and resources. This includes visiting teachers, classes, books, CD's, DVD's etc.

4. Legal representation:

Another request echoed from the survey is assistance in legal matters pertaining to students' personal cases as well as other more general advice or legal representation.

What can you benefit most from Muslims in Texas?



Question Three:

What would you like to say to the Muslims at ISNA and other organizations, groups and individuals around Texas?

1. Your help is needed

In answer to this question Tayba students overwhelmingly restate the urgent need and importance for ISNA, Texas Muslim organizations and Muslims in general to help them with their aforementioned struggles. A large number of Tayba students answering this question, once again cited reentry services, volunteers, visits and Islamic resources.

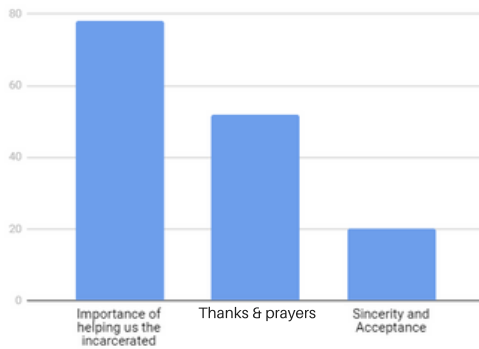
2. We are grateful to you

In addition, many students express gratitude and send prayers to all the organizations and Muslims who have helped, in any possible way, the incarcerated brothers and sisters. This gratitude is echoed so much that it is hard to believe it comes from a community that is usually neglected or referred to as the forgotten believers.

3. Please don't judge us!

In the third and fourth places, with equal shares, students want to tell you that they are sincere Muslims who, by adopting the Deen of Islam, are committed to pleasing Allah and His messenger. They also request that you accept them as full members of your community and not judge them for what they did in the past, before Islam.

What would you like to say to the Muslims?



Question Four:

How has Tayba helped you and what role have we played in your education and development of Deen?

1. A blessing!

The majority of students answering this question mention that it is a blessing to have an institution like Tayba Foundation. Before Tayba, students were getting their Islamic literature from whatever they could find in prison libraries or from outside organizations without having a structured curriculum that fits their needs and promotes their spiritual and religious growth. Thanks to Tayba they are able to pursue a complete and well-organized curriculum, semester-based education that allows them to develop their knowledge just like in a university setting.

2. Understand and learn the Deen!

For many, Tayba gives them their first opportunity to understand and learn the Deen in a wholesome manner. Tayba's curriculum is carefully chosen and developed by Tayba's academy team, which is composed of certified scholars, Tayba's formerly incarcerated student scholars and many well-seasoned curriculum development specialists among others.

3. Character rectification and teaching others:

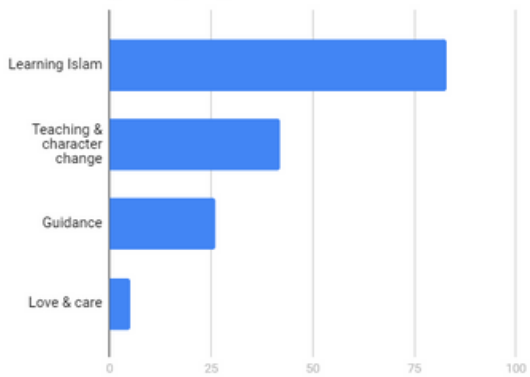
The third most expressed answer to this question is the chance that Tayba gives to these students to rectify their character via well-designed character development courses. Indeed, many students express the fact that after taking Tayba classes they see growth and positive change in their character. Moreover, because of these positive changes and the knowledge they acquired they are able to influence and teach other inmates as well as their non-Muslim families.

4. Opportunity to have important questions answered:

According to the survey, students mentioned that Tayba allows them to get answers for their many Islamic and non-Islamic related questions.

They also consider Tayba as a companion that gives them guidance, love and care while imprisoned. Especially, in the absence of Muslim chaplains available in the TDCJ due to the fact that there are only two Muslim chaplains in the whole state of Texas.

How has Tayba helped you?



FACTS

- Tayba students in Texas: 17% of total Tayba beneficiaries
- Texas community financial contribution to Tayba: 5.1% of the donations received by Tayba
- Tayba's cost to serve students from Texas during the last 3 years: \$229,500
- Total donor contribution from Texas during the last 3 years: \$50,691



How Muslims in Texas can

**H E L P
T A Y B A**

1. Financial Help

We need your contributions to keep up with the growing number of student prisoners from the state of Texas. Currently, the Texas student population represents a little over 17% of Tayba's total beneficiaries while the number of donors from the Texas community only represents 5.7% of our donors contributing only 5.1% of our total donations raised in the last 3 years.

You can help change this by asking your community leaders and organizations to help subsidize this amount. The Texas Muslim community should make an effort to give a hand to the most needy Muslim members of its community, the incarcerated.

Grants, monthly donations and other financial support are welcome. Please note that donations to Tayba are zakat eligible.

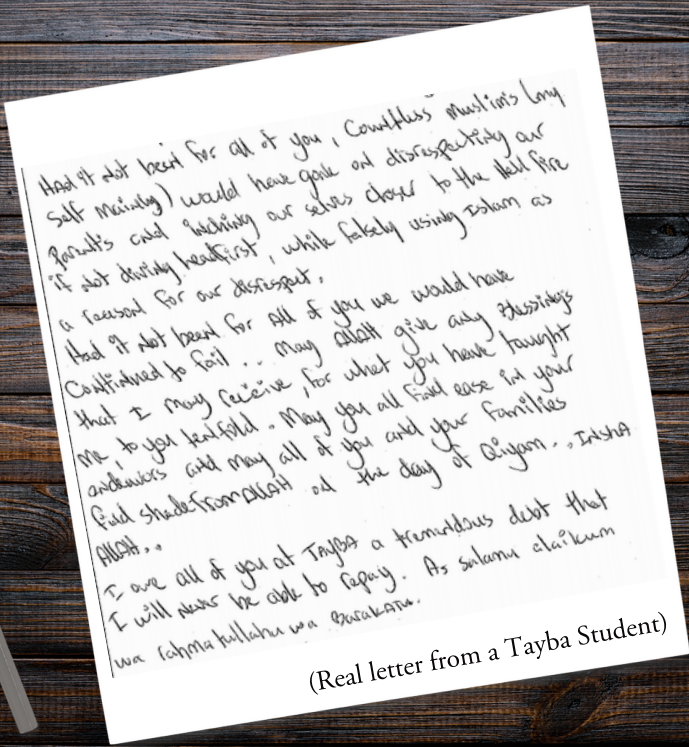
2. Establishing Funds for a Transitional Home

Tayba is always looking to expand its reach to be close to its program beneficiaries and donors. Regional representation in the state of Texas could help us achieve this goal. A regional representation project would consist of an office space and a part time staff member to carry out necessary outreach and tasks.

3. Regional Office

The second type of support needed from the Texas Muslim community is contributions to assist Tayba in acquiring a transitional home in Texas. Currently Tayba is in the process of opening a transitional home in Detroit. The process for such projects is lengthy and requires steady financial support to comply with different state and federal regulations in addition to the cost of managing the required programs in the transitional home. If you or your organization is interested in supporting such a project, please contact Tayba at reentry@taybafoundation.org.

Your zakat can change lives.



Had it not been for all of you, countless millions lay
Self-Meaning) would have gone on disrespecting our
Parents and backing our selves closer to the Hell fire
if not during heartiest, while falsely using Islam as
a reason for our disrespect.
Had it not been for all of you we would have
Continued to fail... May Allah give any blessings
that I may receive for what you have brought
me to you herefold. May you all find ease in your
endeavors and may all of you and your families
find shade from Allah on the day of Qiyaam. Insha
Allah..

I owe all of you at Tayba a tremendous debt that
I will never be able to repay. As salamu alaikum
wa rahmatu billah wa barakatuhu.

(Real letter from a Tayba Student)



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GIVE TODAY