

Milwaukee Women's Correctional Center: 2018 Inmate Activity Review

GUIDING PRINCIPLES - Create an environment based on safety, respect, and dignity. Develop procedures, practices, and programs that are relational to children, families, significant others, and the community. Address substance abuse, trauma, and mental health issues through comprehensive, integrated, and culturally relevant services and appropriate supervision. Provide women with an opportunity to improve their socioeconomic conditions. Establish a system of comprehensive and collaborative services to assist in successful re-entry and community supervision.

(2018 Annual report for Wisconsin Women's Correctional System, page 3)

MWCC. The Milwaukee Women's Correctional Center at 615 W. Keefe Ave is one of three state women's prisons in Wisconsin and the smallest. While there are approximately 1,600 female inmates in state prisons, only 110 are assigned to MWCC which is designated as a re-entry prison for women who have almost completed their sentence and are preparing to re-enter their communities. Over 80% have two years or less left to serve. Three out of five women have one year or less.

DEMOGRAPHICS. The average MWCC inmate is 37 years old, white, Protestant and has a high school diploma. Of the 110 women in the unit, 62 are serving their first prison term. Four out of ten are convicted of drug offenses and 44% have a mental health problem. Half of the women have children, almost two out of three has never married. A substantial number are from areas outside of Milwaukee.

RE-INTEGRATION. The MWCC inmate is assigned to this unit to begin building a new life that will provide a bridge to their families and communities. They leave prison with whatever they have earned (minus the money deducted for board and room at the prison), no job and sometimes nowhere to go. The last year at MWCC is their last year to construct a viable life. They will need their physical and mental health, a documented job history, skills that match the ever more technical world they live in and a support system to carry them through the first very difficult months.

This paper is designed to examine whether the current policies and practices at MWCC are facilitating this transition and providing women with the optimum conditions for a successful release and rebuilding process.

HISTORY. In 2014, the Dominican Center began a partnership with MWCC to provide services that the prison was unable to provide due to minimal staffing. A book group was established under the guidance of the Milwaukee Public Library. The book group in turn began producing a month newsletter with articles about health, events coming to the prison and schedules for religious services.

At that time, the superintendent was also working with MATC to establish a CNC training module from MWCC. In order to participate, women had to pass a math skills test and several women were struggling. A group of volunteers was drafted and they provided math tutoring three days a week for the period before the final math exam. Every one of the women involved passed the test and moved into CNC training.

PROGRAMS. Two new initiatives began after that – the Chop Shop and the Volunteer Program for Skill Development.

The Chop Shop is a project of Tikkun Ha-Ir, an alliance of Jewish synagogues committed to increasing low income families' access to healthy vegetables. Fresh produce is donated by Farmer Markets to the Tikkun Ha-Ir volunteers. A portion of that is brought to Solomon Community Temple, a church located three blocks from MWCC. Once a week, inmates volunteered to wash, cut and cook the vegetables. The food is distributed to homeless and crisis shelters so that kids can eat the healthy and tasty food. This led to beet brownies, zucchini

muffins and lots of spaghetti. The second year of the program, the eight inmates involved also took culinary arts classes at MATC and received a Certificate of Competency at the end of the season. This certificate was a ticket to ongoing training or a prep position in a restaurant. The program has continued without MATC due to funding cuts but the scope and quality of the food keeps growing. In 2017, Chop Shop produced 22,000 servings of food to families in crisis.

Simultaneously, Holly Ryan, the Executive Director of the Ozaukee County Jail Literacy Program, began to create programs at MWCC that helped women in multiple ways. Holly has a wide network of professional contacts who were willing to volunteer their time and talent to make sure the MWCC women had resources to leave prison and never come back.

Holly provided programs beginning in 2015. They were offered mainly on Tuesdays and Thursday afternoons. A sample of these programs is below. (*) This indicates a certificate was issued for attending all sessions. They are organized by categories- family, work, personal resilience.

FAMILY	WORK AND EDUCATION	PERSONAL GROWTH/RESILIENCY
Parenting support group run by former social worker	SEEK Career & Staffing	Fun Fitness Zumba from Danceworks
OB/GYN (Q&A) Had separate session for the 50+yr olds	FSET and ResCare (Foodstamp rules and training options)	Knitting Cross stitch design Indian beading
Yoga	History/Government	Various arts; butterfly, holiday cards, language of flowers, book marks. Flower making, jewelry making, purses with bling, valentine necklace, fall card making, spring card making, water color painting, Origami (many artists were involved with these activities)
Financial Literacy	Interview skills by a retired Human Resources Manager*	Mindfulness -Adult coloring and classical music
3 P's Parenting classes from Parenting Network*	Time Management*	Core El Centro <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healing moves • Finding Joy
Healthy Nutrition, Women's Nutrition & Eating Disorders, Nutritionist from Stepping Stone Nutrition*	Taking you from now to then: How to look & plan towards the future- Cardinal Stritch instructor	Danceworks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yoga • Salsa • Stretch
	Fashion Show with former model	Sewing
Bankruptcy attorney	Dealing with Difficult People with retired Human Resources Manager*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created a photo album • Painting and Designing a Gratitude Journal
	Birds of Prey from Audubon Society	
	Poetry classes, reading, understanding and writing	Circles: Vision/Imagination & Action (Corporate coach and facilitator)
	Creative Writing by two teachers	

	The importance of Butterflies in our environment	
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RETRENCHMENT. The community partnership with MWCC changed dramatically in 2018. The MWCC superintendent was replaced by a new person. The new superintendent placed a primary emphasis on security. All the volunteers who worked at MWCC had their backgrounds checked and most received the orientation from Ms. MacCrae. Only those who were one-time guests did not receive the orientation. The new superintendent required all volunteers to re-apply, get background checks and receive the orientation. As Ms. MacCrae has limited time, this proved very difficult. Many volunteers who came to MWCC for their programs were turned away when they arrived.

Holly Ryan and I met with the new superintendent to see if we could expedite the arrangements so the classes could get back on track. At that time, the new superintendent stated that these programs were unnecessary since the prison was providing all the programming needed for the inmates. Holly met with the superintendent and the warden to discuss the problem as more volunteers were not accepted. After several meetings, **Holly was asked not to return to MWCC.**

The Chop Shop was still scheduled to operate during the summer of 2018. I went to the prison and met with a group of 11 women who were interested in participating. We secured a retired chef who had taught at MATC for over 20 years to volunteer as a culinary trainer for the women. We prepared for a large group of inmates who would have instruction in the morning and cook in the afternoon. However, for almost the entire summer, the prison sent only one prisoner. This both hampered our capacity to produce meals for the shelter and wasted the volunteer time of a skilled culinary instructor. I contacted the superintendent several times but nothing changed. Finally, in the last weeks of the season, three inmates came over. The fate of the program is in jeopardy for 2019.

DATA RECISSION. Although the Superintendent at MWCC said there were multiple programs being offered at the site, it is not clear who is providing the services and how many women are participating. The 2018 report for MWCC is extremely vague. Programs have a boilerplate explanation with no statistics on how many inmates were involved and what was completed. The programming described at REEC and Taychedah is very specific with clear participation details. The programming is also very extensive and geared to inmate growth and development. This does not seem to be the case at MWCC where the inmates are trying to prepare to rebuild their lives.

BEST PRACTICES? Inmates have discussed three policies that seem very counterintuitive in a re-entry facility.
 1) Unlike REEC, inmates must do internal work for 90 days before they can look for a job in the community which reduces their work history time at a crucial juncture. Of the time spent at internal work, **inmates are assigned to work at MSDF doing men’s laundry** for less than \$1.00 per hour. According to the MSDF Annual Report for 2018:

Laundry co-ordinates provision of clothing for over 1,000 offenders per month. On average this includes two exchanges per week for underwear, t-shirts and socks; one exchange per week for pants, shirts, shorts and linens. Blankets are exchanged four times per year. Soiled laundry is sent to the warehouse from all floors for transport to Badger State Industries at OSCI. Limited laundry is washed on-site.

It is MWCC women inmates who are doing the on-site laundry. This does very little to build skills, accumulate money for the future or document a work history that can be used for resumes in the future.

On several occasions, women were not allowed to work at the Chop Shop because they were sent to MSDF.

In addition, MWCC inmates prepare food for MSDF in spite of the assertion by MSDF that the Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility's Food Service Department provides the meals to all inmates and security staff.

- 2) After a shooting in early August when a bullet hit the MWCC building, inmates were forbidden to spend time outside the building for 30 days, the hottest days of summer in a building where the inmates area has no air-conditioning. Inmates had nothing to do and could not even walk around their yard. Most of the garden vegetables were wasted because no one was allowed to pick them. Currently, inmates can only go outside before 10am. This created a very negative environment in a hot crowded building.
- 3) Finally, the superintendent's decision to close off volunteers from the prison in a time when prison budgets are very tight is destructive. Primarily it is inmates who suffer from the lack of activities and skill building that volunteers can provide. But the whole community suffers when inmates leave prison without the personal and professional skills to succeed in this difficult society. Mothers who can't cope, employees who are not able to meet their obligations, individuals struggling to resist long standing addictions. There are many people with the time, skill and concern who are willing to contribute to rebuilding broken lives. Preventing this kind of constructive partnership is a lose-lose for all of us.

Respectfully Submitted,

Karen Royster

October 12, 2018

FCAB/Sec. Cathy Jess Meeting