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Prison Program Provides Female Offenders with Key Job Skills

Nine offenders at Washington Corrections Center for Women (WCCW) are a step closer to successful re-entry now that they are armed with carpentry, iron working and other job skills.

The nine women graduated from the 16-week Trades Related Apprenticeship Coaching program at WCCW on Aug. 14.



CI Director Lyle Morse speaks to the graduates

Doug Cole, Superintendent at WCCW, spoke at the graduation and congratulated the women. “[The graduates] are representatives of success stories that come out of bad situations,” he said. “It’s an investment in the community’s future, and you can’t be successful [in society] if you’ve never learned how to.”

Lyle Morse, Director of Correctional Industries, also spoke at the graduation.

“These women are willing to invest in their own future,” he said. “But it’s also a worthwhile return for taxpayers in Washington,” he said. “For every one dollar we invest in the women of the program, there is a six dollar return in terms of them becoming successful, contributing members of society.”

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New Program assists Veterans under Supervision

The Department of Corrections' Tacoma Resource and Opportunity Center recently began offering a new program designed to assist military veterans who are under community supervision.

With more troops returning from battlefields in Afghanistan and Iraq – and some committing crimes after they return – there are more veterans under community supervision, many of whom suffer post-traumatic stress syndrome.

Point Man International, an organization dedicated to helping veterans, conducts weekly support groups, one-on-one counseling and assists them with claims and appeals to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Point Man International has begun weekly meetings at the Tacoma Community Justice to help veterans deal with issues relating to military service and recidivism reduction. The program is available to all veterans, including those from Afghanistan and Iraq.

Point Man representatives are also available to help DOC employees who have served in the military services with claims and other veteran-related issues. DOC employees are assisted separately from offenders.

The veterans group meets each Monday at the Tacoma CJC at 1:30 p.m. For information contact Kathi Bulman at (253) 671-4005, or e-mail kabulman@doc1.wa.gov.

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Food Manager at Clallam Bay Recruits Friends to Join Her at Prison

When Amber Miller wanted to get out of the retail field she followed a friend into a maximum-security prison.

"I had a friend who told me there was an opening in the law library and I wanted to get out of retail, so it worked out great," Miller said.

Miller, a former University of Washington student, came to Washington from Kodiak, Alaska, and has called Forks her home since 1989.



She came to Clallam Bay Corrections Center as an administrative assistant in March of 2006 and promoted to Food Manager 1 in June 2007. She now is Food Manager 4 and will move to corrections officer in September.

Miller says she loves the people she works with, and even though the transition from a job in the private sector to DOC was something to get used to, she wouldn't go back. "I love the staff," she said. "I couldn't do it without them."

When asked about the challenges of working with the budget of the kitchen she said, "It's a challenge to balance the needs of the community with the needs of offenders. And compared to retail, things in corrections move a bit slower, but it's nice because everything isn't about making money all the time."

Miller likes to shop, go hiking, and hang out with her friends and boyfriend when she isn't behind the walls of Clallam Bay. Her pool of friends outside the facility is getting smaller because she is recruiting most of them to work at Clallam Bay with her.

"I'm a pretty good salesman," she joked. "I've recruited quite a few of my close friends and former coworkers to come work here even at the kitchen."

She said one of her favorite things about working for DOC is getting to hear stories from coworkers. "You get a lot of different points of view working here," she said, "and I'm generally interested with the people I work with."

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Great Turnout at First-Ever Employment and Education Fair in Tacoma

The Tacoma Resource and Opportunity Center recently hosted its first Employment and Education fair designed specifically for Department of Corrections offenders.

Sixteen employers and educators came to the Tacoma Community Justice Center to recruit offenders. The fair served about 50 offenders, who were able to register for school and be interviewed by employers.

“We had some really positive feedback from the employers and educators,” Community Corrections Supervisor Gina Rosendale said. “They were pleasantly surprised at the level of professionalism they found. It turned out really well.”

The fair was planned by the staff of the Tacoma Resource and Opportunity Center, which includes Community Corrections Assistant Shez Vincent, Community Corrections Officer Felice Newcombe, Community Corrections Officer Kathi Bulman, Community Corrections Officer John Ringener, and Community Corrections Officer Nanette Borders, and Rosendale planned the event.

DOC partnered with Elena Bernal of WorkSource which helped contact employers.

“We definitely plan to host a similar event,” Rosendale said.

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Hearings Officers Rely on Administrative Assistant for Help on the Road

The Department of Corrections' 37 hearings officers spend much of their time on the road. Their lifeline is Rebecca Jensen, an Administrative Assistant for the Hearings Unit.

"Our Hearings Officers are kind of out there own their own a lot of times," said Jensen, who primarily works out of the Tacoma Criminal Justice Center. "I try to help them get what they need, whether it's supplies or help with their phones or digital recorders or anything else."

Jensen says she enjoys her job because she likes feeling needed.

"And I feel needed a lot," Jensen said with a laugh. "I like knowing that they can count on me to help them out. It's a good feeling. I absolutely love my job."

Jensen has been with the agency for 11 years, first as a Clerk Typist in Tacoma. After working at the West Seattle field office she started as a Correctional Records Specialist in Tacoma in 2002 and then became an Administrative Assistant for Lori Ramsdell-Gilkey, the Hearings Program Administrator, in 2005.

"I knew from working with Lori before in Tacoma that it was something I wanted to be a part of," Jensen said. "Lori is fantastic to work with."

Jensen, a native of Maine, moved to Pierce County with her family.

"I was only 13, so I didn't get to decide," she said. "I was dragged here kicking and screaming, but I grew to love it out here."

She still visits family in Maine, but she has no plans to move back.

"My rule is that I won't live anywhere where I have to have a contract with someone to shovel snow off my driveway," she said.

Jensen lives in Tacoma with her two sons, ages 8 and 15.

"They are my life outside of work," she said. "I feel very fortunate to have great kids and a job I enjoy."

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