

**HAMPDEN COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT**

**Nicholas Cocchi, Sheriff**

*"Empowering women toward successful citizenship"*

**A Gender-responsive Correctional Empowerment Strategy**



**MISSION STATEMENT**

The Western Massachusetts Regional Women's Correctional Center (WCC), a component of the Hampden County Sheriff's Department, is a regional, multilevel security facility for women. Under the auspices of the Sheriff's Department's mission, the center provides for public safety by applying best practices using criminogenic principles, gender-specific programs and operations in a humane, safe, and secure environment. As a full partner in the criminal justice system we seek to be a leader in the evolving model of women's corrections.

As a member of the Western Massachusetts community, the center strives to be a good neighbor, responding to the needs of the community by providing public information and community service. In collaboration with the community the center offers a multi-disciplinary approach that is trauma-informed, gender-responsive, family-focused, and culturally aware.

The mission of the WCC is to empower women to reclaim their liberty through informed and responsible choices. This mission is accomplished through a professional, well trained, and dedicated staff committed to the goals of the facility. The continuum of care, from entry to post-release, is designed to promote successful offender re-entry as socially and civically responsible citizens.



## **What is *women's* V.O.I.C.E.S. & who is it for?**

A phase-oriented empowerment model started in 1992, the *women's* V.O.I.C.E.S. program operates as an integral part of the Western Massachusetts Regional Women's Correctional Center (WCC), a regional facility for county detainees and inmates (up to 2.5 year sentences) and some state inmates from Western Massachusetts, primarily from urban centers. Typical length of stay is 4 months at the facility, usually much more brief for pre-trial detainees. VOICES is a cumulative series of classes and groups designed to expand inmates' self-awareness, good citizenship capacities and ability to make personal change.

The curriculum is comprehensive and multi-dimensional, with primary focus on the integration of five key domains:

*addiction, parenting, trauma / mental health, domestic violence, and economic marginalization.*

An incidence of at least 80% has been measured in each of these areas for incarcerated women. Programs encourage women to learn new information, to apply new problem-solving skills to their personal issues, and to undertake the journey toward healing and strength.

All inmates are eligible to participate in at least some elements of this broad curriculum. Generally speaking, all pre-trial and sentenced inmates access introductory programs and classes, starting within a week of arrival. All inmates begin to formulate a personal assessment of their own problem areas and strengths. As length of stay, classification factors, and level of functioning permit, they proceed through the groups and classes of the next phases. Inmates complete a personalized growth plan that results in both an Individual Service

Plan identifying goals during custody and a Re-entry Plan for successful community re-entry. Both plans assist participants in developing an analysis and course of action related to both the harm they have sustained and the harm they have caused. This approach strengthens her dignity as well as her sense of community.

## **Screening**

WCC conducts screening and initial assessment within the first 72 hours of custody. These include the LSI, CAGE, DVAK, mental health, family / child situation, and a full medical intake. Many years ago, Hampden County became the first jurisdiction in the nation to screen every newly arriving female inmate for domestic violence victimization. The system of response, intervention, safety planning, and care has evolved and continues to address these important needs.

## **Unit Classification**

Thorough review, analysis of key issues, and objective classification criteria determine each individual's placement within WCC and the HCSD system. Staff seek to assist the inmate towards the lowest level of security consistent with both her abilities and with public safety.

## **The Ongoing Phase: Re-entry Planning**

Beginning literally on the day of arrival, staff members work with every inmate to strengthen her plan for the day she leaves WCC. Everyone receives a Release Plan, which mirrors the Service Plan in addressing key issues. Individual work couples with group work to inform participants about options, services, and resources. Upon approval by Parole or reaching 60 days near Release, staff from After-Incarceration Support Systems make direct contact and provide four engagements before Release. This relational connection not only strengthens the plan but also provides an important relational connection that will continue upon release.

## Medium Security Classes and Programs

### Transitions a 3 week program

The incarceration experience can be an opportunity for transformation, when a supportive and empowering setting and one's own intentions aim for it. Discovery sets the tone and provides an overview of all programs, as well as an exploration of the range of life issues women confront. The "jump start" to all the other offerings, the program offers participants information, inspiration, challenge, and a beginning opportunity to personally identify and prioritize their own concerns and needs for change. Discovery offers what is for many a first chance to talk and listen with other women, in a respectful group setting, about creating safety, and making effective choices. All new arrivals participate, both pre-trial & sentenced. One week of programming.

#### **1<sup>st</sup> week sessions include:**

*Empowerment, Attitudes, Stages of Change, Re-Entry Planning, Substance Abuse, Work, Education, Vocational Services, Relationships, Parenting, Health, Mental Health, Portfolio, Family Services*

### Transitions 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> week classes

Taking the next step beyond "Discovery," Transitions participants further develop the skills and awareness necessary for empowerment. Inmates practice new skills in gender-specific classes and group settings as well as in the daily activities of the institution. Transitions is offered in Two-week cycles, immediately following Discovery. All participate, whether pre-trial or sentenced, within the first month of incarceration.

#### **2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> week sessions include:**

*Addiction, Breaking the barriers to Employment, Budgeting Domestic Violence, Choices and Decision-making, Victim Impact, Mental Health, Mentoring, Parenting, Health, Why School, Self-Assessment, Service and Re-entry Planning, Portfolio, Intro to Computer, Career Decision Making*

### Phase III / Service Plan Programs

**Individual Service Plans in Phase III** guide personal growth work, suited to priority risks and needs. More intensive group interactions give space for women to begin telling their stories in a supportive setting. Through the vehicle of group treatment related to gender-specific topics, participants learn to identify earlier hurts, and to recognize how these can resurface in a distorted form in unproductive behavior and thinking patterns. They also

have the opportunity to substantially widen their vocational skills base and educational foundation. Seeing other options opens up possibilities for living differently.

The structure of personal growth groups utilizes short-term treatment contracts and closed group membership, to permit development of trust and confidentiality, as well as the use of facilitated group process necessary for treatment. Facilitators assist women to manage unresolved feelings that spontaneously arise, so that self-expression can occur in a balanced way. Through this opportunity for self-expression and self-awareness, negative behaviors are diminished, and symptoms contained.

### Classes and Treatment Programs

#### **Dealing With Anger & Other Feelings**

*Education-Process. 8 sessions,*

Anger is an issue for nearly everyone. It's a complicated issue for women. Dealing With Anger gives tools & guidance on how women take control of their anger and their lives.

#### **Love & Violence**

*Education-Process 8 sessions*

This is a group exploration of relationships, intimacy, and abuse. Members work toward understanding and sometimes changing the patterns of relationships in life. A level II program continues this work and allows for in-depth therapeutic process.

#### **Turning Points Parenting Group**

*Education-Process 8 sessions*

The bond between mother and child is profound and life-impacting. This group explores that connection. It helps members enhance skills & knowledge to give to their children what many never themselves received.

#### **Understanding Trauma Group**

*Education-Process 6 sessions*

This group offers a beginning to understanding the ways past trauma may have an impact on current life experiences. Members learn new choices and skills for life after trauma.

#### **Pre-Employment Training Program**

*Education-Process 4 sessions*

*"Alive and Free~ Live up to your Future Economic Opportunity." Reflections on empowerment and employment, combined with real world skills women need.*

### **Breakthru: addiction education**

*Education-Process 12 sessions*

Taking the next step in understanding Substance Abuse, Addiction, Denial, & early recovery.

*"Knowledge is power."*

### **Victim Impact Group**

*Treatment / 8 sessions*

As we learn about what victimization means, we can better understand our own life histories, as well as the impact our actions have on others. In this process, women can heal, grow, and become more productive citizens.

### **Channeling Your Anger Group**

*Treatment / 6 sessions*

*Psycho-Educational Anger Group pre-req. Screened.*

For those with significant treatment experience and a history of aggression, this small, intensive anger therapy group helps chart a course towards a new, more peaceful, and more positive future.

### **Anger Process Group**

*Treatment / 6 sessions*

*Psycho-Educational Anger Group pre-req. Screened.*

For those with significant treatment experience and no history of aggression, this small, intensive anger therapy group helps participants find their voices and honor their feelings. The group experiences strengthens relational skills.

### **Journeys Toward Recovery**

*(28 Day Program) 20 Sessions*

"Journeys" builds on the work done in "Transitions" & "Breakthru," pre-requisites for Journeys. Classes & small groups create an intensive examination of addiction & recovery. By focusing on women's particular issues in addiction & recovery, the program assists women in making personal application of the material to their lives. *Participants must have a substance dependence diagnosis and complete Breakthru before Journeys.*

### **Relapse Prevention**

*8 sessions*

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### **Women's Peer Recovery**

*Ongoing*

A Peer Recovery support Group mentored by the Substance Abuse Educator and Counselors

### **Dialectical Behavior Therapy Skills Building**

*12 Sessions*

Teaches skills in: Mindfulness, Distress Tolerance, Mood Regulation, Interpersonal Effectiveness.

### **Relapse and Addiction Counseling**

*Ongoing*

Individualized sessions with Counselor

### **Mental Health Education and Peer Support**

*10 Sessions*

Provides: Educational, Process, and Skills Building

## **EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING**

All inmates and residents are enrolled in education classes, unless they have already completed High School or a GED. The facility offers small group and individual educational support in the following areas:

GED	Pre-GED
Literacy	Special Education
ESOL	Transition to College
Computer Literacy and Lab, Keyboarding	

In addition to Pre-Employment Training Program, a number of programs offer the preparation women need to make a fresh start in the world of work.

All inmates and residents work in the facility work program, often completing internal job applications (based on local businesses) for the first time ever. Workers are trained, evaluated monthly, and may receive earned good time credit and stipends.

### **Offerings include industry-standard certificate programs in:**

- ✓ MicroSoft Office Specialist,
- ✓ ServeSafe,
- ✓ Custodial Services
- ✓ Construction.

## **FACILITY WORK PROGRAMS**

Placements include: Library, Kitchen, Programs, Institutional Laundry, Intake, Visiting, Segregation, Maintenance, Admin/Lobby, and Community Restitution. Since a high percentage of inmates have never participated in the formal job market for longer than six months, each placement serves as a learning lab; each work supervisor, a role model and coach.

## HEALTH EDUCATION

From general women's health to overdose prevention, WCC provides information and guidance about common health problems, proactive self-care, and being an informed health care consumer. Frequent education occurs in the areas of diabetes, STD's, respiratory disease.

## FELLOWSHIP, SPIRITUAL AND RELIGIOUS

Regular AA and NA and religious services are offered weekly by volunteers and qualified clergy. In addition, WCC gratefully acknowledges the more than 200 volunteers active in this 352-bed facility, many of those bringing recovery, spiritual and religious messages. These programs offer fellowship, step work, scriptural study, and discussion.

## HOW DOES WCC ADDRESS PARENTING?

WCC prioritizes helping women with children to be the best mothers they can possibly be. Counseling, support, and programs are aimed at providing participants with skills and increased capacity for effective parenting.

Program offerings start with the core assumption that the majority of incarcerated women have been and will again be responsible and custodial figures in their children's lives. Therefore, parenting elements of the program equation are vital.

Women's roles as mothers give rise to profound personal values and motivation for change. Program efforts, to effectively engage women, must offer an examination of these responsibilities and teach skills and awareness to help women increase parenting capacity. Appropriate rehabilitation for female offenders will necessarily prioritize parenting competencies.

While the level of involvement in their children's lives after incarceration will vary from primary caretaker to supervised visitation or in some cases adoption; the reality and impact of motherhood is universally profound. For any given mother, she is still the mother of that child for life. *women's V.O.I.C.E.S.* promotes maximum feasible mother-child contact throughout the incarceration period and addresses parenting capacities in a number of ways.

- Special services to pregnant women
- Doula support before, during, after birth
- Primary contact for females involved with Department of Families & Children
- On-site Foster Care Reviews
- Referrals for residential programs, some including children on site
- ⇒ Mother-Child Visitation Program
- ⇒ Turning Points Parenting Group
- ⇒ Mothers Among Us support group
- ⇒ The Story Book Project
- ⇒ Integration of parenting into every Service Plan
- ⇒ Parenting themes addressed in every curriculum

## Minimum/ Work Release Classes and Programs

Each Resident's course is charted individually according to both her unique needs and the considerations of public safety. Upon completion of Orientation, residents attend classes, prepare for job search (if eligible), participate in community service and special projects, as well as attend classes and work in the community, based on classification status. The following offerings are available:

- **Women's Addiction Group** (in-house) or **Intensive Outpatient Program "Pathways"** (community) 6-12 weeks  
These substance abuse groups focus on addiction, relapse prevention and recovery
- **Positively Transforming Anger** 6 sessions  
This group addresses anger management, options for practice and preparing to re-enter the community
- **Victim Impact** 8 sessions  
As we learn about what victimization means, we can better understand our own life histories, as well as the impact our actions have on others. In this process, women can heal, grow, and become more productive citizens.
- **Mother Child and Parenting**  
Classes cover introduction and advanced material on parenting. Mother/child supervised visits offer practice of newly learned skills. Referrals to provider upon release for case management services
- **Stepping Out of the Shadow of Violence** 8 sessions  
How do we transition from a history of violence back into the community with a healthy, positive outlook?
- **Pre-Employment Training Program, Portfolio**  
Classes cover resumes, interviews, working with employers. The Portfolio classes will assist residents in obtaining and organizing re-entry documents
- **Custodial Maintenance and Horticultural Crews**  
Both crews work in the community to provide restitution and training opportunities
- **Community Accountability Board**  
The CAB works with offenders to address the impact of their crimes on their community
- **AA, NA and Church** attendance in the community  
Eligible residents will be able to attend meetings and church in the community with approved escorts
- **Employment, Voc Training** in community  
Eligible residents will be able to work, attend classes or training in the community
- **Health Education**  
Health Services provides ongoing classes on health topics, nutrition and services in the community
- **Education Classes** offered on-site or in the community
  - GED
  - Literacy
  - ESOL
  - Computer Literacy and Lab, Keyboarding
  - Pre-GED
  - Special Education
  - Transition to College

## WCC's PHILOSOPHY

This is a comprehensive program designed for incarcerated women. It takes place within a correctional environment and makes productive use of the structural milieu, tailored to women's unique needs. It is based on an understanding of the complex life circumstances which females bring to jail. Arrival at the Main Institution frequently represents a significant experience of "hitting bottom" and sets or re-sets the tone for an offender's continued engagement with the criminal justice system. The program invites women to take a fresh look at their individual lives and to utilize the program offerings and opportunities to begin or expand their journey of growth. This effort is then further developed as she moves through the system towards community reintegration through lower security levels, parole, probation, and / or involvement with community resources.

Women's pathway to crime has been established as being chiefly related to their histories of addiction and experiences of sexual and physical violation. The goal is to offer an environment to help inmates to achieve greater levels of inner freedom, self-esteem, self-control, social responsibility, safety, and empowerment. The program emphasizes the relational character of women's experience and a holistic approach to women's growth. Incarceration is often a first experience for women to learn to live supportively and to trust other women of diverse cultural backgrounds.

Recovery for women involves developing a greater personal awareness of strengths, limitations and decision-making capacities. This process needs to include opportunities for learning new information about topics of importance to them, such as domestic violence and mental health issues, as well as information about concrete social needs and resources, such as housing, child care, safety, etc.

*women's* V.O.I.C.E.S. provides participants with opportunities to apply information and topics to their personal lives. This treatment process delineates channels through which emotions can be expressed, confidentiality protected, experiences validated, and alternative options explored. These channels include an individual relationship with a counselor, meaningful connections with peers through groups, classes, and activities, and a specific individualized treatment plan.

To accomplish this, staff members provide a climate of respect for self, staff, and others. The unit presents a disciplined yet caring environment, with boundaries clearly understood and consistently maintained. Inmates experience a balance of encouragement, self-expression, and limit-setting. Staff members temper the common inmate experience of hopelessness, powerlessness, and neediness with a message of hope, confidence, and responsibility. Women discover the power of personal choice for effective action.

The tools for change are numerous and the milieu itself presents an essential learning element. On a daily level, inmates learn how to recognize and get their own needs met

through the use of proper interpersonal and structural boundaries. Through direct supervision and team management techniques, trained staff offer treatment incentives and monitor negative behavior. The staff team consists of correctional officers, correctional caseworkers (CCW's), counselors, the Family Services Specialist, the forensic mental health clinician, and a nurse, who all meet regularly. Interdisciplinary conferences provide an opportunity to oversee individualized treatment plans and monitor specific behavior.

Staff members realize that many elements of the jail setting (such as uniforms, particular officer presence, lack of privacy, and lack of control) can trigger feelings, thoughts, and behaviors related to earlier traumas for women. Officers are trained to recognize heightened tensions created by inmate behavior, to distinguish between causes, and to notify counselors as indicated. The unit counselors have professional training and expertise in the treatment and issues of women. Staff model effective communication through professional, confidential meetings and through effective dialogue between officers, CCW's, counselors and other staff to clarify boundaries.

The primary formal arena for learning is the structured classes and groups of the *women's* V.O.I.C.E.S. Program. This program provides multiple opportunities for learning and treatment about the many issues and responsibilities in women's lives. The program operates in four progressive phases to permit an overview of program offerings and an opportunity for inmates to individualize their own treatment and learning needs. These Phases are cumulative and grow in treatment intensity. All group learning activities combine specific learning objectives with gender-responsive program design components.

### **What is the theoretical basis for the intervention strategy?**

Stephanie Covington has defined addiction as a "chronic neglect of self in favor of something or someone else" (Covington, 1998). To change the direction of female offender behavior towards healthy, non-criminal and non-addictive choices, therefore, any approach must address this neglect of self. A treatment program must include elements of safety, connection, information, and empowerment in order to instill hope and confidence and to effect change. Like other comprehensive, integrated treatment programs for women outside corrections, the Hampden County model utilizes a combination of Empowerment and Relational Models (Brown 1997; Covington, 1998; Finkelstein, 1997; Garcia-Coll, et al, 1998; Harris, 1998).

#### Empowerment Model

An empowerment model (Payne, 1997) seeks to help clients gain the power of decision and action over their own lives. This model considers obstacles to exercising power which may include the need for information, for increased self-esteem and confidence, and for strategies for problem-solving and change. An empowerment model may be operationally

defined as a model which guides individuals away from a state of fear, confusion, limited self awareness, and hesitation to take to change. Participants move towards a state of increased capacity to identify and select from a greater range of personal needs, action strategies, and resources.

An empowerment model can help women grow by:

- Identifying women's personal strengths, resources, and problem areas;
- Teaching problem-solving skills, independent living skills and information about women's issues;
- Assisting women to gain mastery over the skills by personalizing them and practicing their application;
- Connecting women to new resources both in jail and in the community.

### Relational Approach

For empowerment for women to be effective, it must be grounded in women's sense of self, development, and psychology. For women, relationships are central to core identity, functioning and growth. The Relational –Cultural Model of women's development and growth has been most clearly articulated in the works of Jean Baker-Miller (*Towards a New psychology of Women, 1976*) and Carol Gilligan (*In a Different Voice, 1982*) and further developed at Wellesley College's Stone Center for Women. According to this theory, women's development does not seek autonomy and separation as successful adult goals. Rather women's primary motivation is to build a sense of connection with others.

Traditional "other connections" for women include parents, families, children, and partners. Also according to the relational model, true, healthy connections involve relationships characterized as mutual, authentic, and empathic. Through these relationships women are more energized, creative, validated, and empowered. Their self awareness expands (Covington, 1998; Gilligan, 1982; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991). Furthermore, women's psychological problems can be traced to disconnections or violations in relations (Miller, 1976). Gilligan expands this concept to moral reasoning and decision-making as gender-unique (Gilligan 1982). Her research showed that, for women, their style of moral reasoning takes into consideration the impact of actions and decisions on others.

With this theory in mind an integrated addictions program for women must take into consideration women's roles with respect to other (i.e. parent, partner, etc.). This theoretical perspective suggests that cognitive change is best received when it is in the context of a "caring" staff member and through dynamic exchange with peers. The relational model emphasizes empathy and caring, which may be perceived to have an emotional and interactional basis for change (Jordan, 1994; & Jordan et al, 1991)

### **In what ways is *women's V.O.I.C.E.S.* specifically designed to address the needs of women?**

The following program elements effectively address the needs of a female population. Documented gender differences

between male and female offenders necessitate a conscious and specific female-oriented intervention strategy.

### **Method of Intervention:**

- ⇒ Female-only groups and programs
- ⇒ Cognitive, affective, and behavioral change targets
- ⇒ Emphasis on modulation of affective expression
- ⇒ Closed cycles wherever possible, to create group safety
- ⇒ Validate self-expression (building self esteem through experience narratives)
- ⇒ Staff modeling through relational interaction

### **Phased Progression Through Programs**

- ⇒ Developmental group stages (information; personalization & application; beginning therapeutic healing work)
- ⇒ Guided process of peer exchange toward mutual support (relational)
- ⇒ Goal of increased range of choice and real options
- ⇒ Guidelines and program elements for internal and external safety
- ⇒ Confidentiality and other elements of group safety
- ⇒ Focus on boundaries: internal as well as interpersonal

### **Clinical and Strategic Concerns**

- ⇒ Trained staff focus on trauma, mental health, addictions and violent histories
- ⇒ Clinically appropriate match of client need to group activity
- ⇒ Skilled referral and supervision to contain impact on mental health
- ⇒ Build problem-solving skills and accountability
- ⇒ Cultivate expanded self awareness
- ⇒ Promote informed decision-making and increased choices
- ⇒ Match of personal needs to community resources
- ⇒ Provision of basic information in relevant areas (health, education, parenting, relationships, addiction, careers)

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