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# Large Jail Network Bulletin

Winter 1993

146035-  
146040

# LARGE JAIL NETWORK

# BULLETIN

NCJRS

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DEC 9 1993

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# Milwaukee County Inmate Programs Improve Job Skills and Benefit the Community

by *Richard Cox,*  
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Contrary to what its name suggests, the Milwaukee County House of Correction is actually a correctional system consisting of four facilities—the Training and Placement Center, the Adult Correctional Center, the Franklin M. Lotter Building, and the Community Correctional Center. The system's average daily population of approximately 1,400 inmates is comprised of pre-trial and post-conviction men and women.

The House of Correction offers a variety of programs and services ranging from the traditional, such as laundry and food services, to more unconventional programs, such as a fish hatchery and nursery. We also provide several educational and vocational programs through partnerships with a private, non-profit social

**Through the nursery operation, Milwaukee's parks will be supplied new trees and shrubs at reduced cost, and inmates will receive useful job training.**

service agency and the adult vocational education system. A description of a few of our innova-

tive efforts to address the needs of the staff, the inmate population, and the community follows.

### Range of Industry Programs in Operation

**Nursery facilities.** Milwaukee County has one of the finest park systems in the nation. There are more than twenty-three square miles of parks and parkways in the county—nearly 10 percent of the county's total of 241 square miles.

Recent budget restrictions were about to force significant reductions in the county's nursery operation, which supplied trees for the park system. To avert this loss, the House of Correction set aside fifty-eight acres of farmland to be used as a tree nursery. We then began to use inmate labor to plant trees.

The initial start-up cost to plant more than 15,000 trees through 1997 is approximately \$10.00 to \$15.00 per tree. This figure may seem high. After seven to eight years of growth, however, the trees will be ready for effective use in the parks and at that point will be worth more than ten times their initial cost.

More than 6,000 trees have been planted to date. They include thirty-six types of trees—both conifers such as spruce, pine, and fir and hardwoods including maple, oak, and walnut. This project ensures that Milwaukee County's park system will continue to provide the community with parks and recreation areas that improve the quality of life.

The nursery program is an example of the House of Corrections' commitment to solving several problems with a single solution. Milwaukee County's parks and lands will be supplied new plants and shrubs at a significantly reduced cost, and, at the same time, inmates at the House of Correction will receive useful job training.

**Fish hatchery.** Raising fish at the House of Correction was the idea of former County Executive William F. O'Donnell, who was interested in improving urban fishing in local waterways. The project was initiated in several phases.

- Phase I of the project was begun in 1984, using eighteen old bathtubs (purchased for \$5.00 each), inmate labor, and technical assistance from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) Center for Great Lakes Study. An old dairy creamery was converted into a small-scale hatchery at

which the House of Correction raised several hundred hybrid bluegills. These fish were used to stock the county park system. Phase I proved that our inmates could successfully raise fish.

- In Phase II we constructed an indoor fish hatchery. An old barn formed the core structure in which more than fifty tanks were installed. We completed the hatchery in 1989 with very limited funding and by using inmate labor. In the fall of 1989, 10,000 yellow perch were transferred to the hatchery from the UWM lab.
- Phase III began with the construction of outdoor rearing ponds. A UWM graduate student studied the area and found that the subsoil was ideal for earthen ponds. The engineering department of the 440th Air Reserves assisted in constructing the ponds. Although work still remains to complete the project, 10,000 rainbow trout have already been produced and a hatching pond is now being used to incubate 160,000 eggs. In addition to UMW and the 440th Air Reserves, groups deserving credit for this significant undertaking include the Milwaukee County Parks Department, the Wisconsin Highway Department, House of Correction staff, and Rawson Contractors.

Fish production has steadily increased since the project began. In 1990, we produced 5,000 yellow perch, 2,000 hybrid bluegills, and

2,000 walleyes and hybrid walleyes, for a total of 9,000 fish. In 1993 to date, we have produced 10,000 rainbow trout and 22,000 yellow perch—32,000 fish. In addition, as a result of the 1992 class, we have 30,000 yellow perch that will be used to stock our ponds in 1994.

The hatchery will continue to raise various breeds of fish for stocking the waterways of the Milwaukee County parks. The hatchery also will hold lake fish for the Milwaukee County Zoo this fall and winter while the zoo's aquarium is being renovated.

Inmate workers do most of the maintenance for the fish hatchery. In 1993, the program received the National Association of Counties' Achievement Award for Innovative Programs.

**Garden/farm program.** The House of Correction Garden Program provides fresh vegetables and fruit to House of Correction and county jail populations. The garden also raises pumpkins for Halloween activities in the county park system. When bumper crops are raised, the surplus produce is donated to local food pantries.

The garden program began in 1990, but early production was hampered by the lack of suitable equipment and by equipment breakdowns. With the 1991 arrival of a Case 265 row tractor and other used farm implements (plow, disc, planter, etc.), garden production improved.

The wholesale value of the crops raised that year was approximately \$28,000. With improved techniques, better equipment (including an 865 Case tractor), and better growing conditions, the 1992 garden produced more than \$50,000 worth of fresh produce.

In March 1991, two seasonal greenhouses were created by refurbishing old, unused chicken coops. They made possible the preparation of over 600 flats of cabbage, tomatoes, and other transplants. At a retail value of \$6.00 per flat, these transplants had a market value of \$3,600.

The garden is practically a year-round program, with planning, seed and pesticide purchases, orchard pruning, and equipment maintenance taking place during the off-season. When the soil becomes workable in early spring, the garden program shifts into high gear. The goal in spring is to prepare a suitable, weed-free seed bed in the twenty-five to thirty acres used for the garden. The land is carefully worked, and most crops are planted by May. More than twenty-five types of crops are raised, with some variation in types from year to year. Most harvesting takes place between July 1 and the first frost.

This fall the inmates have helped build a new, all-season greenhouse. Looking toward the future, we want to improve weed control to ensure increased quantity and quality.

Inmate workers provide the labor for all garden activities. Although it is long, hard work, the garden/farm is one of the most popular programs among inmates.

**Laundry operations.** A new institutional laundry was designed and built as part of the Eli Surges addition to the main Adult Correctional Center. Opened in the spring of 1990, it was designed using hospital laundry accreditation specifications to handle anticipated laundry and linen processing needs for county-operated hospitals. Meeting these more stringent requirements proved invaluable in later compliance with new standards for infection control in correctional facilities.

The laundry now serves two major accounts: the county hospital and the county jail. In addition to meeting the needs of these facilities and all House of Correction needs, the laundry has several minor customers, including the county parks concession operations. Approximately 2.6 million pounds of laundry and linen are processed each year.

A dedicated staff of laundry professionals supervises an inmate work crew of twenty-four residents on two shifts. A structured on-the-job training program helps inmates develop marketable skills in laundry operations. A federal grant awarded in 1993 enabled inmates to participate in expanded adult basic education and occupational skills classroom training.

The laundry operation has proven highly successful. A significant number of inmates are productively engaged and receiving a quality vocational training opportunity. Labor-intensive personal laundry, usually unpopular in commercial institutional establishments, is being handled at an unusually high service level. Costs for our own laundry are offset by the rates paid by outside customers.

**Print shop operations.** The House of Correction also operates a print/graphics shop. A head pressman/printer supervises a five-inmate work crew on two offset presses (one color) and other related printing equipment. All forms and other in-house printing jobs are handled at the shop.

In addition, the shop provides some printing services for other Milwaukee County departments as well as for charitable and non-profit organizations located near the main correctional facility. Collectively, these services provide modest revenue to offset the institution's costs for printed material.

The rehabilitation value of the printing operations is particularly significant because southeastern Wisconsin is one of the largest centers in the nation for the printing industry. Though post-placement tracking needs to be refined, our

records indicate that one-quarter of the inmates who completed the basic structured program are now employed in the industry, where they earn more than \$8.00 an hour.

**Post-placement records indicate that one-quarter of those who have completed the print shop training are now employed in the industry.**

### **Educational and Vocational Training Opportunities**

Several local education institutions and non-profit agencies provide education/vocational training for House of Correction inmates. Through a grant from State of Wisconsin Administered Funds, the Milwaukee Area Technical College established a Learning Center that provides services to House of Corrections inmates. Learning Center faculty provide a comprehensive assessment to determine inmates' base-level skills in math, language, and reading comprehension. Teachers then work with inmates to create an educational development plan to help them meet long-term educational and occupational goals. The Learning Center offers basic skills education and GED preparation as appropriate to inmates' skills.

Another provider, the Wisconsin Correctional Service, is a non-profit social service agency with fifteen years' experience providing education, vocational training, and job placement services at all House of Correction facilities. Services are

provided through two programs, the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) Employment Program and the Learn and Earn Program.

#### **JTPA employment program.**

Through funds from the Federal Job Training Partnership Act, Wisconsin Correctional Services provides services at the Training and Placement Center and the Community Correctional Center, primarily for inmates with work release or Huber privileges. Unemployed Huber/work release inmates with sentences greater than thirty days are screened for the JTPA program. Inmates wishing to enter the program are tested academically and given a career interest inventory and aptitude test. Persons scoring below the ninth grade level on the academic tests are encouraged to enter a basic skills program to work on eighteen competency areas that will improve their ability to function in the work world. Participants scoring at the ninth grade level or above who do not have a high school diploma or GED are encouraged to attend GED/HSED preparatory classes.

Inmates interested in vocational training may be enrolled in one of several vocational training programs. At present, training is available in custodial/building maintenance, food service, laundry, and, seasonally, arborist/landscaping and asphaltting. Training programs, which average about ten weeks in length, prepare participants for entry-level positions in the work force.

After academic deficiencies are addressed and/or vocational training is completed, participants are transferred to the Community Correctional Center for training in job seeking skills and job search activities. The two-week job-seeking course trains participants in completing employment applications, drafting resumes and cover letters, and interviewing on the telephone and in person. Participants are knowledgeable about the labor market and their potential in the labor force. When they can demonstrate competence in job-seeking skills, they are ready for job search activities.

Because structured job search activities require community access, assistance is offered only at the Community Correctional Center. Participants are allowed out into the community to complete employment applications and to report for verifiable job interviews. Once a participant secures employment, program Job Developers verify employment information and complete the paperwork to secure the participant's release from the institution. They also work closely with House of Correction personnel and employers to keep the participant employed.

Program staff have developed working relationships with area employers, who frequently call when their labor force is low. The program places, on an average, twelve program participants in employment per month. A total of 162 partici-

pants were placed in jobs between July 1, 1992 and June 30, 1993. The program's job verification activities for the House of Correction help Milwaukee County collect more than \$500,000 in inmate board payments annually.

**Learn & Earn demonstration project.** In October 1992, Wisconsin Correctional Service received a contract from the U.S. Department of Education to develop a three-year demonstration project, Learn & Earn. The project integrates basic skills and vocational instruction, House of Correction work details, and payment for attendance.

Curricula for the Learn & Earn program are based on existing House of Correction work assignments: laundry, food service, farm/arborist, asphalt, custodial/building maintenance, and printing. The Learn & Earn program operates at the Adult Correctional Center and the Training & Placement Center. To be eligible for participation, inmates must be sentenced to at least 120 days.

Project participants from the general population volunteer for a work assignment. Because this is an experimental project, participants are randomly selected for either the control group, which obtains just work experience, or the experimental group, which receives classroom and work experience.

Those in the experimental group make a ten- to twelve-week commitment to the program. Students attend

daily, hands-on classroom sessions lasting two and one-half hours, in which basic academic and pre-employment skills are integrated into the vocational curriculum and taught using the cooperative learning model. Outside speakers representing employers in the vocational areas are frequent guests. The classroom session is either preceded or followed by a full work shift in the vocational area. Near the end of the training course, participants write, "star in," and produce an instructional video. Videos are filmed and edited by ESSC-TV, a non-profit association governed by the Cable Consortium Board.

Expected program outcomes of Learn & Earn are:

- Improvement in basic academic skills, especially as they relate to the workplace;
- Increased ability to work as a cooperative team member and communicate effectively with peers and authority figures;
- Enhanced knowledge of a specific vocational area;
- Thorough knowledge of pre-employment issues and the job market;
- Enhanced ability to obtain and retain meaningful employment, thereby achieving economic independence;

- Enhanced ability to function effectively in everyday relationships and to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship; and
- Recognition of the value of life-long learning.

After completing the program, participants with community access privileges are assisted in job search activities. The court is also petitioned on behalf of straight-time participants in an attempt to obtain community access privileges so that they may also begin to look for jobs. Employment follow-up and monitoring occur six months and one year after completion of the program or job placement.

**B**ecause it is often difficult for inmates to return to school after years of frustration, failure, and perceived irrelevance, this program ties academic learning as closely as possible to a vocational area. Reading, writing, and math lessons are taken from real-life materials such as trade journals, magazines, and newspapers. In addition, relevance and continuity are established by involving outside employers and institutional work supervisors in the classroom setting.

Keeping inmates involved for a meaningful length of time is another major educational concern. Using a highly interactive, hands-on approach, the program endeavors to develop group cohesiveness and accomplishment and to encourage

confidence, responsibility, motivation, and enthusiasm.

To date, two cycles of food service training have been completed, as have one cycle of arborist/landscaping training and one of laundry training. Currently under way are classes in food services, an arborist class, and training in custodial/building maintenance and printing.

Although the program is too new to determine a success rate, to date, 40 percent of participants who have completed training are employed in related areas.

### Conclusion

The Milwaukee House of Correction attempts to engage its residents in useful and productive activity. Using a web of inter-connecting and overlapping programs and initiatives, the House of Correction makes positive use of inmates' time and prepares them for productive membership in society.

For further information, contact Richard Cox, Superintendent, Milwaukee County House of Correction, Milwaukee, Wisconsin; (414) 427-4700. ■