Around the Block

MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION NEWSLETTER

Commissioner Carol Higgins O’Brien

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Historic Week for Massachusetts Department of Correction – Successful Prison Rape Elimination (PREA) Audits

History was made in the Massachusetts Department of Correction (DOC) last week as Old Colony Correctional Center (OCCC) and the Massachusetts Treatment Center (MTC) both underwent and passed their respective Department of Justice (DOJ), Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) audits, marking the Commonwealth of Massachusetts’ first state correctional facilities to achieve such a milestone.

These audits have been over a decade in the making, since the PREA law was passed in 2003. The DOC held its first PREA conference in 2006 and started working towards integrating the new law into the agency soon after. However, the PREA standards were not passed until 2012. Following that critical achievement, the DOC pushed ahead with ensuring those standards were incorporated into the Agency’s policies, procedures and practices.

Ray Marchilli, the DOC’s PREA Coordinator took the lead in “cross-walking” the PREA standards with all of the DOC’s policies & procedures. He, along with many other staff members throughout the entire Agency, spent countless hours going through each and every DOC policy and procedure to ensure the critical elements of each PREA standard were accurately and appropriately reflected and applied.

According to Jennifer Gaffney, the Director of the DOC’s Policy Development and Compliance Unit (PDCU), “There is not one area within our Agency that the new PREA law and standards did not have an impact on: from maintenance to security, from our Commissioner to our facility volunteers, and everyone in between, the PREA law impacted this agency, and Ray Marchilli played a large role in getting our Agency ready for the audits.”

Although OCCC and MTC were the first DOC facilities to be audited, they will not be the last. According to Michael Donaher, Acting Deputy Director for PREA, “There are eight more audits scheduled between now and the middle of August 2015, and five more facilities will undergo their audits in 2016.” “I’m confident that the rest of the facilities will be equally as successful as OCCC and MTC proclaimed Donaher.” “We are looking forward to showcasing the good work done by our dedicated staff in each one of our Agency’s correctional facilities.”

The common theme expressed by many of the DOC staff was that preparing for an audit of this magnitude and significance was not about one person or even one facility. It was about “TEAMWORK.”

During the audit close outs, Director Gaffney expressed her sincere appreciation to all those involved in the entire process. “I’m very proud of Team DOC.” She gave particular thanks to and recognition to Sergeant Krystal DeAngelo, Policy Coordinator at OCCC for creating the “model” for the PREA standards folders. “Her untiring work ethic and meticulous attention to detail played an invaluable role in not only preparing her facility for its audit, but for also providing a roadmap for all the other DOC facilities to prepare for their respective DOJ PREA audit.”

Director Gaffney also recognized Sergeant Shawn Zoldak, the Policy Coordinator for the DOC’s Northeastern Correctional Institution. “Working hand-in-hand with Sergeant DeAngelo, Shawn converted the hard copy PREA folders into an “electronic” version. He spent countless hours not only creating the actual process, but also developed a users’ guide for other Policy Coordinators, throughout the DOC, to use as they prepared their respective facility for its audit.”

Both facilities underwent an intensive, comprehensive and complete two and a half day audit process by Amy Fairbanks, a Certified DOJ PREA Auditor from Lansing, Michigan. Ms. Fairbanks noted that each facility’s audit actually began weeks before she conducted her on-site audit visit. She explained, to a standing room only crowd at the close-outs, she reviewed “literally hundreds of pages of documents” provided to her by both facilities, which were required to support facility compliance with the PREA standards.

There are 43 main PREA standards and many of them have numerous subsections totaling well over 200 areas in which a facility must show compliance. Unlike the American Correctional Association’s audit process, a facility must achieve a 100% pass rating with each standard in order to be accredited.

“The audits validate, not only what we do as an Agency, but what our facility staff, at all levels, do on a daily basis to keep our staff, the inmates and the public safe and secure,” according to Acting Deputy Donaher. “PREA is good corrections,” he added.

The primary focus during Ms. Fairbanks on-site audit process of each facility was to conduct a facility tour, conduct interviews of staff and inmates and to review additional documentation (training records, personnel records, investigation files and any other documentation needed to support compliance to the PREA standards). Ms. Fairbanks noted the cleanliness of both facilities, interviewed approximately 100 staff (including the Commissioner, Human Resource Staff, facility and support staff) and inmates. She commented, “Staff understand and embrace the PREA process - they get it.”

Throughout the entire audit process, Ms. Fairbanks frequently commented on the “professionalism and knowledge” of all the staff in which she interacted with during her week long audit of both facilities.

The second round of DOC facility audits will take place in May beginning with MCI-Cedar Junction, followed by Pondville Correctional Center and finishing up with MCI Norfolk. All of the staff at each of these facilities have contributed countless hours of hard work to prepare for their respective audit. All are expected to do equally as well as OCCC and MTC.
A Pathway to Change
By Kyle Pelletier and Kelly Paquin

Over the past two years MCI Framingham and Program & Reentry Services have collaborated to develop a holistic treatment approach for the female offender like no other in the country. Using an advanced version of the COMPAS-risk/need assessment tool which evaluates the interaction of gender-specific need scales, MCI-Framingham is able to assess the individual’s criminogenic needs and identify the specific pathway she traveled leading to prison. Once the pathway is identified, we are then able to provide the appropriate program prescription which will give the individual a clear “Pathway to Change”.

This project began with the simple question, “Can we make the assessment tool more female specific?” Throughout the course of answering this question, the work group quickly realized there was an opportunity to utilize a female specific assessment, and also the ability to truly redesign how treatment is provided at MCI Framingham. Through research the work group discovered a way to identify an offender’s individual pathway into crime, and once thoroughly addressed through various groups and treatment options, the approach would impact one’s recidivism and success upon release.

Research shows that there are undeniable differences between the male and female offender, including the ways in which they become involved in crime. Many systems and research have found that female offenders have a history of trauma and abuse, and higher rates of mental illness than their male counter parts. However, to think that there is only one pathway a woman takes into criminal behavior is misleading. More in-depth research identifies at least four distinct pathways a woman can take to prison. Without considering the individual’s pathway a general program approach could either over treat or under treat the offender’s criminogenic needs.

The “Pathway to Change” assessment assigns each offender sentenced over 90 days to one of four pathways. Each pathway has a different core treatment prescription dictated by the common needs and strengths of that pathway. The offenders may have similar needs, but difference in this treatment approach is the manner of facilitation and focus on core goals set by their common pathway. For example, a parenting group for someone whose main treatment goal is substance abuse should be facilitated differently than a parenting group for someone whose main treatment goal is addressing past abuse and developing healthy relationships. While each of these women may need to develop parenting skills, their specific pathway influences the treatment providers’ approach and will always reference the pathway that led the offenders to prison, while reinforcing the skills which can lead them out.

A Pathway programming prescription encompasses all treatment needs identified for an individual offender which contribute to their criminal behavior including: education, vocation, core treatment, reentry planning, sex offender treatment programming, and even work. While this is not unlike the standard personalized program plan, the key difference is in identifying the interaction of the offender’s criminogenic needs when determining the best course of treatment, rather than programming to the individual need areas themselves. Pathway programming is unique because the offender will be simultaneously participating in groups which address different need areas, unlike male institution programs which address one criminogenic need at a time. Offenders will be given the opportunity to participate in their core treatment for the entirety of their sentence. Keeping offenders engaged in treatment throughout the duration of their incarceration requires the coordination of the program providers to ensure they have the opportunity to engage in their programming as prescribed. This is done through a weekly pre-programming meeting for each pathway. Additionally, MCI Framingham assigns housing based on the individual’s pathway, allowing groups to be held on the unit and staff to be aware of the driving factors behind criminal behavior, and to reinforce change outside of the program groups.

MCI Framingham is on the forefront of treatment for the female offender. This unique approach to treatment is based on decades of research and theories of why women commit crimes. Using this approach, grounded soundly in theory and research, should yield significant results in the next few years. The goal, as with all treatment, will be to reduce recidivism, a measure that will be analyzed, to determine the true impact of this programming approach on the population.

In the next installment in this series we will explore the makeup of core treatment to better understand what the four pathways are and their treatment prescription.

Civilization Group Helps the Civilly Committed
By James Rioux

Since mid-March, inmates and civilly committed patients at Bridgewater State Hospital have been meeting weekly to attend a peer facilitated and staff supervised Self Improvement Group designed to equip them with the skills needed to better cope with their incarceration, hospitalization, and the world around them. First initiated by an inmate worker and civilly committed patient, the suitably titled Civilization Group aims to develop pro-social attitudes in group members, foster pro-social thinking, and promote choices that benefit the individual and community at large. Group members will primarily focus on strengthening three core skill sets: interpersonal communication, critical thinking, and goal setting.

These goals are achieved through the discussion and application of recovery based literature derived from the Spectrum Therapeutic Community Handbook, Texas Christian University, and AA/NA World Services.

Despite their obvious differences and unique challenges, inmate and patient participants contribute to creating a positive group dynamic with clearly defined group rules, roles, and expectations. For example, inmate and patient co-facilitators inform group members upon enrollment to use only ‘I’ statements, to show respect for the person talking, and to remain focused on group objectives. These co-facilitators are also responsible for introducing discussion topics, reinforcing group expectations, and for ensuring that all group members have an equal opportunity to share and participate.

One of the inmate co-facilitators, who is a graduate of the department’s Correctional Recovery Academy (CRA), states that these rules are necessary to maintain the integrity of the group. He also hopes to share the skills he acquired in the CRA program with his peers. He adds that the peer model has given participants who have historically had difficulty sharing their feelings and ideas both a sense of belonging and the ability to relate to their struggles. In just three short weeks, the fifteen inmates and patients enrolled in the program have already reported experiencing a stronger sense of community and began the process of addressing the issues that have affected their recovery and personal growth.
The Medication Assisted Treatment Reentry Initiative (MATRI) was implemented as former Governor Patrick’s initiative to address the opioid epidemic across the Commonwealth. Governor Baker has indicated that addressing the opioid epidemic will continue to remain a priority during his time in office.

The purpose of the Medication Assisted Treatment Re-Entry Initiative is to provide pre-release treatment and post-release referral for opioid-addicted and alcohol-addicted offenders at participating sites in the Department of Correction (DOC). This program involves prison-based residential substance abuse treatment and collaboration with community-based clinics to provide aftercare treatment. The goal is to facilitate transition into an outpatient substance abuse treatment program which employs a multi-faceted approach to treatment including the use of the medication Vivitrol/Naltrexone, counseling, and aftercare referral to community-based providers. The active ingredient in Vivitrol is an opioid antagonist or blocker. Unlike Suboxone and Methadone, Vivitrol is not addictive, non-narcotic and only requires one monthly administration. Vivitrol blocks the effects of opioids in the brain’s reward system for approximately 28 days after administration. Upon discontinuation, Vivitrol is not associated with withdrawal.

Offenders participating in the program must be engaged in substance abuse treatment for the duration of their incarceration. This program is available to offenders who have a documented opioid or alcohol addiction and have completed or are enrolled in any of the Department’s Subsate Abuse Treatment programs.

Providing medication-assisted treatment with Vivitrol presents an opportunity for the Department to enhance its reentry initiatives. The Department is optimistic that this initiative will prove to be an effective way to bridge the gap between prison and community-based substance abuse treatment programs. It is expected that this initiative and perhaps others will result in significant and substantial cost avoidance for communities while having a positive impact on public safety.

Mr. Lowney recounted the intense media attention of the crime and prosecution and explained how his family had to grieve while encountering reporters on their lawn, and a well-publicized defense in which the offender argued that he was not criminally responsible for his crimes. Mr. Lowney also expressed to the audience the importance of the compasition that many members of the criminal justice system showed his family in the months and years after Shannon’s murder. He recounted how, on New Year’s Eve 1994 his family arrived at the Office of the Medical Examiner to identify Shannon’s body. A young resident came to greet them, took hold of Mr. and Mrs. Lowney’s hands and said, “You have a beautiful daughter.” Mr. Lowney explained that her use of the present tense and her approach remains with him twenty years later.

Mr. Lowney explained that for victims of crime there is no “closure.” He explained that his mother has said, “You learn to adjust” to the new life that you have. Mr. Lowney’s presentation was a very touching reminder of the experiences endured by crime victims.

In addition to the DOC Commemoration, DOC and VSU staff also attended the April 8, 2015, State House Ceremony hosted by Attorney General Maura Healy during which we honored many members of the victim advocacy community. It was especially heartening to see Annette Presti receive the Public Policy Advocacy Award. In January, 2004, Ms. Presti’s daughter Jo-anne and granddaughter Alyssa Ann were murdered by a Level Three Sex Offender. Despite her ongoing grief Ms. Presti has worked to advocate for increased protection from and information for the public regarding sex offenders.

On April 24, ADC Mici and members of the VSU staff attended the Massachusetts Office of Victim Assistance Annual Conference at the Seaport World Trade Center in Boston. This was an especially special occasion because CPO C Brian McNally received a Length of Service Recognition for his ten years of service to victims of crime. In January 2015 CPO C McNally celebrated his tenth anniversary at VSU. CPO C McNally has been constant in the VSU, always providing information and support to crime victims and survivors with caring, calm, and compassion. It was wonderful to see him receive such a well-deserved honor.

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The Farm
By Shawn Zoldak

As the long awaited nice weather approaches, we start to see the mountains of snow melt, the green start to emerge from our lawns, the sound of birds chirping, and the warmth of the sun upon our faces, the “Farm” is ramping up to get ready for the growing season. Gardens and fields need to be planned, seeds need to be ordered, and vegetable plants need to be started.

Under the direction of Northeastern Correctional Center’s Farm Manager David Grinkis, who has been at it for over 40 years, along with Lt. John Chalmers and Sgt. Brian Sumner, a successful crop requires a multitude of planning and preparation work. A staggering 1.76 million corn seeds will be planted this year amongst the farm’s fifty-five acres of corn fields and sixty-five acres of alfalfa to produce the feed needed for the livestock throughout the year.

Just drop a seed and watch it grow right? Well there’s a little more than that to it. Soil science, seed science, fertilizer science, you name it there is a method on how to do everything, with scientific research to back it up. Along with the corn and hay fields, also comes the greenhouse and vegetable gardening program. Tony, a volunteer and master gardener insturacts a group of inmates under the direction of Correction Officer Mike Cronin about how to grow a successful vegetable garden. Every year the program produces and abundance of fresh vegetables which are then used in the inmate’s diet there is a method on how to do everything, with scientific research to back it up. Along with the corn and hay fields, also comes the greenhouse and vegetable gardening program. Tony, a volunteer and master gardener instructs a group of inmates under the direction of Correction Officer Mike Cronin about how to grow a successful vegetable garden. Every year the program produces and abundance of fresh vegetables which are then used in the inmate’s diet.

Program Engagement Strategy
By Matthew Moniz

The MA DOC’s vision is “to effect positive behavioral change in order to eliminate violence, victimization, and recidivism.” Motivating and recommending offenders to participate and complete evidence based programs is one of the many strategies the MA DOC utilizes to effect positive behavioral change. However, multiple analyses of program outcome data extracted from offenders’ case plans in IMS had indicated a culture of refusing enrollment into programs.

Thus, the MA DOC developed a strategy designed to change the culture of program accountability and compliance. This strategy has become known as the Program Engagement Strategy (PES) and had been implemented as a pilot study at MCI-Norfolk on January 1, 2014, and has since been made a standing practice. The pilot process commenced at NCCI-Gardner on January 1, 2015. PES changes the program culture by balancing incentives and consequences as a means of decreasing program refusals and terminations. The consequences entail loss of jobs, change in housing, as well as an adjustment to one’s seniority date, while offenders that participate in programming will retain their housing and jobs, as well as maintaining their seniority date.

Additionally, PES is designed to empower staff to use integrated case management skills to promote a culture which compels program compliance and ensures that the right inmate is enrolled in the right program at the right time. PES fosters an environment which focuses on eliminating violence, victimization, and recidivism by ensuring those who are in need of programming participate. In order to determine the effects of PES on programming, there will be an evidence-based evaluation focused on the effects PES has had on the programming culture within the Department.

Mass Hospital Prom Dress Collection
By Tina Anthony

The Mass Hospital School is not your typical School or Hospital. “The Mission of The Massachusetts Hospital School (MHS) is to provide medical, habilitative, rehabilitative, recreational, educational and vocational services to children and young adults with multiple disabilities, assisting them to achieve their maximum level of independence in all aspects of life.”

If you have been lucky enough to participate in wheel chair basketball or wheel chair football you know what an amazing group of students MHS has. I have been lucky enough to participate in both the years and to also be part of the Christmas party where OCCC staff purchase gifts for the students from Santa. I have also volunteered on my own time and with my past Girl Scout troops. It is both humbling and rewarding.

Prom is an important right of passage for all girls in high school. Dress shopping, hair and make up, dates and having fun with friends. It is no different for the Girls of the Massachusetts Hospital School in Canton, MA. The young ladies of the MHS attend the Prom from the ages of 16 to 22, when they graduate.

Although these girls have varying degrees of disabilities, they all want to feel and look beautiful on their Prom. Every year for the past 5 years I have collected Prom dresses for the MHS Prom dress drive. Most years I am able to bring 5-6 dresses and drop them off at the school. However, this year with the help of social media and the Department of Correction, I was able to collect and deliver 59 Prom dresses.

The young ladies will “shop” for their dress in March. There are volunteers who will alter the dresses to accommodate any medical equipment they have, along with making it comfortable to wear while in their wheel chairs.

On the day of the Prom in May there are many volunteers who do hair, nails and make up for these beautiful girls. Students are transported to the prom via many handicap busses and vans. This year I am happy to say that I will be able to see these beautiful girls and handsome young men of the MHS, as I will be assisting Chris Fallon who has donated his time over the last few years to DJ the Prom. I can not wait to see the students and (some of my favorites) dressed up and having fun just like any high school student should.

Be on the lookout the Intranet in Jan/Feb of 2016 as I will again collect dresses to donate to the MHS School. It should also be mentioned that all unused Prom dresses are donated to Antons Cleaners for the “Bell of the Ball” Program. This program helps high school students who can not afford a dress for Prom.

It is the little things in life that you can give to someone. I love to help and volunteer where and whenever I can but when visiting and volunteering at the MHS, the gifts I leave with every time can not be put into words.