

## Men of Strength, Men of Honor:

### Providing Positive Role-Models in Our Penal Institutions

#### **Introduction**

Within the United States there exists a shadow population which goes unnoticed by most citizens. It consists of those who have been accused of and/or convicted of a criminal offense.

The Bureau of Justice statistics shows that over 7.2 million adults are currently under correctional supervision. Of these individuals over 1.6 million were held in prisons while 760,000 await sentencing in local jails ("Bureau of justice," 2011).

The facilities that hold these individuals vary based on jurisdiction county, state or federal, size and security level. They may consist of dormitories, pods or lines of cells with bars. Recreation and educational facilities may be limited to a cement box on the institutions grounds or consist of an expansive gym, library and classrooms. What doesn't vary is that the residents of these facilities are supervised and their time is regulated by others.

This proposal was designed for Sample State Correctional Facility, a male facility that uses a pod design and houses around 1,100 inmates. Constructed in the early 1990's it houses medium and maximum security inmates in different wings. Its library is housed in a medium sized space and is split equally between legal materials and recreational collections. There are also a few tables and chairs. This space can comfortably accommodate twenty-five patrons.

#### **Project Necessity**

The 1980's saw a huge spike in the number of individuals incarcerated. This trend has continued to the present day where 1 in 32 Americans are under the control of the criminal justice system (Ross & Richards, 2002). The reasons for this increase include truth in sentencing laws, a shift to determinate sentencing and the war on drugs. Regardless as to which of these

factors has played the largest role in our overflowing prisons the fact remains that they exist and they are costing us money. To house one inmate at a facility similar to Sample State Correctional Facility it costs about \$22,800. Overall corrections programs cost taxpayer's \$15 billion yearly (Ross & Richards, 2002).

The most shocking part of this system is that most of those incarcerated are repeat offenders. Worse yet, due to decreasing budgets, increasing populations and lack of societal support many correctional facilities are withdrawing support from rehabilitative programs. The cost of this attitude is high, leaving inmates caught in a revolving door of justice, being pushed from prison to the same neighborhoods that breed a necessity for criminal behavior. This leads to more individuals being incarcerated and more funds diverted to housing and supervision rather than to rehabilitation.

A societal need for change is apparent, but far beyond the scope of this project. This facilitator would like to propose a simple program that would reach offenders that are most likely to re-offend by offering them a chance to read material they will enjoy and will teach them about social values held by society. The goal of this program is to plant a desire for the patrons to see themselves as better men and introduce them to the tools the library already has that can assist them in becoming productive member of society.

### **Service Population**

This program is aimed at young men between the ages of 18 and 30 who are housed at Sample State Correctional Facility. This age group was chosen due to their high likelihood to reoffend if resources are not provided. All participants are male due to the nature of the facility, and the facilitators experience with masculine values.

## **Program Overview**

The program is an adaptation of the library staple, a book club. It differs from the standard group of readers in that its target audience is non-readers and the moral focus of the material. “Men of Strength, Men of Honor” will use westerns to capture the interest of the target population, reaching out to their views of masculine strength and dominance. Once their interest is established the facilitator and inmate leader will guide discussion toward the values of the main characters and how the characters decisions impacted those around them. This process should provide the participants with stronger decision making skills, attachment to societal values and a desire to pursue education that will allow them to achieve those values. After the discussion participants will be asked to write out their reflections of the session in journals which will be housed in the library office.

The group will ideally consist of seven inmates from the target population. This allows for a diverse array of perspectives while keeping the group small enough to facilitate discussion. The eighth member should be an older inmate leader, someone who is respected in the general population but is free from ties to any one organization. They should be supportive of education and the library program. This member serves as an advocate for the program and provides a level head that is respected by the patrons. The final member of this discussion circle is the librarian. Their role is to provide access, ask questions and work with the inmate facilitator to ensure the discussions are active, informative and motivational.

## Services Requested

Material	Cost	Supplier
Librarian time	1-2 hours a week	Can be accomplished by adjusting responsibilities
Inmate Facilitator	5 hours a week	Volunteer
Notebook Paper	\$5.00 (300 sheets)	Facility Budget
Pencils	\$7.00 (72 pencils)	Facility Budget
Printing Pre and Post Surveys	\$.10 * 8 participants * 2 = \$1.6	Facility Budget
“Fallon” by Louis L’amor	\$6.00 Retail	Free from Heartland Book Bank, or other Western available

As you can see the beauty of this program is that it uses few facility resources. The total cost to the institution is under \$14.00. Should the facility not be able to assist in that regard I would also be interested in contacting inmate programming and seeing if funds could be appropriated from the canteen profits.

## Evaluation of Services

This program will be evaluated using both surveys and interviews. A pre-program survey will be administered during the first meeting. This survey will gauge participant’s definition of masculinity, personal values and how they feel about their decision making abilities. The same survey will be completed after the discussion is complete to measure change. Additionally participants will be asked on the post survey what they liked about the discussion, what they disliked, would they participate again and if they had any suggestions for other materials to cover.

The interview portion will consist of the librarian and inmate facilitator meeting with the participants individually to discuss their reaction to the program. This will also provide a time for the patron to ask questions they might not have felt comfortable mentioning to the group.

The program’s success will depend on the value the patrons assign to the program in addition to demonstration of positive values and views of masculinity on the post-survey.

## **Summary**

An increase in incarceration rates and declining budgets has set the revolving door of criminal justice on overdrive costing society billions. Social changes are costly and time consuming, but that doesn't mean that change is impossible. The prison library provides ideal place to teach socially accepted values using materials of interest to the patrons. Programs like "Men of Strength, Men of Honor" that bring inmates together to practice problem solving and discuss the consequences of actions provide a low-cost option for facilities to start positive changes and reduce long-term costs by giving individual men the resources they need to turn their lives around.

## References

Ross, J. I., & Richards, S. C. (2002). *Behind bars: Surviving prison*. Indianapolis, IN: Alpha Books.

*Bureau of Justice statistics: Total correctional population*. (2011, December 08). Retrieved from <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=11>

*EDCF warden's page*. (2011). Retrieved from <http://www.doc.ks.gov/facilities/edcf/edcf-rdu>