
Prison Inmates Reduce Recidivism Using Peer Mentoring Program, Reports From Here To The Streets

Arizona Department of Correction Inmates Reduce Recidivism Using Peer Mentoring Programs

For Immediate Release

YUMA, Ariz./EWorldWire/Aug. 27, 2010 --- With recidivism rates approaching 75 percent nationwide, a small group of inmate peer mentors in Yuma, Ariz., has an inmate facilitated program that has reduced recidivism rates to less than 20 percent, reports FromHereToTheStreets.com (<http://www.fromheretothestreets.com>).

Evidence compiled by program creator and lead mentor Clifford Lacy shows that his "Prison Experience Workshop Program" (P.E.W.P.) - an "inmate-on-inmate" peer-facilitated program, is actually reducing recidivism.

Recidivism is the bane of all corrections professionals. When inmates return to prison for new offenses, they leave behind new victims and return to the same programs that failed to reach them the first time they served their sentences. Participants in P.E.W.P. all agree that the program is giving them new meaning in life and a better understanding of how to return to their communities as assets rather than liabilities.

Since its inception in 2005, the Prison Experience Workshop Program has graduated hundreds of participants. An evidence-based survey conducted on 215 graduates who took the classes between 2006 and 2009 has shown that 32 graduates were released from custody, and only 6 of them have re-offended and returned to prison. This gives the program graduates an average recidivism rate of approximately 19 percent. Lacy affirms the incredible 81 percent success rate is related to the focus on life skills which covers effective communication, integrity, work ethics, and community betterment.

Graduates of the program are also offered the opportunity to become peer mentors and facilitate future classes. This pay-it-forward approach allows inmates serving lengthy sentences an opportunity to help communities by sending inmates home with the tools they need to succeed rather than the same habits that caused them to victimize those communities in the first place.

Educating inmates about life skills is the key to changing thinking and decision making among inmates, according to Lacy. "We teach them how to reason in P.E.W.P., and learning effective communication is the key."

Lacy is an inmate who is all too familiar with the problems inmates face in changing their lives. Lacy has been incarcerated since 1976 and has watched the behavior of recidivism first-hand for over three decades. He first proposed and wrote the P.E.W.P. program for at-risk youth in 1997. In 2006, Arizona Department of Corrections Deputy Warden Rider in Yuma - Cheyenne Unit gave the P.E.W.P. its chance when she allowed Lacy to implement the program at Cheyenne Unit for the general population. Since then, the program has become a respected and effective tool for changing lives. Inmates and staff at Cheyenne Unit all interact with peer mentors and the P.E.W.P. classes. The program is constantly evolving and is currently incorporating pre-release/re-entry materials and health education into its curriculum.

A partnership with Gold Canyon Heart & Home, an Arizona 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, now makes Lacy's Prison Experience Workshop Program available through six PDF booklets, downloadable free of charge on Gold Canyon's affiliate Web site, FromHereToTheStreets.com (<http://www.fromheretothestreets.com>). Prison administrators who wish to use these free materials are only required to write a letter to Lacy requesting permission.

The program has been offered to the Arizona Department of Corrections for statewide use.

More information is available at http://fromheretothestreets.com/Prison_Exp_Workshop_Prog.html.

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