

# Gender Responsiveness at the RIDOC

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## Women's Facilities Steering Committee

The Women's Facilities Steering Committee (WFSC) was formed in the fall of 2011 and has been co-chaired by then Interim Warden Donna Collins and Principal Planner, Bree Derrick. With the return of Warden Carole Dwyer, leadership of the WFSC will be transferred. The WFSC was created as a result of staff's recognition that programs, services, and offender management could be enhanced for women in our custody.

It is the vision of the Women's Facilities Steering Committee to advance gender-responsive principles and practices in all aspects of work with justice-involved women who are under the jurisdiction of the RIDOC. WFSC recognizes that being gender-responsive means the policies, practices, programming and interactions will reflect the five core tenets of effective work with women by being: relational, holistic, strengths-based, trauma-informed and culturally competent. The committee believes implementing gender-responsive strategies will improve offender rehabilitation and increase public safety.

In advancing gender-responsive practices at the RIDOC, WFSC will use a collaborative process to develop clear



*Pictures from the garden outside Women's Facility II*

goals and measurable objectives. The committee will track on-going process via established performance measures, to include offender experiences. Further, WFSC will hold members accountable for meeting the outlined objectives and shall expect staff and offenders to be accountable for the implementation and embodiment of gender-responsive principles.

WFSC consists of members from various departmental units including Correctional Officers (Brass and line staff), Adult Counselors, Medical and Behavioral Health, Professional Services, Training Academy, and Planning & Research staff. Committee members are divided into the following 5 work groups: Physical Plant, Programming/Services, Assessment/Classification/Case Management, Offender Management, and Staff Training/Coaching.

## Progress & Milestones

The WFSC requested and received technical assistance from the National Resource Center on Justice-Involved Women, which began in winter 2011. Consultant Alyssa Benedict conducted two site visits (January & April) to meet with staff and offenders to better understand current practices/policies and assist the WFSC in setting and achieving objectives for change. Alyssa's input led to the creation of 5 work groups within the committee as well as a sound 3-year strategic plan. This round of technical assistance ended in August 2012.

Director Wall and Assistant Director McCauley have shown enthusiastic support for the project and formally recognized the membership in March 2012.

Specifically, the Director and Executive Team gave approval for the committee to formulate new policy language related to women offenders.

Highlights from the initial months include:

- The revision of the Classification policy to reflect current practice, which relies on risk/need assessment to determine classification for women
- Modifications to the discipline codes to reflect women's behaviors
- The development of a solid strategic plan for year 1, and drafts for years 2 and 3
- Pilot testing of a new screening tool to aid the case management process

- Ongoing quality assurance checks to ensure programming is adhering to gender-responsive practices
- The creation of a new training curriculum specific to volunteers/contract providers working with women



## WRNA Screener

The Women's Risk/Need Assessment (WRNA) Screener was validated as predictive of behavior and risk for women offenders at the RIDOC. This newly released Screener, a 14-item questionnaire, should allow the department to migrate toward a system whereby all sentenced women are screened and only those scoring "high-risk" are referred for full assessment. This triages low-risk offenders to less intensive services and ensures that those at highest risk receive the most intensive, individually-tailored case management services. Overall, this approach promises better resource allocation and improved reductions in recidivism.

The WRNA Screener is currently being pilot tested to determine feasibility and workload changes that may be incurred by Adult Counselors. Testing began in June 2012 with women who were recently sentenced and will soon be expanded to all sentenced women.

The following is a review of selected data that have been collected thus far:

- Of the 41 women assessed, the average score on the Screener was a 7 out of 14, with overall scores ranging from 1-12
- Sixty-three percent (63%) report having three or more prior adult convictions
- A mere 19% of women report having been arrested under the age of 16

***"Effective transition requires a system-wide approach, beginning upon entry into the institutional system, and concluding with linkages to gender specific aftercare services." – J. Berman, NIC***



*"Raising the wall" during Habitat for Humanity*



*Habitat for Humanity house dedication*

- Over half of the female population (51%) have at least one close family member who has a criminal history
- Fifty-six percent (56%) of women report having been homeless and/or living in a shelter as an adult

## Looking Ahead

In the coming months the WFSC will be working toward final approvals and implementation of the new gender-responsive policies. We are hopeful the RIDOC will secure additional technical assistance to support staff training and ensure continued progress toward Year 1 goals.

Additionally, the RIDOC has applied for a second round of technical assistance to re-establish the Trauma, Addictions, Mental Health, and Recovery (TAMAR) model. TAMAR was originally introduced to the RIDOC in 2007, with the purpose of creating a trauma-informed environment in the Women's Facilities. Analysis of the 2007 data revealed a reduction in bookings among women during the course and a decrease in the severity of bookings after completion.