

**PROPOSAL**  
for a  
Character-Based Residential Program  
at  
Lowell Correctional Institution, The Florida Department of Corrections  
Submitted by  
Horizon Communities in Prison and  
Gateless Gate Zen Center

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The proposed year-long, Character-Based Residential program at Lowell C.I will provide programs with evidence-based outcomes and build on the basic structure of an existing and well-functioning Character-Based dorm at Tomoka C.I. It will also incorporate a unique core program entitled Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) which research has shown to be highly successful in prisons and other venues. The goal of the Character-Based Program, in combination with MBSR, is to improve security, improve inmate attitudes, behavior and well-being, and increase successful transition and reentry to society. The anticipated measurable outcomes of the project are:

- Improved security by reducing disciplinary infractions and ultimately reducing recidivism
- Improved physical well-being, decrease anxiety, depression, and hostility, and increase ability to cope more effectively with both short and long-term stressful situations
- Increased personal and family responsibility through delivering an intense curriculum of programs using both behavioral and cognitive approaches, and providing time to practice new attitudes and behaviors
- Improved transition preparation for a healthy, law-abiding lifestyle upon release, thereby reducing the rate of recidivism of this population

This proposal is offered by a collaborative team, whose principal program providers are Horizon Communities in Prison in Winter Park, FL, and Gateless Gate Zen Center in Gainesville, FL. Florida Works and WorkForce have agreed to provide services as a part of this project and others will continue to be developed.

## STATEMENT OF NEED

### **Female Inmates and Character-Based Dorms**

Character-Based programs have proven successful in reducing disciplinary incidents in men's prisons and in preparing offenders for transition. The Character-based, residential dorm program at Tomoka C.I. began in early 2006 with a focus on transition preparation and has had almost 50 graduates.

Numerous institutions and government agencies now recognize that incarcerated women have distinct needs distinct from the male inmate population. Previously, women in prison have been an under-served population or the "forgotten offenders,"<sup>1</sup> and too often overlooked in correctional research, program design, and policy development.

The needs of incarcerated women are compelling:

- a) 80% of women in prison have backgrounds of abuse, trauma and poverty.
- b) Institutionalization does not often provide treatment or assistance in coping with these traumatic issues, leading to increased numbers of repeat offenders.
- c) Separation from family causes greater anxiety and stress among female prisoners as they are often the sole caretakers for their children.
- d) Physical impairments arising from the stress of abuse, separation from family and trauma, create a heavy dependence of female inmates on medication.
- e) 80% of women in prison are mothers; 2/3 of their children are minors. When the mother is healed, most often a family is healed.

In female prisons the trauma of incarceration exacerbates the abuse all too often experienced before becoming incarcerated. Such trauma blocks the capacity to learn and grow emotionally.<sup>2</sup> Programs recognized as effective in opening channels of renewed learning are rarely offered in prisons. Prisons with a significant programming and a well-organized community involvement can become places of healing.

The National Institute of Corrections, a division of the U.S. Department of Justice, called for a new approach to serving the incarcerated in their recent broadcast of "A Model of Social Justice: Collaboration between Faith-based and Community Organizations and Corrections". The proposed project is a model for such collaboration in Florida's largest prison for women.

### **Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)**

The MBSR program was developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn at the University of Massachusetts Memorial Hospital in 1979. Since then MBSR has evolved into a multi-disciplinary behavioral modification program that is the centerpiece of the University of Massachusetts Medical School's Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care and Society (CFM). MBSR has been taught in many hospitals, in a growing number of U.S. prisons and other settings. Research has "consistently documented MBSR as highly effective in teaching participants to become more

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<sup>1</sup> Morton, DPA, Joann Brown, President, Assoc. on Programs for Female Offenders, "Corrections Today", August 2007

<sup>2</sup> Goleman, Daniel, *Emotional Intelligence*, Bantam Publishing, 1995, p. 207

responsible in the management of their own health, vitality and healing...and shown dramatic decreases in anxiety, depression, hostility...and an increased ability to cope more effectively with both short and long-term stressful situations.”<sup>3</sup>

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The program’s overall objectives will focus on building skills in five relevant areas:

1. Respect for self and others
2. Family strengthening
3. Citizenship/ Community Engagement
4. Education
5. Employability or institutional stability (Lifers have and should continue to make up a constant proportion of those who participate in the Character-based program and MBSR classes at Lowell C.I.)

### **Personnel**

Two paid positions will be filled; the Program Coordinator will work inside the prison in an office in the dorm and be responsible for the integration of the program with all regulations and requirements of the prison’s operation. The Community Resource/ Transition Coordinator will be responsible for recruiting and training volunteers, obtaining materials and developing resources within the local community to provide transition services. Complete job descriptions are available and all personnel will be subject to approval by the Warden or his/her designee. Peer facilitators (usually long-term inmates) will be selected by the Program Coordinator for each Pod Family.

### **Intake and Structure**

Planning for the inaugural program will begin with the appointment of an Inmate Advisory Council to assist in formation, reduce misinformation, and encourage inmate acceptance. After one month, this group will become the Character-Based Planning Council to include representatives of the Administration and Security.

There will be one period for intake of participants per year for each dorm, although vacancies will be filled as they occur and bed space is needed. Trained peer facilitators will bring new participants up to date on activities. Some dorm modification may be necessary to provide program space in the unit. A group of participants will be chosen by the Program Coordinator to serve as Peer Facilitators, one per eight inmates. These may be participants with longer sentences, and they may repeat the program if they are found to be helpful to the process. Once an inmate has volunteered and has been accepted, she will move into the unit prior to the start of the program for orientation. Inmates will live in groups of eight, referred to as “pod families.” A community building event will be planned for the beginning of each intake.

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<sup>3</sup> Center for Mindfulness website: [www.mindfullivingprograms.com](http://www.mindfullivingprograms.com), select “Research”

## **Eligibility**

- Voluntary – Applicants volunteer for the year-long program
- Applicants need not have any specific experience to be accepted into program.
- If accepted, participation in all aspects of the program is required.
- Assurances will be sought so that participants accepted into the program will remain at this facility for at least one year, unless they are removed for cause.

## **Program Components to Achieve Outcomes/ Work Plan**

Participants should work at their regular job assignments during the day. Program components are extra-curricular in nature, taking place at times that will not conflict with normal daytime working hours. Programs will be presented by trained volunteers from the community, generally in the evenings. Any program planned in the daytime will be arranged in advance with all appropriate authorities. MBSR training will occur throughout the year and time will be provided for daily practice.

1. Community Orientation: All participants will participate in a community-building experience near the start of the program year teaching acceptance, cooperation, mutual support, accountability and team building.
2. MBSR: Classes will be offered to open pathways of decision making, and to learn to identify and self monitor emotions and build capacities of impulse control. Daily practice times will be made available.
3. Quest: Women’s Workbook focuses on family violence, battering, and anger management – its causes, the role of the past and the role of alcohol and drug addiction on anger, and on communication skills and relationships.
4. Family Letter Writing: Each family member will be provided resources to write at least one letter per week to a family member. The Program Coordinator will encourage and supervise this activity.
5. Community Meetings: A part of Citizenship training, The Program Coordinator will conduct community meetings weekly, or more often if needed. These meetings build teamwork, community responsibility, accountability and decision-making.
6. Mentoring or “Outside Sisters”: Volunteers from the local community will be recruited by the Program Coordinators. They will make every effort to identify and qualify sufficient numbers for one-on-one weekly visits.
7. Financial Responsibility: The National Endowment for Financial Education workbook for high school students will be used in this 3-month course.
8. Criminal and Addictive Thinking: A three-month program designed to open pathways of decision making and reverse habits of interiorizing anger, too often resulting in physical problems and illnesses.
9. Education: Those without a GED will be encouraged to have education as their work assignment. If possible, education will be supported by a computer literacy lab.
10. Job Readiness: Computer Literacy and Ready for Work training
11. Family Day / Graduation: At the conclusion of the program, a Graduation or Completion Ceremony will be held for participants, their family members, and invited volunteers. Certificates will be presented to those completing the program.

Volunteers are essential to the delivery of the program and will be recruited by the Community Resource Coordinator working with the Chaplain or Assistant Warden. This is an important element in creating a connection between the correctional institution and the larger community.

### **Projected Outcomes**

Accountability is the key ingredient in the residential program, arising from the group and the presence of volunteer facilitators following a well-developed curriculum. Changed behavior and attitudes are demonstrated by:

- Improved Wellness<sup>4</sup>
- Improved Family Relations
- Reduced D.R.'s and increased Institutional Stability. Horizon program participants have consistently charted a 90% reduction in major rule infractions and over 30% in family relationship restorations<sup>5</sup>.
- Recidivism rates studies would be tracked the Department of Corrections.

### **Transition Preparation**

- Education: Participants will be encouraged to pursue educational advancement through programs offered at Lowell and supplemented by the Character-based programming.
- A close collaboration will be developed with WorkForce and other agencies providing post-release services in health, family services, housing, etc. so arrangements can be made prior to release.

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<sup>4</sup> Sumter, Melvina, et al., "The Potential Benefits of Meditation in a Correctional Setting", "Corrections Today" August 2007

<sup>5</sup> Horizon Website/ Outcomes/ Texas, [www.horizoncommunities.org](http://www.horizoncommunities.org)

**Projected Annual Budget Summary**

Note: Does not include one-time expense by FL DOC for chairs and modification of the day room. Costs to FL DOC leveraged by continuous fund-raising by program contractors.

**CHARACTER-BASED RESIDENTIAL DORM PROGRAM  
PROPOSED ANNUAL BUDGET**

No. of Participants – 72

**ANNUAL COST ESTIMATES**

<b>Personnel</b>	<b>Program Coordinator</b>	<b>40,000*</b>
	<b>Comm. Resource / Transition Coord.</b>	<b>25,000*</b>
<b>Supplies</b>	<b>Family Letter Writing</b>	<b>1,500</b>
	<b>Workbooks, Supplies, etc</b>	<b>8,500</b>
	<b>Community-Building Launch Event</b>	<b>2,000</b>
	<b>Family Day/ Graduation</b>	<b>3,000</b>
	<b>Other</b>	<b>5,000</b>
<b>Consultants and Stipends</b>		<b>5,000</b>
<b>Administrative</b>	<b>Oversight, Accounting &amp; Reporting</b>	<b>5,000*</b>
<b>TOTAL COSTS EST.</b>	<b>Annual Costs</b>	<b>\$ 105,000**</b>

\* *FL DOC Total of \$70,000*

\*\* Annual Costs for one Residential Re-Entry Dorm Program. Costs vary with the number of managed program dorms under contract.

## **ADDENDA:**

### **Short Term and Long Term Goals**

- Year One – assuming combined sources of funding
  1. Begin with one dorm of 72 inmates.
  2. Hire Inside Program Coordinator and Community Coord.
  3. Recruit free-world volunteer program facilitators
  4. 60% or more complete the 12-month program; 40 or more available as peer facilitators for additional dorms
  5. Documentation of changes in disciplinary reports
  6. Documentation of changes in family relations
  7. At 6 months, establish small computer lab for educational enhancement, GED practice and transition preparation (Note, no AC required.)
  
- Year Two
  1. Expand to three residential dorms – to allow participants to hold each other accountable, sustain practices and tutor others.
  2. Add one full-time Program Coordinator
  3. Full-time Community Resource Coordinator required to build up volunteer base and resources
  4. Document changes observed by work supervisors
  5. Continue with item numbers 3 – 7 under Year One.
  
- Year Three
  1. With sufficient funding, expand to six dorm programs inmates using graduates as peer facilitators in each residential program site.
  2. Hire additional Program Coordinators (1 per 2 dorms of 72).
  3. Continue with items 3 -7 under Year One
  4. Begin recidivism studies (FL DOC)

## **Program Providers Organizational Background**

### **Horizon Communities in Prison**

Horizon Communities in Prison, a non-profit 501-c-(3) organization, begun in 1999, has remained on the forefront of faith and character-based residential re-entry programs. Horizon is active in five medium and maximum security prisons in four states and collaborates with the department of corrections in each state. Over 2,000 participants have graduated from Horizon's ground-breaking program, creating a positive subculture in those prisons and low recidivism rates. Program elements focus on personal responsibility, growth and change, family relations, communication skills, problem solving, conflict resolution, education, addiction issues, and computer literacy among others.

In March 2006, Tomoka Correctional Institution was required to establish a character-based dorm equivalent to its dynamic faith-based program. Horizon Communities is under contract to support the residential program at Tomoka and the programming at Wakulla C.I., a large faith and character-based prison. Horizon has supplemented state contracts by building income resources from private philanthropy, foundations, churches, businesses and individuals. Horizon is profiled in the "Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council" as a model reentry-preparation program, has been copied widely and received numerous national and state awards.

### **Gateless Gate Zen Center**

Gateless Gate Zen Center is a not-for-profit corporation founded in 1999 to establish and maintain a public place of practice in accordance with the teachings of Zen Master Seung Sahn. It operates under the guidance of a board of directors which supervises the center's director, or Abbot, and has operated programs in state and federal prisons as well as county jails since 1997. Programs presented by the Gateless Gate Zen Center range from Zen classes, Anger Management programs, Interfaith Meditation Retreats, and Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction classes. Active at many Florida prisons, most programs have been presented in the DOC Region I and II as well as FCC Coleman near Leesburg, FL. Gateless Gate brings a wealth of experience and community resources to the collaboration with Horizon on this proposed dorm program at Lowell C.I. For this program the focus and teaching will be strictly on secular programming, using FL DOC approved workbooks and procedures.

