

Boulder County Program Promotes “Productive Day”

IN 1996 BOULDER COUNTY Sheriff George Epp asked me to explore ways to decrease the amount of jail inmates' idle time. He set a goal of 8 hours of productive activity-including work, education, or treatment-for every inmate, every day.

With resources from an NIC technical assistance program, three members of the Boulder County Jail staff toured three jails during the week of March 10, 1997, to get new ideas about jail and inmate management. These three jails, in Hennepin County, Minnesota; Sonoma County, California; and Jefferson County, Texas, have developed several new programs in inmate industry, programming, and education.

After the trip, the sheriff directed jail administrators to explore the feasibility of implementing some of the ideas gained from the visits to other facilities. At a 2-day, off-site jail planning session, the jail management team looked at some contemporary concepts of inmate and jail management and determined that it was feasible to implement them in Boulder County.

In July 1997, the jail began to put into place some of the provisions of the Productive Day program. Four companies in the community participated in piloting the new program. Through the steadfast efforts of a citizen volunteer, the jail was able to identify several local companies that were willing to test the use of inmates as workers.

Inmates from three modules volunteered to be assigned to work teams. Each team was taught the job to be done and then began their tasks. In cooperation with the company, we worked out some of the inevitable problems.

In April 1997, Sheriff Epp had asked the Boulder Board of County Commissioners to pass County Resolution 97-38, which dictates the disbursement of monies earned by inmate labor. As of August 1997, we were billing the companies for the work being performed by inmates. We are now working out details regarding inmates' payments of restitution and child support before we begin to pay inmates

for their labor. Each day we learn something new about the overall operation. Staff have been instrumental in finding ways to make this program successful.

UNDER THE PHILOSOPHY of Productive Day in the Boulder County Jail, all inmates coming into the facility must earn their privileges. Until classified, new intake inmates are locked down and do not have access to TVs, commissary, telephones, or visitation. Jail staff conduct a needs assessment for each new inmate during the initial 2-week period as part of the classification process. Intake officers meet individually or in groups with new inmates to help them make the transition to jail life.

Following the needs assessment, the inmate must work in some productive job and also may choose to attend education or other programs. In the evening, the inmate may watch TV, have a visit with a friend or loved one, or attend recreation.

In this environment, each inmate in Building A has the opportunity to earn one contact visit every 2 weeks if he/she remains free from all disciplinary action. Visits with inmates in other buildings are secure visits. Recreation is an alternative to either type of visit.

If an inmate violates a jail rule, she/he is subject to being regressed and to losing earned good time. A regression results in the inmate being housed in

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the intake module until she/he sends a request to be considered for movement back into the Productive Day Program and agrees to work, attend programming, and/or go to classes as directed by jail staff.

A CORNERSTONE OF THE Productive Day Program is officer involvement. We have committed and

dedicated officers who make this concept work. We have seen it work in other facilities, although Boulder County is the first in Colorado to try the program.

Since its inception at the Jefferson County Correctional Facility in Beaumont, Texas, Productive Day has become well known in surrounding

areas in that state. Media coverage of the many projects in which Productive Day members have been involved has helped to generate extensive interest in the effort. A recent news piece filed by an NBC affiliate ran on several news-casts.

Productive Day is one of the most timely, innovative, and positive concepts ever developed for incarcerated adults who wish to make a change in their lives. The program is designed to be entirely self-supporting. Our goal is to introduce additional work programs in the jail so that inmates in every module will have an opportunity to work. We are examining a number of alternatives that would involve contracting with the private sector and result in revenue for the jail.

The Boulder County Board of County Commissioners passed a resolution to direct how money from inmate labor is to be spent. The first priority for inmate-generated funds is toward restitution and reparations owed by the inmate, followed by support of the inmate's dependents. The resolution permits the sheriff to pay the inmate up to \$1 per day. Additional funds generated will go to offset the inmate's cost of care.

We believe that it is important for inmates to provide some restoration to society for their offenses and that restoration helps inmates reintegrate into society. It also builds a sense of pride and accomplishment in the inmates.

THE PRODUCTIVE DAY program is voluntary; it is available to all inmates confined at the Boulder

GOALS OF PRODUCTIVE DAY-

- Reduce inmate idleness
- Provide 8 hours of structured activity for each inmate, each day
- Instill a work ethic in each inmate
- Create and maintain a safe and clean jail environment
- Provide for restitution and fines to be paid by inmate labor
- Provide educational opportunities for each inmate
- Provide treatment through programming opportunities for each inmate
- Reduce the impact of incarceration costs on taxpayers
- Provide for child and family support to be paid by each inmate
- Reduce jail tension by keeping inmates occupied
- Improve inmates' self esteem by increasing self-worth through labor
- Give added responsibilities to inmates
- Teach inmates to take pride in their work and to respect authority
- Give inmates something to look forward to daily
- Help inmates' families to become self-sufficient and reduce dependency on governmental support
- Help the inmate to feel worthy of his/her family and remove some of the guilt associated with being incarcerated

County Jail. As its name implies, Productive Day requires having a positive attitude and being productive with one's time. Productive Day incorporates good work habits, academic achievement, coping skills, anger management, and money management in one program. While they are incarcerated, inmates will be required to work in some productive capacity and will have the opportunity to take that skill into their private lives when they are released from jail. Full-time officers enforce strict codes of conduct, hygiene, and dress, and the use of an in-house chain of command. ■

EXAMPLES OF WORK OPPORTUNITIES-

The Boulder County Jail has established relationships with several local companies to provide inmate labor at competitive rates. The inmate labor force bids competitively with temporary labor (day laborers) for work that can be performed inside the jail. Decisions about the type of work being performed and the time allocated to perform it are made on a case-by-case basis by jail administrative staff.

Types of work undertaken by inmates include:

- Assisting a local plastic injection molding firm in repairing injected plastic parts that were improperly molded. Inmates worked to complete the piecework necessary to meet the standards set by the company.
- Folding and assembling fabricated cardboard display cases for a local greeting card company. The cardboard materials were brought to the jail, and inmates assembled them in a prescribed manner to create display boxes for the company's greeting cards.
- Assembling intricate machined pieces for a local high-tech plumbing firm for a controlled atmosphere manufacturing plant. Each finished piece consists of many other, more intricate parts, including rubber gaskets, O-rings, and washers. Inmates were trained to assemble each piece, place it in a plastic bag, and seal and label the bag.
- Tying fishing flies. A local company supplied the raw materials and an instructor. Inmates tied fishing flies and were paid a piece rate for acceptable pieces.