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THE SENSIBLE CHOICE: FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES IN CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION

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The Sensible Choice:

Family and Consumer Sciences in Correctional Education

By Kyle L. Roberson

Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) is a field of study based in the human sciences with a mission to improve the lives of individuals, families and communities through training, education and advocacy. FCS is defined as “the comprehensive body of knowledge that helps people make informed decisions about their well being, relationships and resources to achieve optimal quality of life.”¹ The curriculum taught through FCS education closely aligns with the educational needs of the incarcerated members of the American population.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) reports that one in 35 adults in the U.S. are under some form of correctional supervision, with 2.1 million of those adults being housed in a correctional facility.² Within these correctional facilities are education departments, with educators who focus on preparing offenders for reentry and are able to assist offenders in earning basic levels of education. Other facilities may also provide training for everyday living, offer vocational trade courses and present classes in interpersonal relationships, parenting and the family. For programs to assist these 2.1 million offenders to successfully reenter society, it is imperative that facilities hire professionals with the ability to fulfill the educational needs of this diverse population of students.

FCS educators are trained to provide all the programs and courses necessary in correctional environments, from literacy development to career readiness. By hiring FCS educators, administrators can save resources otherwise spent on hiring or contracting specialized instructors. Additionally, they can be assured each FCS staff member will be professional and dedicated to the betterment of the offenders, their families and the community, maintaining the pedagogical knowledge essential to an education department.

**FAMILY &
CONSUMER
SCIENCES**



Creating Healthy & Sustainable Families

The Problem

Currently, when administrators need to hire an educator, the goal is to provide the necessary instruction to assist offenders in obtaining a high school equivalency certificate or GED diploma — but this is not enough. Educators within prisons need to have an understanding of adolescent and adult learners, as well as the necessary training to not only teach the core subjects found on the official GED exams, but also provide instruction related to other aspects of personal growth, such as parenting, life skills and vocational training. The problem with the current approach to hiring teachers is their narrow certification, confining them to a single content area. For example, if they have experience teaching at the high school level, they might be certified in only math, science, sociology or English. If they taught younger students, they are usually certified as K-8 elementary educators. When administrators hire, they usually pick a person with a teaching certificate for elementary education, a high school teacher who taught a single subject or a vocational teacher with only one specific specialty. These teachers are usually not certified to provide specialized instruction in the other life skill areas that most offenders need. Correctional educators should have the training and skills that can provide the diverse services necessary for the incarcerated population. FCS-certified educators are a sensible choice and provide the best value from a budgeting and personnel perspective.

Correctional Education

BJS reports that adult correctional populations have lower educational attainment than people in the general population. It is estimated that 40 percent of state offenders, 27 percent of federal offenders and 47 percent of offenders in local jails have not completed high school or earned its equivalency. Nine in 10 state prisons, and all federal prisons, provide education programs with a literacy component, otherwise known as the GED program.³ These statistics point to the obvious need for FCS's education program, considering a GED diploma is generally needed to obtain even minimum-wage jobs; the GED preparation and testing program is a primary mission of most correctional education programs.

Another significant aspect of correctional education programs is the attainment of important life skills that are necessary for reentry preparation. Selected skill areas are usually part of an overall reentry plan determined by the offender's counselor, education advisor or unit team. Many such life-skills classes are currently offered to offenders in institutions across the country, including:

- Parenting;
- Marriage Enrichment;
- Personal Finance;
- Consumer Finance;
- Housing;
- Interpersonal Relationships;
- Resume Writing;
- Mock Job Fairs;
- Mock Interviews;
- Wellness and Nutrition;
- Computer Literacy;
- Touch Typing; and
- Service Learning

Vocational training is another area that generally finds itself under the umbrella of correctional education. Depending on the size and resources of the institution, this training varies in its nature and depth. Many facilities have apprenticeship programs, coordinated with local colleges and the Department of Labor, which can teach valuable skills, leading to living-wage jobs upon release.

Lastly, post-secondary education (PSE) is found throughout correctional education. Some prisons and jails contract with local colleges to offer courses, certificates and degree programs to offenders. Studies conducted during the 1990s reported an average of 46 percent lower recidivism rate for offenders who participated in PSE.⁴

Family and Consumer Sciences Education

Influenced by developmental psychology theories, FCS holistically addresses how the content areas of its education can improve the human condition for individuals, families and communities.⁵ FCS educators are trained using “research-based knowledge about the topics of everyday life, including human development, personal and family finance, housing and interior design, food science, nutrition and wellness, textiles and apparel and consumer issues.”⁶ Additionally, FCS teacher certification requires the same general education courses expected of all accredited four-year teacher preparation programs. Courses in pedagogy (the science of teaching and learning) are also required, which encompass curriculum and instruction, classroom management, content area literacy and special education.

The National Association of State Administrators of FCS is the governing body that outlines the national standards and competencies expected of FCS educators and what their students are expected to learn during courses. Educators have to pass teacher certification exams, such as the Praxis, to demonstrate their knowledge of FCS content and teaching and

FCS Content Areas

- 1.0 Career, Community and Family Connections
- 2.0 Consumer and Family Resources
- 3.0 Consumer Services
- 4.0 Education and Early Childhood
- 5.0 Facilities Management and Maintenance
- 6.0 Family
- 7.0 Family and Community Services
- 8.0 Food Production and Services
- 9.0 Food Science, Dietetics and Nutrition
- 10.0 Hospitality, Tourism and Recreation
- 11.0 Housing and Interior Design
- 12.0 Human Development
- 13.0 Interpersonal Relationships
- 14.0 Nutrition and Wellness
- 15.0 Parenting
- 16.0 Textiles, Fashion and Apparel

learning principles. The content knowledge for FCS educators is divided among 16 areas of study by the administration.⁷ Each of the content areas has primary relevance to correctional education programs, relating to basic life skills and providing preparation and instruction for job and career readiness.

The Solution

There has been a change in the mission of corrections over the past decade. Although the primary goals of most agencies are to maintain safe and secure facilities, to house individuals convicted of crimes and to protect the public, there has been a transformation in the philosophy from simply warehousing offenders to providing programming that will assist with reentry and prepare the offender for a more productive and law-abiding life. This philosophy is not simply a matter of free education, but an investment in society itself. A RAND Corporation study found that the cost-to-benefit ratios for education programming is well worth the investment as it reduces the costs associated with recidivism.⁸ With this in mind, hiring educators who can implement education programming that meets most, if not all, the needs of correctional education makes sense.

FCS educators have the pedagogical knowledge and training to provide the necessary levels of instruction to assist offenders in preparing for and taking high school equivalency and GED exams. Through their curriculum, these educators teach most of the basic life skills needed to be successful, productive and healthy members of society. Money management, consumerism, nutrition and wellness,

housing, parenting and interpersonal relationships are just a few of the courses the educators are certified to provide — other teachers are generally not trained in those areas.

Those certified through FCS also have a broad level of training in many areas that are useful in obtaining gainful employment. Depending on the teachers' emphasis areas, they can provide courses and college-level instruction in various job trades, such as facility management and maintenance, customer service, food production and restaurant management, hospitality, tourism and recreation, retail management and much more. Furthermore, their training is founded as "a discipline and a profession that focuses on an integrative approach to the reciprocal relationships among individuals, families and communities, as well as the environments in which they function."⁹

Family is a primary focus for how FCS content interrelates within the individual's environment. Influenced by Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural cognitive theory, FCS education emphasizes how culture and social interaction guide cognitive development. This theory is important because research has shown that family connectedness and visitation can reduce and delay recidivism.¹⁰ Educators who can teach offenders improved methods of social interaction within parenting, marriage and interpersonal relationships both at home and at work can have an even deeper impact on improving the lives of offenders and their families. Ideally, the lessons taught to the offenders would carry over to the offenders' children in how they interact during visits and phone conversations, ultimately helping reduce the cycle of intergenerational criminal behavior often found in the families of offenders.

Conclusion

When there is so much at stake with regard to successful programming in correctional institutions, administrators have to make sound and economic investments in their chief resources. Education has proven to be a solid investment for reducing recidivism; therefore, it makes sense to invest in the best-prepared educators to manage the programs offered through correctional education departments. FCS educators can teach GED content areas; provide vocational training in numerous fields, leading to gainful employment and living-wage jobs; and present classes in a host of everyday living skills, from computer literacy to parenting and life literacy. The next time an agency has an education staff vacancy, the sensible choice is to advertise for a teacher certified in Family and Consumer Sciences.

ENDNOTES

¹ American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences. About us. Retrieved from www.aafcs.org/AboutUs/index.asp.

² Glaze, L.E., D. Kaebler, and BJS Statisticians. 2014. Bureau of Justice Statistics bulletin: Correctional populations in the United States, 2013. Bureau of Justice Statistics. Retrieved from www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cpus13.pdf.

³ Harlow, C.W. 2003. Bureau of Justice Statistics special report: Education and correctional populations. Bureau of Justice Statistics. Retrieved from www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/ecp.pdf.

⁴ Meyer, S.J. 2011. Factors affecting student success in postsecondary academic correctional education programs. *The Journal of Correctional Education*, 62(2): 132-164. Correctional Education Association.

⁵ Kato, S.L. and J.G. Elias. 2014. *Foundations of family and consumer sciences: Careers serving individuals, families, and consumers*. Tinley Park, Ill.: Goodheart-Willcox.

⁶ National Association of State Administrators of Family and Consumer Sciences. National standards and competencies. Retrieved from www.nasafacs.org/national-standards-and-competencies.html.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Davis, L.M., R. Bozick, J.L. Steele, J. Saunders, and J.N.V. Miles. 2013. *Evaluating the effectiveness of correctional education: A meta-analysis of programs that provide education to incarcerated adults*. Washington, D.C.: RAND Corporation. Retrieved from www.rand.org/jie/projects/correctional-education.html.

⁹ Bales, W.D., and D.P. Mears. 2008. Inmate social ties and the transition to society: Does visitation reduce recidivism? *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*. Retrieved from <http://jrc.sagepub.com/content/45/3/287>.

¹⁰ Kato, S.L. et al. 2014.



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direction the department is heading, and other systems can learn from these experiences and develop solutions to meet the unique circumstances in their jurisdictions

So far, the staff selection and incentive system instituted at SDSP has resulted in:

- Increased interest in working in restrictive housing (e.g., 39 correctional officers applied for 18 open positions);
- Improved morale, because staff had been selected through a competitive process and had made a choice to work with inmates in restrictive housing rather than being forced to rotate through;
- A highly motivated and talented set of individuals to help roll out the department's new approach to restrictive housing;
- A more consistent environment for inmates, fewer behavioral issues and better inmate attitudes and communication;
- Increased efficiency in the restrictive housing areas;

- Improved officer adherence to daily operations, procedures and rules; and
- Increased staff awareness of individual inmates and how to best work with them to meet individual goals, as well as the department's facility safety and public safety goals.

As Director of Prisons Bob Dooley said, "What Warden Young and his team accomplished in terms of changing staff culture in a short amount of time has been extraordinary. There is a whole new level of job satisfaction, productivity and efficiency."



Darin Young is warden at the South Dakota State Penitentiary. Barbara Pierce Parker is managing associate for the Crime and Justice Institute.



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