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## **Inmates in Most Restrictive Custody Complete Program**

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PEARL – A small group of inmates in the most restrictive custody level have completed a new three-phase rehabilitation program at the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility in Rankin County.

Eleven inmates participated in a graduation on Friday, March 13, receiving certifications for completing classes in alcohol and drug treatment, anger management, and positive thinking. Two other inmates also completed the program, but had been transferred to other facilities.

The new program in the facility's RC unit offers face-to-face sessions for close-custody inmates who had not previously received such contact due to their level of custody.

"The guys remained in the unit all day without any opportunity to come out and participate in anything positive," Warden Tamala King said of the time before the program was created. "There has been much success in our programs here for our close custody population since we began classes. The guys really enjoy having a classroom to come out to for classes."

Participants were identified as those mandated by the courts or the Parole Board. Inmates were also selected through staff referrals and/or voluntary participation. MDOC reviewed the inmates' disciplinary records and interviewed them to advise them on expectations regarding attendance, grooming, conduct, participation, and commitment.

The program includes a six-month alcohol and drug treatment course, a three-month anger management course, and a three-month positive thinking course. Inmates choose one or another or take all three courses. Participants have to meet strict attendance guidelines, complete and turn in homework assignments accurately, and complete classroom assignments accurately, King said.

A&D educates the dangers of drug use and the process of behavior changes. "It helps our guys to identify patterns of drug use/abuse and develop plans for positive changes within their lives," Johnson said.

Anger management is a cognitive behavior therapy class that teaches inmates healthy ways to handle situations that make them angry. They learn relaxation techniques, problem-solving, and communication skills. Positive Thinking is also a cognitive behavior therapy class that teaches better interpersonal skills, emotional awareness, mindfulness, and stress management.

In addition to the challenges of the coursework, inmates face personal barriers, including completing coursework amid persistent noise in their housing, which can hinder learning. Focus requires discipline and the ability to manage challenges.

At Friday's graduation, inmates recited quotes, poems, and Bible scriptures, and some offered brief testimonies about their experiences.

Jacarson Young, 18, the youngest program participant, having just come over to the adult side from the Youthful Offender Unit, said he hopes to make the most of every opportunity to keep growing during his incarceration. His release date is in 2032.

"I was really motivated to finish. I had a lot of support from other inmates to keep pushing forward and stay focused. I really enjoyed all of the material that I learned," Young said. "I am looking forward to doing more programs and being productive. I am determined to enroll in every program that I can while I am here."

Michael L. Lewis expects to be released from prison in December 2026. "I enjoyed all parts of the program, and it helped me stay focused among all the negativity that I see in the zone. I am proud to complete it and finish what I started," Lewis said.

Darryl Hurts Jr. has a 2027 release date. "This was something I needed in my life, and I learned patience and the determination to finish what I started," Hurts said.

Graduation guest speaker Derrick Eanochs, a mental health therapist, encouraged the graduates to be the best versions of themselves as they move forward in life, both inside and eventually outside of incarceration.

"This is a continuous journey of personal growth, which means coming out of your comfort zone, embracing failures as learning moments, and taking responsibility for your actions, which creates a life of purpose," Eanochs said. "Acknowledge that you are the architect of your own life and your choices dictate your reality. This includes knowing your potential is not limited to your current circumstances, but rather your own determination."

Instructor Jill Johnson said she saw transformations in inmates as they progressed in the program. "It's a testament of hard work and determination and courage to keep going," Johnson said. "I'm proud of the transformations you made in your lives. You have worked really hard and stuck with it, and I appreciate it."

