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MCIW celebrates new class of Reentry Academy graduates

The Reentry Academy at the Mississippi Correctional Institute for Women (MCIW) in Pearl can celebrate another achievement: Its fourth graduation resulting in 46 more inmates receiving diplomas.

The graduates completed more than 200 hours of classes focusing on life skills for success after release. Additionally, 41 graduates within the group also completed the facility's forklift program. One graduate, Brandi Allgood, 37, a mother of two, is nearing release this year. After incarceration for a drug possession conviction, she plans to attend college to study psychology to become a mental health therapist.

"When I got here, I signed up for every class that I could. When I saw my name on the Reentry list, I felt honored and blessed for this opportunity," said Allgood, who also completed the Alcohol and Drug Treatment Program. Considering enrollment in the Reentry Academy as a privilege and a blessing "enabled me to gain clarity and perspective on my past as well as my future," she added.

"The teachers were nothing short of amazing and they helped me learn how to be a better mother to my children, how to handle my grief, and how to manage my anger. I am determined to see my future as bright and prosperous, despite having experienced a past that completely unraveled my life," said Allgood, who is serving a drug

Using evidence-based principles, the Reentry Academy is a three-month structured program designed to strengthen inmates' life skills, facilitating their successful assimilation back into society. Eligible inmates must have a clean prison record, a GED or HED, be within 36 months of release, and be committed to finishing the program, among other requirements. The program is designed to reduce the number of individuals returning to prison within the first three years of release.

Tatyana Maple, 28, also spoke to graduates during the May 30 commencement program.

"I entered prison believing that I had lost everything and had nothing to return to, but the people in my life never gave up on me," said Maple, who also is in prison for a drug conviction. "During this

time in the Re-Entry Academy, I have dedicated myself to self-awareness and self-improvement as a way to prepare myself to pour into others the same way.”

Maple said she has her previous job waiting for her, a place to live, and transportation all lined up after release. She plans to join a church, attend rehabilitative meetings, and earn her General Education Diploma.

“I once viewed myself in a negative light due to not having completed high school, but the Re-Entry Academy made me realize that I am an intelligent and capable woman,” said Maple, who achieved Silver Level in the SmartStart program, improving upon her original assessment ranking. “The respect I have for others comes from a deep place of self-respect that has only been strengthened by the skills I learned in the Reentry Academy.”

Faith Long, a 10-year veteran of the MDOC, was the guest speaker for the commencement. She works to ensure that inmates have Medicaid, Social Security, Disability, health and food benefits assistance, and other vital documents needed before release.

“Today, we celebrate something extraordinary – not just graduation, but transformation. You’re not leaving as you were. You’re walking out as the person you are to become. You have growth in a place that can break you. You chose learning in a place that often tells people to give up,” Long told the graduates.

“The diploma is more than a piece of paper. It is a promise you made to yourself – a promise that your past will not decide your future. Your story isn’t over. It’s just getting good,” Long said. “You’ve done something powerful, something people on the other side never even attempt. You’re not who you were. You have earned the right to walk with your head held high, to seek peace, to build, and to lead.”

Maj. Williestine Magee-Guise, a 19-year veteran of MDOC, serves as the Reentry Academy Director having started her career in 2006 as a correctional officer and then drill instructor, and a case manager before her current assignment. Her MDOC career is enhanced by her 21 years of service in the Mississippi Army National Guard.

Guise advised the graduates to have a plan that starts immediately after their release from prison.

“When you are released, you may feel overwhelmed with attention from family and friends. Make out you’re A-B-C plan starting with your first 24 hours after release, then your next 15 days, and 15 days after that, and so on,” Guise said. “If something goes wrong, back up and correct your course for your next 15. I hope you will apply all the things you learned here, stay positive, and move forward.”

As the program, which included lunch, music “Girl” and “Lean on Me” performed by the prison’s band “1099 Calling All Units” and a reading of poetry and presentation of certificates, the graduates heard final remarks from the division leader who created the Reentry Academy.

Deputy Commissioner Kelley Christopher, who oversees programs, education, and reentry, encouraged the graduates to “dump the shame” that had been placed upon them by others and themselves to move forward.

“The first measurement of the success of an inmate’s return to society is that he or she does not come back to prison,” Christopher said. “The goal of the Reentry Academy is to create a consistent, uniform pathway for inmates to gain the personal skills, perspectives, and confidence to navigate the inherent obstacles in the way of a felon as he or she creates a new life in a free society.”



