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Date: September 14, 2022
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Inmates have new lease on life after completing Alcohol & Drug program in state prison

JACKSON – New starts and fresh beginnings were on the minds of female inmates at the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility Tuesday as they completed an intensive 12-step alcohol and drug (A&D) rehabilitation program.

During a ceremony in the facility’s gymnasium, the 17 women heard spiritually uplifting music, motivational speakers, and received certificates as graduates. There was a mixture of inmates included in the graduation, some who completed the short-term version of three months and others who completed the long-term version of six months.

A&D Director Erica Jenkins Smith saw significant transformations in the women during their participation which she hopes leads to better lives for them. Smith noted the program’s advantage is being available every step of the way while the women are incarcerated with the use of counselors and trained peer supporters.

“I hope they learned to live sober and productive lives and to make better decisions,” Smith said. “One of the things we focus on when they start the program is changing the way that they think. They know that if they do some things differently, they can get a different outcome.”

The graduation ceremony also included readings of scripture, personal testimonials, a poem, statements of acceptance and reciting of the 12-step pledge. Performances included a skit and selections by the Praise Dance Team, Hip Hop Dance Team, the CMCF Choir, and the CMCF Band. CMCF Recreation Director James Wells served as one of two guest speakers providing motivation and perspective.

“I hope the women came away with the idea that decision-making is everything in life. The choices they make don’t just affect them, but everyone close to them,” Wells said. “Inmates must remember that it is not just about them, but others around them which is a part of making better lives for themselves.”

Among the graduates taking the ceremony’s content to heart was Catherine Deckard. She said the program was instrumental in changing her mindset for a better future.

“I had a lot of unresolved issues and I was dealing with them the wrong way using drugs to medicate instead of coping with things. I had just lost my son and I was dealing with a lot of grief. I wanted to be done with that,” Deckard said, noting that the support and materials were key components of finishing the program. Deckard said the program helped her beat addiction and just covered all the bases emotionally, spiritually, physically, and intellectually.

Deckard has a strong family support system and is excited about a new start after her expected release in October. She will be reunited with her other son and will live in a new environment.

“Because of this A&D program, I have made a choice to start completely fresh and when I get out, I will have my kids back, my family back, and a new home in a completely different area,” Deckard said.

Angel Daniels, expecting release in November, said the program gave her a new sense of purpose for her life through 10 months of participation. She highly recommends it to other inmates.

“I needed sobriety. I had no goals and I felt hopeless. When I got in, I was encouraged to do better for myself and my family. Now I have set a lot of goals that I am going to accomplish,” Daniels said. “This program is really worth it. If you work the 12 steps, don’t give up, and resist temptation, you’ll make it through and feel much better about yourself. I thank God that He has walked me through this.”

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A&D Director Erica Jenkins Smith, left, presents a certificate to Catherine Deckard upon completion of the alcohol and drug rehabilitation program at the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility Tuesday.



Inmates Lauren Still, left, and Dixie White were among 17 inmates who graduated Tuesday from the alcohol and drug program. Still and White presented statements of acceptance of responsibility during the ceremony.



Members of the Hip Hop Dance Team at the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility in Rankin County performed during a graduation ceremony Tuesday honoring 17 female inmates who completed the alcohol and drug rehabilitation program.