OUR BEST SHOT AT RETURNING TO NORMAL: DOC HOLDS VACCINE EVENTS AROUND THE AGENCY

Photos on Pages 6-7
Minnesota Rehabilitation and Reinvestment Act Policy Introduced

By Commissioner Paul Schnell

The Department of Corrections recently introduced the “Minnesota Rehabilitation and Reinvestment Act.”

At its heart, the Minnesota Rehabilitation and Reinvestment Act (MRRA) is an important step in our larger effort to become a more person-centered organization. The policy creates new incentives that shift our focus from how much time an individual spends under our care to how they spend their time.

The Rehabilitation and Reinvestment Act will work by prioritizing programming that will help the men and women in our facilities deeply invest in transformational programming that aids in self-improvement and successful transition. There are four key components:

- **Individualized Rehabilitation Plan (IRP).** Each person will receive a robust assessment that is used to set concrete, personalized rehabilitation goals.
- **Earned Release.** People can earn earlier release by participating in rehabilitation prescribed by their plan. Example activities include substance abuse treatment, mental health counseling, vocational skills training and education.
- **Earned Supervision Abatement.** Once released, people can again earn a shortened period of community supervision, known as Supervision Abatement, by meeting goals of a personalized plan. Examples of these tailored goals include maintaining employment, chemical health aftercare programming and mental health follow-up counseling, and positive family and community reintegration.
- **Justice Reinvestment Fund.** Savings reinvestment will occur through reallocation of savings across four areas: victim support services; strategic investments in crime prevention and intervention initiatives; reinvestment in community-based correctional programs; and the state’s general fund.

The more people in our facilities invest in self-improvement and in creating a successful future, the better their lives will be and the safer our communities and prisons will be. The end result is system improvement: more incarcerated people working toward a better future; fewer people in prison who waste the time they spend without investment in change; and greater staff capacity to focus intervention efforts on the most high-need people we serve to reduce the risk of re-offending.

Across the country, approximately 40 states have policies allowing for earned release, and the data from our own CIP program demonstrates the benefits of incentivizing change efforts.

We have created a public webpage to learn more about the Minnesota Rehabilitation and Reinvestment Act. Information can be viewed at [mn.gov/doc/mrr](http://mn.gov/doc/mrr).
Mathews Receives ESGR Patriot Award

By Carl Seim

MCF-St. Cloud Records Supervisor Teri Mathews was recently honored with the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve’s (ESGR) Patriot Award for her support of staff who are in the military. Teri was nominated by Carl Seim, one of her staff in the records unit.

ESGR is a Department of Defense program that promotes cooperation and understanding between the Reserve Component Service members and their civilian employers. Within the ESGR program there is an opportunity for Service Members to recognize and nominate their supervisors for their cooperation, understanding and support.

Teri, having a husband who is a Navy veteran, understands the obligations and burdens that Service Members in the Armed Forces carry. The following in italics is from the nomination: She has been supportive of my past involvement with Beyond the Yellow Ribbon Committee and most importantly this past year, the strain of multiple domestic deployments in response to COVID-19 and civil unrest. When the pandemic began, I was called for several weeks to serve as the Chief Religious Affairs NCO for Joint Force Headquarters in Wisconsin. This is where I worked with the State Chaplain and established operational concepts and processes of our Unit Ministry Teams that were called to serve throughout Wisconsin. These operations then were reported to National Guard Bureau in Washington D.C. Throughout the summer, I would be called on to report to Madison for operations and training. Throughout my daily workday with DOC, I would periodically receive calls from the National Guard informing me of situations and actions that were needed to support Religious Operations and Soldier Caring. Teri understood the bi-vocational duties that I was serving and supported my obligation with Army National Guard duties.

Teri without hesitation would approve military leave, find a person to fill in for my duties, and would personally cover down on my position while I was fulfilling my National Guard obligations. Not only would she do this, but she would have concern for my wife who was left at home with an infant and 3-year-old toddler. Teri would offer her personal time to ensure that her employee’s family was taken care of while away on military duty.

Teri in effect, supported the National Emergency Response not only here in the Department of Corrections and for the State of Minnesota, but also on a national level, by supporting and providing the time and space for me to serve my additional duties with the Wisconsin Army National Guard.

Teri is an example to emulate when it comes to the DOC initiative of person-centered caring and support toward employees. She is caring and supportive of all those in the Records Department. She constantly goes out of her way to ensure that we are cared for not only in our jobs, but to show personal concern for our overall well-being.

I’d like to recognize my supervisor for providing person-centered focus on an employee that builds resiliency to carry on those multitude of missions.
Rush City Staff Mourn the Loss of Sgt. Pete Mollhoff

On February 10th, Sgt. Pete Mollhoff passed away as the result of a tragic vehicle accident.

Pete worked at MCF-Rush City for 11-years. He was a treasured friend and co-worker at MCF-Rush City and was well known for his caring spirit and willingness to help anyone. He will truly be missed.

A sincere thank you to all the Critical Incident Stress Management, Peer Support and Honor Guard staff, as well as staff from other facilities that reached out to Rush City during this trying time.

Honor Guard Helps Memorialize Former Red Wing Sgt. Newhart

Former Sgt. William H. Newhart, who worked his 21-year DOC career at MCF-Red Wing, was recently honored at a celebration of life service at C3 Church in Ellsworth, Wisconsin. Members of Red Wing’s Honor Guard attended the service.

Honor Guard duties at the celebration of life service included standing post in three different locations throughout the church (main entrance, entrance to the sanctuary, and near the remains of the deceased). They also worked with local American Legion members, who were in attendance posting colors (Newhart had served in the United States Air Force during the Vietnam War). The Honor Guard also served as ramp guard, lining up in the sanctuary as the bereaved family entered and walked to their seats. Those completing Honor Guard duties were Lt. Anthony Swancutt (Honor Guard Commander), Sgt. Kevin Vandestouwe, Sgt. Kelly Jacobson, Officer Kayla Perkins, Officer Steven Jones, ICWC Crew Leader Jason Garlitch, and Officer Brandon Hanson (member-in-training).

The Newhart family felt immensely grateful for the presence of the Honor Guard at this personal event. “My dad had a heart for serving and for giving. He served in the United States Air Force, DOC, the Pierce County Sheriff’s Department, and the Local Legion, and was a strong leader in his community and family. He always taught to give and don’t expect anything in return. It was such a blessing to see the Honor Guard at the funeral to watch over my father and present the flag to my mother,” remarked William Newhart’s son, Daniel Newhart, who is also a plant maintenance engineer at MCF-Red Wing. “To have those members there, giving of their own time and energy to support someone that would have done the same in return, was powerful and touching. It is something I’m glad my children and I were able to witness and take part in. It is something I will not forget. Thank you so much for all you do.”

The widow of the deceased, Shirley Newhart, also expressed her gratitude. “I would like to thank the honor guard for being at Bill’s funeral. Your presence there gave the whole service a sense of honor to Bill’s life and his service to the state of Minnesota.”

Paying tribute to our staff is why the Honor Guard does what it does. Commander Anthony Swancutt commented, “The Honor Guard is important to me because I feel that the least we can do for our past DOC brethren is to render them the utmost respect and honor they so richly deserve for their years of dedication and service to their institutions and fellow staff.”
Meals Play Important Role in Black History Month Celebration

By Adam LeSarge, Cook Coordinator

A group of MCF-Togo CIP participants assigned to Food Services came up with a menu of dishes they wanted to share with everyone else in celebration of Black History Month. Once the menu was approved, each participant volunteered to make or be involved in the process of making each part of the meal, along with participating in a short verbal presentation reflecting on historical icons who are important to them.

The meal they decided to serve included baked breaded chicken, collard greens, sweet potatoes, baked macaroni and cheese, honey glazed cornbread and peach cobbler. Not only does this give the men the chance to get creative and to make something they are proud of, it gives them an opportunity to share something they enjoy with someone like myself, who has a genuine interest in experiencing different foods.

Several of the men involved in the meal celebration event discussed the meals they chose for the special event.

Restorative Justice Councils in Moose Lake Recognized

By Ian Heaslip, Corrections Program Director

The Restorative Justice Councils operating in the Minnesota Department of Corrections were recognized and nominated for an Employee Recognition Award in the Team category. The group recognized includes staff employed currently at MCF-Moose Lake, CIP-Willow River, and even MN Dept. of Human Services- MSOP.

The council is responsible for coordinating Restorative Justice 101 classes, victim impact classes, apology letter writing workshops, hosting speakers and films, and offering opportunities to incarcerated individuals to process trauma and build conflict resolution skills. Perhaps the most visible project they coordinate are the Restorative Justice Fundraisers, which typically happen two to four times a year in each facility. The proceeds from these fundraisers are donated to community-based organizations that provide victim assistance, crime prevention, or restorative justice programming to our local communities.

Follow DOC on Social Media

The DOC’s social media accounts recognize the excellent work of our staff and incarcerated population and help us recruit new employees. Follow the department on Facebook, Twitter:@MinnCorrections, LinkedIn, Instagram, and TikTok.
Training Computer Aided Dispatch in ISR

By Cody Underdahl

When Intensive Supervised Release agents contact clients in the community, they are now equipped with new safety features. Mobile for Public Safety is the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) program that allows the Minnesota State Patrol and their community allies to self-dispatch when responding to a scene or making contacting with people in the community.

The Minnesota State Patrol recognized the need for their community allies to have a state-wide reporting location and in agreement with the Minnesota Department of Corrections have created a CAD program.

This program allows agents to electronically create an event and check in with the Minnesota State Patrol dispatch when contacting clients at their residence, employment or community programming. That event automatically populates a GPS location to include a physical address with additional details of the community contact added by the agent.

Once the event is created, an automatic predetermined timer will begin. If the agent does not clear the event or the contact with their client requires more time, a radio check from the Minnesota State Patrol will occur for a status update. Agents are also equipped with an ARMER two-way portable radio that allows statewide communication with Minnesota State Patrol, DOC facilities, or additional community stakeholders if needed.

The State Patrol worked in collaboration with Training Coordinator Kelly Wheeler, CPD Dan Traun, DOC trainers such as Tony Esping, Jerome Shear, Jeremiah Sims, Eric Starke, Cody Underdahl and supervisors Roman George, Kelley Blake and Paula Thielen to set up and familiarize agents with the new system. On March 17, 2021 at Fort Ripley, the Intensive Supervised Release North District completed the last of the district trainings to prepare agents to use the system in the community.

Going forward, an iShare sub-site dedicated to 800 MHz and CAD will help to present announcements and to resolve ongoing issues for those using the system.

A special thank you to Sergeant Rick Harjes, Sergeant Mike Krukowski, and Ken Paschke with the Minnesota State Patrol for their assistance with the development of this program and their professional training of DOC staff.

Correctional Peace Officers Foundation Helps Staff in Need

The Correctional Peace Officers Foundation (CPOF) is the only national nonprofit charity in existence for those in the corrections profession. Its primary mission is to assist surviving families of officers who are killed in the line of duty. In addition, the CPOF has a catastrophic assistance program for those in the corrections profession and their families in times of emergency crisis, or other dire need.

The CPOF Board of Directors, the CPOF Catastrophic Coordinator and Supporting Member Sgt. Joe Witter and Sgt. Brandon Witter assisted MCF-Oak Park Heights General Maintenance Worker Dylan Davidson whose home was destroyed in a fire with a monetary donation.

The Catastrophic Assistance Program is made possible by funds provided by the organization supporting members. Without the members, this organization would not be able to assist others.

To learn more about the CPOF, visit: https://cpof.org/
Vaccination Events Around the Department
Vaccination Events Around the Department

Special Thanks to: Ben Drilling from the IMT; AFSCME; and the Facilities for Supplying the Photos.
Women in CIP Make Protective Masks

By Officer Kyle Kelly

During these uncertain times, women in the Challenge Incarceration Program at MCF-Shakopee have been doing their part to help others.

Material was recently donated to the CIP Restorative Justice Program to make masks to give to MCF-Shakopee Health Services for individuals who, for health reasons, require a specialized mask.

While utilizing their textile skills and skills learned in CIP, Alpha 34 and Delta 16 squads along with Katrina Steward of the Charlie squad, made around 100 masks. Corrections Officer Derone Welsh took the lead in ensuring the women knew how to make masks. On March 11, the CIP Restorative Justice program donated the masks to Health Services for those who are medically approved to wear them. Thank you to everyone who helped make this donation a huge success.

Sgt. Tim Wysocki Retires After 26-plus Years

By Ian Heaslip, Corrections Program Director

Sgt. Tim Wysocki retired on March 1st after spending over 26 years with the DOC.

Tim spent his DOC career at the MCF-Moose Lake and Willow River sites, working primarily in living units, utility, and eventually ending his career in the Truck Gate. He was an integral part of the Field Training Officer program at Moose Lake for many years. He helped coordinate the Receiving and Orientation Program and was also an instructor. His humor and demeanor around staff and the incarcerated men will be greatly missed.

Congratulations, Tim!

Estes Promoted at Lino Lakes

By Nik Tatro

In February, Chris Estes promoted to 3rd Watch Sargent in TRIAD at MCF-Lino Lakes and is happy to take on his new challenges in this role.

Chris began his career with the DOC in February of 1997 at MCF-Red Wing, where he remained for two and a half years. He then transferred to MCF Oak Park Heights. In March of 2002, he transferred to MCF-Lino Lakes where he has also been a 1st Aid instructor and an FTO.

Congratulations, Sgt. Estes, on your promotion and thank you for your years of service to the Minnesota Department of Corrections.
Staff Testimonial: Seedia Jaiteh

Hello, my name is Seedia Jaiteh and I have worked at MCF-Oak Park Heights (OPH) for 13 years. I went to school for computer programming but switched my major to Criminal Justice and transferred to Metro State University. After I graduated, I received an internship with Dakota County working in Juvenile Community Probation, called New Chance. I was passionate about the job and enjoyed working with youth and with DC Juvenile Probation. After my internship, I received a part-time job in the same position for one year.

I applied to the DOC and was offered a position as a Corrections Officer at OPH. I had never seen a correctional facility before and in my mind, this was just a temporary steppingstone. I went to Concordia University and received my master’s degree in Criminal Justice Leadership, all while working full-time at OPH, with the intention of continuing in probation.

I have a good rapport with the incarcerated men and staff and initially my thoughts were to retire as Corrections Officer 2. I have had the opportunity to work with veteran staff, new staff, and retired staff and all these people have had a great impact on my career and I have learned a lot from them. I have had the opportunity to work on all watches and in every unit.

As in all jobs, there are difficult times, but OPH offers a lot of staff support to keep us going. I was an E-Board member with AFSCME union and really enjoyed it. The pay and benefits are good such as our pensions, health insurance and the optional deferred compensation. Retiring at the young age of 55 is also great benefit, as I will still have a lot of years left to enjoy life outside of working in a correctional facility.

There are a lot of opportunities for growth and promotions while working with the DOC and if you set your mind to it, the sky is the limit. So that was when I decided to take on the challenge and got a promotion to 3rd watch Utility Sergeant and moved to A-Team 3rd watch Sergeant. After working as the A-Team Sergeant for 3 years, I was offered a six-month Work Out of Class Lieutenant position supervising Complex 6 and Complex 8. In January 2020 I was offered a permanent Lieutenant position on 1st watch and I am currently a Lieutenant on 1st watch.

I still find my career to be very rewarding and am looking forward to my next 8 years before I get the opportunity to retire from OPH. I strongly encourage everyone to come work for the DOC. There are a lot of great opportunities.

Faribault Intern Testimonial: Trista Wolfgram

I am currently completing an assessment internship at MCF-Faribault. Despite the ongoing challenges of working in a facility during a pandemic, my training experience here has been invaluable to my future career as a psychologist. I am supported by not only the supervisors, but the entire team. I have learned how to navigate complex cases and practice my clinical skills while always taking into account the special considerations that accompany working in corrections.

I feel lucky to have had the opportunity to work with the mental health team at MCF-Faribault and would recommend any student pursuing a career in psychology, forensic or otherwise, to consider interning/working here!
Virtual Cognitive Group Sessions Shows Promising Results

By Marc Bloomquist

In 2020, COVID-19 created issues in the Bemidji 2 District of Field Services for holding live, in-person cognitive groups for clients convicted of domestic violence. Still, agents knew these clients historically tend to need help processing and problem solving so they did not return to violence. These groups not only focus on meeting the client need, but also support the victim as well as public safety. When comparing the gap between the need and the importance of the intervention, the necessity to identify a way to continue group to get clients access to cognitive programming became very pressing.

With the need recognized, staff at the Roseau office discussed how to make this happen in a time of social distancing. Seeing the quick changes deployed both in social and in business settings to help people stay connected through technology, staff asked, “why can’t we do this with group?” The first step was figuring out if clients have access to a device with video capability and an internet connection. Staff contacting clients found clients either had access to the tools or were willing to try and obtain access. From there, the court gave permission to move forward with Interpersonal Violence Groups, using an online platform.

Jessica Dvergsten, a Roseau supervision agent and co-facilitator of the group, met with each client ensuring they knew how to access and operate Zoom, set up a trial run for each group participant, helping them download the app to phones and tablets, enabled access to audio within their settings and completed as many practice runs as the group participant needed to feel comfortable for the first virtual session. Staff mailed out all group material so it would be exactly like in-person sessions.

The biggest challenge within the virtual groups was maintaining connection, however, this problem was easily solved by having people use a different location with a better connection or to use free Wi-Fi. Through the virtual sessions, we saw more and more clients participate sitting in their parked vehicles, or even tractors, as it meant less drive time or less time away from work and as they could log in from anywhere! Some features of Zoom even appeared to help participants feel more comfortable sharing and participating. i.e. “breakout rooms” allow group participants to work with their peers.

Within Roseau County, this change was implemented in the three active Interpersonal Violence Intervention groups that were half-way through when COVID hit. All three of these groups have finished with 100 percent successful completion. Further, client self-report and staff observation note that clients open-up more, speak about the complex and difficult situations within their life and show emotion to greater extent. With the success, virtual group was then expanded to all Cognitive groups in the district by mid-summer 2020.

Starting this process virtually seemed difficult and complex, but it got us to a new normal and a more cost-efficient way of doing group work. Clients are still getting the accountability, structure, peer influence, agent support and cognitive learning but are benefitting financially from doing groups online in the form of less time away from work and less travel time. Virtual groups also make treatment more accessible to everyone based on reduced transportation issues. This online group process has now spread to six counties in northern Minnesota and the results are similar.

The outcomes we have experienced so far has exceeded expectations. We have had 123 clients in groups and only six failures since March 2020. This was a great short-term improvement over our historical failure rate in our area for groups of 25 percent. While this is only one year of data, it is very encouraging.

Moving forward, we are going to continue options for groups online. The feedback we received in Roseau, Kittson, and Lake of the Woods counties was very positive with specific client feedback saying that they enjoyed the sessions being virtual. We believe the clients retained the same programming as if they were physically in group for the duration of the class, with some taking even more away than they would have. In the words of one participant, “If you look at the facts in every situation, you will never go wrong.”
Restorative Justice Projects at Shakopee

By Katelyn Lambrecht, Transitions Coordinator

Assisted living centers for senior citizens across the country have been on lockdown for the safety of their residents since the beginning of the pandemic. This was done to protect the physical health and well-being of the residents of these care facilities. However, this has left a lot of people feeling alone in a stressful time. To combat the loneliness, many of the centers are welcoming cards.

Due to restrictions and limited movement at MCF-Shakopee, Restorative Justice (RJ) efforts have been limited. To engage the facility in connecting and giving back to the community and with February 26th recognized as national Letter to an Elder Day, the RJ committee sponsored a card making project to repurpose donated greeting cards. Once completed, these cards will be sent to various nursing/assisted living facilities throughout the community. Transitions Coordinators Katelyn Lambrecht and Sandy Hand have spearheaded this effort.

In addition, the Hennepin Healthcare NICU (neonatal intensive care unit) needs crocheted octopi for their tiniest patients. Research shows that babies cuddling crochet octopus toys saw improvement in breathing, as well as more regulated heartbeats, which improves oxygen levels and leads to overall better health. The tentacles of these cute stuffed toys remind babies of the umbilical cord, which in turn reminds them of being in their mother’s womb, creating a sense of safety.

Since last April, crochet instructions (for beginners and up) and patterns were added to The Reflector Lite editions. Thank you to AnDee Flohr, Special Teacher, for leading this effort.

Van Alstine Promoted to Sergeant at Oak Park Heights

By Lt. Brian Bradley

Congratulations to Shannon Van Alstine on her promotion to Sergeant at MCF-Oak Park Heights.

Shannon began her DOC career in 2014 and has been assigned to all three watches and has worked in all areas. She was the Integrated Conflict Management Systems (ICMS) Coordinator at Oak Park Heights and has also been a Field Training Officer. Recently, she joined the Recruitment Committee as one the coordinators.

Shannon has been an instructor for academy classes and for the all staff training days, teaching the following areas: Diagnosing and Understanding Conflict, Property Cell Pack Ups, and Self Mediation. In December 2020, she obtained a certificate in Evidence-Based Practices for the Corrections Professional.

Sgt. Van Alstine had the honor of being pinned by Lt. Brian Bradley and her uncle Chaplain Martin Shanahan. We congratulate Sgt. Shannon Van Alstine on her accomplishments and look forward to her career and contributions to the Oak Park Heights family.
Hello, I am Sue Ricci the Hiring Coordinator for the Trainee Correction Officer selection process for the Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC). I have been with the Department of Corrections since 2003 and have been employed with the State of Minnesota since 1990. As you can see, most of my career has been spent at the DOC. Why? I enjoy what I do here and the people I work with.

Are you ready to start a career where you can help transform lives? The DOC has competitive pay, great low-cost benefits including health and dental insurance, life insurance, short- and long-term disability, pre-tax flexible spending accounts, generous vacation and sick leave and retirement, free parking and workout facilities at most locations, which are just a few of our many benefits.

You do not need corrections experience or a degree in criminal justice in order to apply. We do have the minimum qualifications that you will need in order to qualify listed on the job posting that can be found at www.mn.gov/careers, search for job ID# 37935 or Trainee-Corrections Officer position. You will also need to take and pass the REACT test, interview, backgrounds and references checks. We offer 6-weeks of paid training at the facility after you are offered a position.

The MN-DOC state facilities are as follows: Faribault, Lino Lakes, Oak Park Heights, Red Wing, Rush City, Shakopee, St. Cloud, Stillwater, Togo and Willow River/Moose Lake. We are hiring at all locations and we would love you to join a team with a national reputation for excellence! The DOC is highly regarded nationwide and has provided a model for other corrections systems to follow. Our mission is to transform lives for a safer Minnesota.

**Frequently Asked Questions:**

- Is there an age requirement to work as a Corrections Officer with the MN-DOC? Yes, you do need to be at least 18 to work at any of the adult facilities and at least 21 to work at Red Wing which is our only Juvenile facility.

- How do you place at the facility? We will let you choose what facility or facilities you would be interested in working at. We will only offer you a position at one of the facilities you selected.

- Where will the training be held? The training will be held at the facility that you are working at.

- Do I have to be eligible to possess a firearm? Yes, if you are not eligible to possess a firearm you will not meet the minimum qualifications.

- What if I have a criminal record? All convictions will need to be closed and conditions of the court met. When completing backgrounds, we will review and make determination on a case by case basis.

- Do I have to have experience in working at a jail or prison or working in the criminal justice field? No, you do not need prior experience as there are other ways to qualify which are all listed in the posting.

- Do I need to have a degree in criminal justice in order to qualify? No, you do not need a degree in criminal justice as there are other ways to qualify which are all listed in the posting.

- Is it safe to work in the DOC? Minnesota has a national reputation for operating secure, humane correctional facilities that have low levels of violence and are safe. Controlled movement, video surveillance, inmate education and work programs, and an incident management system help to maintain this safe environment.

If you or anyone you know is interested in becoming a member of our team as a Trainee Corrections Officer, go to www.mn.gov/careers and apply to job ID#37935 or if you have additional questions, feel free to contact me directly at susan.ricci@state.mn.us or 651/361-7298.
My Educational Journey

By Samantha Heiges

When I was growing up, my siblings and I were pushed by our parents to not only go to school but to do well so we could have a good future and hopefully end up in a better position than them. In my senior year of high school, I began looking at what options I had for colleges and careers and while doing so I ran into a packet for Argosy University in Eagan. Throughout my whole life I loved animals of all kinds, so I really had the mindset that when I got older, I wanted to become a veterinarian. This school did offer a program for Veterinary Technicians, but as I continued to look through the information I stumbled into another fascinating program that I had never heard of and found very interesting, Histology (the study of cells). Reading over the description of this program, I felt like it really fit where I was at the time. The Histology program was very intriguing, and I couldn’t believe I had never heard of it, so I decided to take a leap and sign up to begin my journey of becoming a Histologist.

After I graduated with my High School Diploma from Anoka High School, I moved to Burnsville and continued with my education at Argosy University for Histology. I couldn't wait to do this as a career. Unfortunately, I ended up in a very toxic and abusive relationship which, at the time, ended my college dreams and vision for the future.

As a result of some of the events that happened in this toxic relationship, I was incarcerated at MCF-Shakopee in January of 2009. When I first got here, I did not realize that there were opportunities to take college courses. I was beyond excited when I found out that the prison offered two college classes every quarter that we were able to apply for. The first class that caught my attention was Historical Geology, which I signed up for. At that time the grant that was in place did not allow for people with violent crimes to benefit from the funding. It had been over five years since I had last been in school, so I was nervous but excited at the same time. Historical Geology was so amazing. I had a super passionate teacher, Rob Bursik, who made our class challenging but exciting at the same time. When that class ended, I couldn't wait to get into another one. With the cost of these classes being so high in correlation with such a low salary I did not know how many classes I would be able to take in my time here, but I was determined to do as much as I could. When the grant was reviewed and renewed there had been an adjustment that allowed for all incarcerated people to benefit from the grant funding. This gave me a new enthusiasm about my educational journey. It took over nine years, but I had finally done it, I graduated with my associate’s degree. I couldn’t believe it, but I felt like I had really done something not only with my time but also for my future. Another driving force behind my schooling was my daughter, Taylor. With these classes I was able to relate and share my journey with her as she was going through school. We would always talk about the different homework assignments we had and what we were learning. It was just another way to bond with my daughter and it was great.

While I was in my last class to complete my A.A. my dad and I talked about what I would do next. I told him that I had briefly thought about looking into getting a bachelor’s degree. He said that if I decided to go that route that he would help pay for it. After asking around I found out that the facility did not offer any bachelor’s degree programs and if I were to pay to do it through the mail it would be extremely expensive. I decided at that point that I was very appreciative to have been able to receive my A.A. while incarcerated but I would not be going any further. I told my dad that it was too expensive and that I wasn’t going to let him pay that much for school. All of a sudden, while I was in that final class, I read in the Memo of the Day that they were starting a pilot program for a bachelor’s degree program through Ashland University. They were only going to start this pilot program with 12 students that fit the criteria. I applied and once again was excited and nervous about the potential of this new opportunity. I, along with the other potential candidates, were called in for an informational meeting in ABE-East and we were able to hear all about this new avenue to get a bachelor’s degree. I loved the idea of this new program. The first reason was because I could now obtain the bachelor’s degree that I did not think I would be able to get. The second reason was that I could do it on my own time, even late into the night. (story continued on next page)
My Educational Journey, Continued

The first semester I took three courses to make sure I wouldn’t be overwhelmed with the full-time schedule of four courses. When I started that first semester it truly felt like I was in college on the outside. I loved the feeling of the multiple classes at once and having to organize my life and schedule. I felt I had that drive and push like I had when I was at Argosy. The other part of the Ashland experience that I appreciated was that we were able to communicate with our teachers through e-mails. We wouldn’t have to wait a week to ask the teacher a question like we had to in the quarterly classes. As I went on, I upgraded to the maximum four classes per semester to make sure I could get my classes completed just in case the grant was not renewed. At the end of March 2020, the pandemic came and hit the prison like everywhere else. All the programs and classes throughout the prison were canceled since we could not have any outside personnel coming in. The Ashland program stayed strong though and continued, and thankfully we had our Site Director, Ms. McDonnell, supporting us all the way. Because Ashland is a distance learning program, we were able to continue with our schooling with no problems, even during the lockdowns. Because of the way this program is set-up and run, it only took me about two and a half years to get my Bachelor of Art Degree. I majored in Communications Studies with a minor in Business Administration which I completed with honors, Magna Cum Laude, in December of 2020.

The Ashland program was more than I could have asked for. Before coming to prison, I didn’t think I was going to complete my associate’s degree let alone receive a bachelor’s degree. I chose to continue with my education for multiple reasons. The first reason was so I could be set-up for a more successful future when I re-enter society. The second reason was to make sure I kept my mind fresh and growing by continually learning new things. The final reason was to be a good role model for my daughter. I not only wanted to show her that it was important to go to college but I also wanted her to know that even if you end up in a low place in your life you can dig your way out and still make something of yourself. I am more than grateful to have been able to have the opportunities that I have had here. I knew when I came to MCF-Shakopee that I wanted to take advantage of whatever programing was available to me. With the completion of both degrees I am very proud of what I have accomplished, and I feel like I have been able to use this time to learn and grow as an individual.

My future plans are not fully known at this point. My hope is to be able to find a job where I can help others and feel good with how far I have come and how much I was able to accomplish while incarcerated. These degrees and all the education I have received in here will be vital to my success outside of these walls.

**From Ashland University Site Director, Crystal McDonnell**

Samantha “Sam” Heiges began her Ashland University education at the conception of the program. Sam was one of ten brand new students to start courses in the fall of 2018. As her Site Director, I guided her as she consistently enrolled and completed three courses per term. Sam earned exceptional grades and after the fall of 2019 completed her Associate of Arts degree. However, she was not stopping there; she continued to study even harder and successfully completed four courses each term thereafter until she earned her Bachelor of Art degree. Sam majored in Communications Studies with a minor in Business Administration. She also graduated with honors – Magna Cum Laude.

Supporting Sam’s educational journey has been not only an honor; she has made it easy on me. As an Ashland University student with almost 12 years of time served, she navigated her way through technology that she had never seen, she completed research homework without Google, and faced all of the challenges that COVID-19 brought not only to the facility but to her loved ones. When so many wanted to give up on their goals because of the helplessness and stress from the pandemic, Sam did not. Even through all of this and more I am sure I do not know about, she pushed through until she completed her goal.

I am genuinely impressed with her dedication to the Ashland University program and her ability to accomplish her educational goals in a place where many never thought they could or would. Congratulations Ms. Heiges – I am very proud of you!
Sgt. Doug Steen recently retired after spending more than 28 years with the department. He started as an officer at MCF-St. Cloud prior to transferring to MCF-Moose Lake, where he spent most of his career. He also spent a short time at Willow River - CIP.

Doug promoted to a sergeant position as soon as he was eligible. He remembers the days at Moose Lake when it was transitioning from a state hospital to a correctional facility. He worked in all the living units at the facility prior to spending his last 11 years in Transportation. His words of wisdom for staff are to take care of one another and build your high five.

Congratulations, Doug, on a well-deserved retirement!

Red Wing Lieutenant Promotions

Congratulations to Kyle Prall and Sean Streich on their recent promotions to lieutenants at MCF-Red Wing.

Submitted by: Lt. Anita Kendall

Kyle began his career at Red Wing in 2004 as a Corrections Officer. Over the last 17 years, Kyle worked his way through the ranks and also had Work-Out-of-Class (WOOC) opportunities in several different areas of the facility, including time as a Recreational Therapist, Sergeant, Caseworker and Lieutenant prior to his permanent promotion to Lieutenant in February 2021. Kyle is currently 3rd Watch Relief Lieutenant and supervises Knox, Red Wing’s Adult Living Unit. He also manages adult due process and supervises the Resource Center. Kyle is also an instructor and a member of Red Wing’s Special Operations Response Team. Throughout his career, he has always been highly devoted to Red Wing and the youth we serve. He takes pride in the work that he does and is always willing to help, teach and guide the staff in the facility.

Submitted by: Lt. Adam Blaschko

Sean started at MCF-Stillwater in October 2003 and transferred to MCF-Red Wing in July 2005. He is involved in multiple aspects of the facility, including the Red Wing ICS Team - COML, Red Wing FTO Coordinator, Master CPR and First Aid Instructor, CIT Coach, and 800 MHz Radio Instructor. Sean is a strong and reliable leader who is always willing to go above and beyond his required job duties. He has proven this throughout his time in the department, but more recently during his time as a WOOC lieutenant. He does a nice job of balancing the security and control of the facility yet understands the importance of implementing the treatment model. Lt. Streich will be the primary Watch Commander on 3rd Watch.
Child Friendly Changes to Rush City Visiting Room

By Todd Lubben

The Visiting Room at MCF-Rush City is undergoing a transformation from a sterile environment, to a warmer atmosphere during visits, especially for children. The new look features art by incarcerated individuals such as murals, paintings, and drawings.

Phase one of the project includes a mural of “SpongeBob SquarePants” and his friends in the children’s area. This area will also feature wooden chairs painted like animals, which were built by the carpentry class at MCF-Faribault and painted by MCF-Rush City artists. Phase two will include artwork such as pencil drawings and canvas paintings by artists from the facility. We look forward to the completion of this project bringing more ease to families during visits.

“Well Done Grasshopper”

By Arlene Duff, MCF-Togo

Often in life the student is the teacher and the teacher is the student. It is a reciprocal process. It is the same with mushing. The musher is teaching and training dogs, but the dogs are teaching the musher so much more. Teamwork is critical and an absolute! Without it, you simply cannot move forward on the trail. Period. Each position is critically important and of equal value. The dogs need care, guidance, and direction from the musher, and the musher needs trust, respect, and confidence from their dogs in order for the team to move ahead as one unit.

I had the privilege and opportunity to share my love of dogs and mushing with Marina Fuhrman, Central Office. We both ran teams in the Beargrease 40 (miles) in Duluth and the Wolftrack Classic (32 miles) in Ely. She is a quick learner, very attuned to the dogs, and committed to the process of training many, many miles on a 4-wheeler, and on a dog sled over the course of 6 months…including a 25 below plus windchill training run!

Our success at the races were directly tied into our handlers, Rhonda Vahle and Dominique Wilson, (both from MCF-Lino Lakes). They have a calm, eager, and cheerful presence (even when asked to shovel out a three-foot deep snowbank) that impacts both the musher and the dogs positively. Handlers help with everything from shoveling snow, putting salve and boots on the dog’s feet, preparing food and snacks for the dogs, harnessing the dogs, getting the team up to the start line, and driving the truck to the check points to name just a few responsibilities.

Mushing teaches you to live in the present moment. To be fully present. To live in the here and now.

My heart sings when I reflect on the smiles, the laughter, the experiences we all shared. So proud of the dogs and our teamwork! For those of you who are familiar with the old movie, “Kung Fu”, the elder monk imparts wisdom and training to his student. His student goes out and learns and practices those principles. The elder often says to him, “well done grasshopper.” I would repeat the same to Marina who completed the second race 5 seconds faster than her trainer…well done grasshopper!
Staff Testimonial: Heidi Schafer

My name is Heidi Schafer and I’m an Office and Administrative Specialist (OAS) Senior at MCF-Rush City in the Visiting Administration Unit. I’m starting 16 years with the DOC, all of it at Rush City. I came in as a Temp for human resources department, finance, and the mail room, all while applying for different positions. After a year, I landed a permanent position in the discipline unit as an OAS. I worked for Discipline/OSI for 10 years. I accepted a promotion to OAS-Senior in the newly created centralized Visiting Administration Unit, where I’m currently working.

The DOC is a great place to work it has given me a good wage, great benefits, including, health and dental insurance, life insurance, paid vacation, paid sick time, paid holidays and being an AFSCME union member makes me eligible for free college tuition benefits for me and my family. I have worked with a lot of great people over the years who have taught me a lot. The DOC is a family and your family will always have your back when you need them.

During my time with the DOC, I have been on a few committees including the planning committee for the 20-year mark of Rush City’s operations, Combined Charities, Beyond the Yellow Ribbon committee and Beyond the Yellow Ribbon steering committee. In 2015, I worked with a great group of people to help the DOC become designated as a Yellow Ribbon Company. Most recently, I’ve been asked to help as the facility Recruitment Coordinator for the DOC.

This past year has taught me a lot with this pandemic— be thankful for what we have, never take anything for granted, yesterday is gone, live today for the here and the now, tomorrow is not a guarantee. Hug your loved ones! Take time for yourself, you are your only you!

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Togo’s Choices and Change Program in Area Schools Goes Virtual

By Sgt. Joe Martire

MCF-Togo offers a program called Choices and Change to local schools and colleges. Challenge Incarceration Program (CIP) participants volunteer to speak to students. Schools that have participated in this program have had very good things to say about it and the impact it has had on students.

“I have been working with the Choices and Change program for the past three years. I have observed numerous positive changes in some of the youth that have attended the program,” said Deputy Brock Kick, a St. Louis County School Resource Officer. “The program helps students make positive choices and to make a change in life where it may be needed. The program is one that I will continue to bring into the school system as it makes a difference in lives.”

Due to COVID-19, the presentations have been done via Zoom. Choices and Change has continued to promote positive change in area schools.
Malm Takes on Leadership Role at Lino Lakes

Mindy Malm has stepped into the Psychological Services Director role in SOTP at MCF-Lino Lakes as a Work-Out-of-Class with the retirement of behind Robin Goldman.

Mindy started at the DOC in 2008 when she interned with the Office of Special Investigations at MCF-Rush City. After completing this internship, Mindy began graduate school for her Master’s degree in Marriage and Family Therapy, knowing her ultimate goal was returning to the DOC.

Mindy completed her graduate school internship with the Sex Offender Treatment Program (SOTP) at MCF-Lino Lakes in 2012 and was hired as a therapist upon the completion of her internship hours. In her role as Clinical Program Therapist, Mindy has served as a group therapist as well as the intake coordinator in SOTP.

In 2016, Mindy was promoted to Corrections Program Director in SOTP where she served as a supervisor for four years. In addition to her experience with the DOC, Mindy has provided sex offense-specific treatment services to adolescents and adults in the community for seven years. She has also served on the Minnesota Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers Conference Committee for the past three years, most recently serving as the Chair of the Committee. Mindy has been a member of the Employee Recognition Committee at MCF-Lino Lakes and provided a variety of trainings to behavioral health staff in the DOC. Most recently, Mindy was promoted to a WOOC position as Psychological Services Director at Lino Lakes. This was no small task, as the previous director had started this program and been in her director role for 23 years. When asked about the transition, Mindy shared “The thought of stepping into these large shoes was daunting. I was both nervous and excited for the transition, however I have found the experience to be quite rewarding. I am lucky to be surrounded by a very dedicated and talented team of both therapy and uniformed staff. The pandemic has made it challenging, with limited ability to meet in-person as a team. I make a point of stepping away from my computer screen and walk through a hallway, even if just to say ‘hello’.

Malm continued, “I really hope to continue the foundations of SOTP that make this program successful while also exploring new ideas. When asked ‘why’ something is the way it is, I don’t want to say ‘because it’s always been this way’. I like challenging myself to acknowledge the potential for change, as uncomfortable as it may be. I have an immense amount of gratitude for the support provided to me in my DOC journey, and the continued support I have received with stepping into this new role.”

Staff Testimonial: Laura Cain

Laura is an intern in the Substance Use Disorder Treatment Program.

Hi, my name is Laura Cain. I have previously worked in the community with children and families. I began working with a lot of juveniles with legal issues and adults who had substance use issues, who became incarcerated. I began working on my LADC and chose to intern at MCF-Faribault’s New Dimensions Program as my academic advisor recommended it as a "blue chip opportunity." Honestly, it was the best decision for me for an internship. The security and treatment staff are supportive and safety-focused individuals who care about the well-being of those under our care and take a person-centered treatment approach. I’ve been able to see a lot of different therapy styles and sit in on different groups, which has been beneficial to experience. I’d highly recommend the DOC as a place for students to intern and work.
IMT Activated for One Year During COVID

We’ve seen many challenges due to COVID during the last year, but thanks to the dedicated work of the department’s Incident Management Team (IMT) and facility-level Incident Command Teams, the DOC has accomplished important unprecedented work for the health and safety of our staff and those under our care.

Deputy Commissioner Michelle Smith said she “is so proud of our IMT and facility-level Incident Command Teams. They have spent countless hours preparing and training to ensure that a crisis response to something as complex as the pandemic is handled in a timely and professional manner.”

The IMT is currently comprised of 25 members from cross-functional units of the DOC. Members receive advanced training in the ICS, the Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program, and position-specific training based on their assignment. Many team members are certified Emergency Managers or ICS instructors. In addition, the IMT has two members that deploy to the State Emergency Operations Center when it is activated.

“Our IMT is highly respected. We are one of the few state agencies that have this level of readiness,” said Jay Olson, a member of the team and a Training Development Specialist-Security for the DOC. “Our IMT is often called upon to provide guidance and resources to other organizations looking to create or enhance their teams. This is a clear testament to the commitment, dedication, and expertise of the DOC.”

The team is operating under an Area Command model partnering with Health Services staff to address the pandemic response. This is the longest activation in team history. The command post is staffed Monday through Friday, 06:00 to 16:00 hours, and/or as need to support the mission. Area Command facilitates daily meetings with the executive team to ensure leaders intent and they conduct morning tactics and afternoon operations briefs to ensure connectivity with all business units and facilities. Area Command maintains ongoing contact with partner agencies such as the Minnesota Department of Health, Minnesota Management and Budget, and the Minnesota Department of Public Safety.

“Our IMT is extremely progressive and works very well together. We have long-established relationships inside and out of the DOC” says OSI Director John Melvin. “As an example, being able to partner and integrate seamlessly with our Health Services Unit has proven to be an invaluable asset in our pandemic response.”

Thank you to everyone on IMT, including the Incident Commanders helping to implement the work, for all that we have accomplished during the past year!
Staff Testimonial: Sgt. Joe Martire (Togo)

I started my Minnesota Department of Corrections career in 2008 as a Corrections Officer at “Thistledew Camp” for juveniles. MCF-Togo, Thistledew Program, had a rich history of making a difference in the lives of the clients they served. I was attracted to the history of Thistledew Camp, and knew the people there were devoted to see success in young people beyond their out of home placement. The unique facility location in Northern MN was appeasing to me, having grown up on the Iron Range. The programs Thistledew offered to their population were evidence-based and proven to be successful, who wouldn’t want to work there!

I’ve seen a lot of changes with the mission of Thistledew Camp since I’ve started here. A juvenile 90-day program, wilderness 21-day program, juvenile Portage SUD Treatment Program, Women’s Challenge Incarceration Program (CIP), Togo Minimum Unit program, and currently the site of one of the Challenge Incarceration Programs for men. Working with all these populations has made me a well-rounded officer. When news of MCF-Togo’s closure this summer was shared with us, WE all, every employee, felt like someone had stolen a piece of our dignity. The local communities rallied with employees and there was an overwhelming support for our facility to stay open. Luckily, during a special legislative session this fall, a bonding bill passed, and it included appropriation for the Minnesota Department of Corrections, specifically our facility and the Willow River CIP facility, we were staying open! It’s very rewarding to work with staff who are dedicated every day and continue to strive to provide best interventions for our CIP participants to be successful. With that being said, I enjoy the career I have chosen with the Department of Corrections. The state has a very generous benefits package, great pay, paid vacation, etc. Every day is different and rewarding. I’m truly blessed with the team I am surrounded by at MCF-Togo.

Currently, I’m the Restorative Justice Work Crew (RJWC) Sergeant at MCF-Togo. I take our CIP participants into the local communities to provide work crews, and other restorative projects. This gives CIP participants an opportunity to give back to communities. I can see that CIP participants feel rewarded when they give back to the local communities. It’s very rewarding for myself, the CIP participants, and the facility. We are very well appreciated by each organization we have worked for. Another program I head is the Choices and Change program. We reach out to local schools and ask them if our incarcerated population can share their stories, in hope to change the direction some high school students may be going down. It is very rewarding to see the CIP participants volunteer to do this, because they really do care and want to give back through sharing their story hoping they are planting a seed in a juvenile that might be struggling or choosing the wrong path.

I’m very thankful that MCF-Togo can continue to provide CIP. This program is proven to reduce recidivism, and although there has been a lot of mission changes at MCF-Togo, after 12 years I still enjoy what I do and who I work with, a great team here at MCF-Togo.

Sullivan Promoted to Accounting Manager

Lavonne Sullivan has been named Accounting Manager, where she will serve as the regional finance director for the ML/WR/RC/OPH/Togo region, effective February 24. Before promoting to the new role, she was an accounting supervisor.

During Lavonne’s DOC career, she has completed several Work-Out-of-Class appointments, including as the accounting manager in the former STW/OPH/RW region and in the former ML/WR/RC/Togo region.

“Lavonne has consistently demonstrated excellent leadership qualities and her active engagement will help ensure the continued success of DOC financial operations,” said Chris Dodge, the DOC’s Chief Financial Officer.

Congratulations, Lavonne!
Rush City Academy Graduation

On February 16th, MCF-Rush City welcomed four new staff to the Rush City family!

Photo (L – R)
Andrew Sobtzak (Cook Coordinator),
Daniel Lakeberg (Plant Operations),
Stephanie Buchanan (Central Services Admin Senior), and
Sidney Schwartz (Corrections Officer)

Oak Park Heights CIT Graduates

Congratulations to MCF-Oak Park Heights’ newest CIT graduates! On February 25, Officers Alfred Sanyaolu and Cody Kunhart became CIT graduates. They were coached by Sgt. Matthew Stanley.

Photo (L – R) Officer
Alfred Sanyaolu, Sgt.
Matt Stanley, and
Officer Cody Kunhart

TRIAD Team at Lino Lakes Steps Up in a Big Way

By Rhonda Vahle

A team is a group of people who work together toward a common goal. Each member is responsible for contributing to the team, but the group as a whole is responsible for the team’s success. Success is exactly what the TRIAD team at MCF-Lino Lakes did (as well as many others within the DOC)! A group of us in TRIAD gave our time and energy to help with COVID testing for the facility population and staff during these difficult times. We came together to get the job done and there were so many benefits in doing so!

We were able to meet new people that we may have never ran across while working here and we were able to strengthen the current relationships within TRIAD by spending time and having fun with one another while volunteering. Volunteering helped build pride and confidence in ourselves, our team and the DOC community. This experience helped us feel more connected to our coworkers as we were able to help contribute to something larger than ourselves.

Everyone pictured here was nominated for an Employee Recognition Award for volunteering. This recognition has shown us that we are valued here in the DOC. The DOC is not only the place we work, but the place we are valued and appreciated by the things we do. Good job to the TRIAD team at Lino Lakes!

Photo: (L – R) AWO Mary McComb, Eric Hillman, David Dubin, Mary Hartenstein, Valerie Bashiri, Lauren Webber, Cheyenne Drogsvold, AWA Nik Tatro, Nichole Williams, Karen Hagen, Mark Ortner, Stephanie Chase, Sarah Hagen, Tami Thon, Marie Ludwig, Rhonda Vahle, and Warden Shannon Reimann.
Virtual College Visit at Shakopee

By Randy Feldsien, ABE Teacher CIP

When I started in CIP, part of my responsibilities was teaching Career and Employment (C&E). I reached out to Transitions Coordinator Sandy Hand for help and we developed the curriculum for C&E that included partnerships with Dress for Success and the CareerForce Center. These partnerships included off-grounds field trips that the women really appreciated and helped with career search and interviewing skills. They would also be the inspiration that would include a trip to a local community college down the road.

Another aspect of C&E included students learning more about student loans. Over the years, I started to see a pattern of a lot of debt without completing a degree. As I investigated it more, I realized there was big difference in post-secondary schools and many of the women didn’t realize the differences and were targeted by “For-Profit” schools. I even had one student that had over $80,000 in debt and not even a two-year degree to show for it. Since many of the women wanted to go to college, I wanted to make sure they understood the process and how to navigate the college system including financial aid.

I knew talking about college and experiencing it are two different things. I wanted the women to experience it which hopefully would result in them going to college after they graduated. I first partnered with CIP Restorative Sgt. Jim Church who would take the women on different speaking engagements. One of those included speaking to a class at North Hennepin Community College. In addition to the women speaking to a class I would line up a tour and information session with the Admissions Office. Over the years, Michael Birchard from the Office of Equity and Inclusion would come and speak to the women encouraging them to further their education. He would also give them contact information of people within the Minnesota State System depending on where they were releasing to that would help them be successful.

Birchard was promoted to the Associate Vice President of Equity and Inclusion for both Inver Hills Community College and Dakota County Technical College. Michael reached out to me wanting to continue partnering with CIP at IHCC & DCTC. Over the past several years we have been touring both schools allowing the women to see the difference between a Technical College and a Community College and all the programs they have to offer. With Michael’s positivity and the welcoming admission’s staff, the women feel very empowered to return to school and be successful with all the resources available to them.

Prior to our visit, the women use the Minnesota Career Information System computer program to explore different careers and what, if any, schooling is necessary. Also, during education, we look at the differences between for-profit, private, and public institutions. We also look at tuition and the financial aid process including the ins-and-outs of student loans. They also get an overview of the Minnesota State System.

Since COVID hit, those in-person visits were halted, and many women missed out on an important opportunity. Several months later, Michael and I discussed the idea of a virtual visit that wouldn’t totally replace an in-person visit, however, we knew it would be a way for the women to connect to an outside resource that they could take advantage of once released. The virtual visit occurred February 4th and it was a huge success. The women were able to ask questions and Michael and his staff gave a great presentation and resources the women will use once released.

Testimonial from CIP Squad Alpha 34:

The virtual college tour was very resourceful. We were shown connections that each would be able to utilize and discover the resources that could be made available to us. Especially in the times of COVID 19 we were glad to still be able to seize the opportunity for ways we can excel and participate in higher learning.
DOC Southern Region IT Finalist in MNIT Annual Awards

The MCF-Faribault and MCF-Shakopee IT staff, supervised by Brian Allen, were recently recognized for being a finalist for the MNIT Annual Awards for Team of the Year.

The DOC Southern Region IT Team supports a vast array of technology services for the DOC and during the Pandemic have creatively solved various issues within the facilities to improve accessibility, work environment, and reduce workload for Health Services, mental health, and case managers.

Congratulations and thank you for all the work you have done.

Student Finds Rewarding Career Thanks to Moose Lake Program

By Derek Aldridge

The C-Tech Network Cabling Specialist (NCS) program started over two years ago at MCF-Moose Lake. As this program developed, I felt it would be important to find clerks/tutors that had an interest and ability in the field; Corey Vener fit that bill. Corey not only intended to be a student and become certified to further develop his Telecommunications knowledge, but also to carry out the duties of clerk/tutor as needed.

Throughout the infancy of the NCS program, Corey helped develop many useful software documents. He improved the grading system and added a long-term graduation rate statistics feature that has proved very useful in the success tracking of the program. He helped with the development of the “C-Techopoly”, a version of Monopoly in which gamification is applied to course material for test preparation. Each action Corey made throughout this program has made a lasting impact for future students. The C-Tech NCS program at Moose Lake has developed into what it is in part thanks to Mr. Vener, an impact that will surely be lasting.

Upon Corey’s release, he started a career at Elite Cutover Connections and Splicing as a Fiber Optic Technician. He is now responsible for installing, testing/troubleshooting, and splicing advanced fiber optic systems. With a starting salary near $80,000 a year and benefits, Corey is on to bigger and better things upon his release from prison. The education he received at the MCF-Moose Lake C-Tech program prepared him for the current standards and techniques of the field; however, the contribution he made to program will help prepare future students for their next chapter of life for years to come.
Cognitive Thinking Skills Key Component of CIP

The Cognitive Thinking and Experiential Learning program (Cogs) at MCF-Togo is centered around the five most important functions of cognitive thinking: team building, decision making, problem solving, communication and attention to detail.

Recreation Therapist David Kurth begins working with the new squads in CIP shortly after their arrival and begins developing and encouraging team building. As the individuals get to know each other and learn to work together, various team activities are introduced. The high ropes course, indoor traversing wall/climbing wall, along with Thinking for a Change lessons and utilizing the Circle processes for communication. All these activities are designed to take the CIP participants out of their comfort zone.

Recently the Cogs and Substance Use Disorder program began working on a weekly activity. All aspects of Cogs are designed to help the CIP participant to better deal with different emotions, attitudes, and life experiences that will prepare them for a successful reentry into communities.

Interstate Compact for Adult Supervision through a Global Pandemic & Beyond

By Tracy Hudrlik, Interstate Director

As many long time interstate compact users know, the interstate compact rules and the unit here in the MN DOC have undergone many changes throughout the years. However, nothing prepared any of us for the issues that would arise around interstate compact during a global pandemic.

The DOC’s Interstate Compact Unit strives to be customer service oriented, providing assistance to agents and various other criminal justice stakeholders such as court personnel and sheriff’s office staff. The compact unit staff understand the intricacies of each interstate case can be complex. We encourage all parties to contact our office when they have questions or need assistance.

The pandemic created additional issues regarding travel and compact activities. Staff throughout the state rose to the challenge of virtual witnessing of applications, travel restrictions, ZOOM sentencings and working through the safe return of our individuals when necessary. The new challenges that staff and stakeholders faced presented the opportunity for even more communication and collaboration to come up with solutions to what could seem like impossible situations.

The Interstate Compact Unit has undergone some significant changes as well, including becoming permanent teleworkers. While our staff are not physically located in Central Office any longer, they are still easily reached via email and telephone. Interstate compact training has also shifted significantly. New user training is conducted via on demand prerequisite courses followed up by a two-hour virtual training. During the training, new users learn how the rules apply specifically to Minnesota policy and procedure and can ask questions and go through specific scenarios to learn to apply the rules to real cases. Additionally, more advanced training has been broken down into one hour monthly virtual sessions. Each session reviews a specific interstate compact activity/function and participants can attend any or all monthly sessions.

If you have any questions regarding interstate compact in Minnesota, or have further questions or suggestions regarding training, please feel free to contact Interstate Compact Director Tracy Hudrlik at: tracy.hudrlik@state.mn.us or at 651-285-9271. Or, you can contact the main email at: mnisc.doc@state.mn.us or 651-361-7321 for further assistance.
Oak Park Heights Holds Restorative Justice Fundraiser

By Rachel Culver

In light of the hardships facing communities due to the pandemic, the MCF-Oak Park Heights Restorative Justice Council held a fundraiser to support a victim services provider.

Selling bags of chocolate, the men at Oak Park Heights raised over $1,000. The Bridge for Youth in Minneapolis, which provides runaway and homeless youth safe shelter, and assists in homeless prevention, resolution of family conflicts, and reunification of families, graciously accepted the donation. A big thank you to all who participated in helping support our community.

Gari Stewart, one of the council members stated, “Being a part of Restorative Justice provides an opportunity to help others in need and to be a man of integrity and change.”

Mellingen Promoted to RN Supervisor for Transitional Care Unit

By Joan Wolff, RN, Director of Clinical Operations

Please join me in welcoming Emily Mellingen to the MCF-Oak Park Heights management team. Emily has been promoted from an RN, Senior to the RN, Supervisor position for the Transitional Care Unit.

Emily has worked for the DOC for eight years, spending seven years at MCF-Oak Park Heights and one year working at MCF-Red Wing. Emily exemplified professionalism with those under our care and her peers. She has exceptional understanding of organizational policy, nursing process and procedures. Emily has received multiple awards, including a Certificate of Recognition for her outstanding individual performance with assisting in the ACA certification.

Congratulations, Emily, on your new role!

Faribault CIT Graduates

Congratulations to the newest members of the Crisis Intervention Team at MCF-Faribault. Officer Kaitlyn Hansen, Officer Miranda Krenske, OAS-I Kristina Anderson, Officer Macy McDonough, Officer Sydney Brekke, Case manager Misty Scherf with Lt. Nicholas Duffy and Warden Tracy Beltz. Crisis Intervention Training is an important program in our facilities as it creates a safer and more empathetic environment.

Welcome to the team!
Kuntz and Reed Join IT Leadership Team

Dan Kuntz and Andrew Reed joined the IT leadership team on March 17.

Dan Kuntz - Director, Technical Services:

In his role Dan will be responsible for the complete infrastructure technology delivery across the DOC including MCF and Field Services locations. The Facility Technology Supervisors and staff will be in his organization. He will also provide the leadership for collaboration and management with the Enterprise shared services organizations in our blended team model.

Dan has been a part of the Information Technology industry for the past 30+ years and has worked for the State of Minnesota for the past 22 years. He started his career in IT while in the military when he was stationed in Berlin, Germany installing and supporting computers and networks for the Berlin Brigade. Since that time, he has worked in several different technical and leadership positions both in the private sector as well as for the State of Minnesota which have built a solid foundation of skills that will prove invaluable to the DOC.

He has an Associate of Arts degree in Business Administration Information Systems, and a bachelor's degree of Business Administration in Management, and Finance and Accounting.

Dan is a volunteer Scouter for the Central Minnesota Boy Scouts of America serving in a variety of leadership and committee roles since 2000, a Vigil member of Naguonabe Lodge of the Order of the Arrow (OA), and serves on the technology committee for the North Star Scouting Museum (NSSM) for the girl and boy scouts in North St Paul. Dan has received the Scouting District award of Merit, The Silver Beaver, the OA Founders award, the OA Centurion award, and the NSSM Venerable Honor of Polaris award for his volunteer and leadership activities.

Andrew Reed - Facility Technology Supervisor, East Region:

In his position Andrew will guide the technology delivery and support for the East Region including MCF-Stillwater and MCF-Oak Park Heights.

Andrew got his start with the State of Minnesota at MCF-Rush City as a Training Director. He transferred to Lino Lakes as a Training Director in 2016 and was promoted to Corrections Program Director in 2017 at Stillwater. Andrew is also currently serving in the military and is a Sergeant First Class as the Division Electronic Warfare Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge. Andrew has been with the military for 15 years and has deployed three times. Most recently, Andrew returned from Kuwait where he was tracking and reprogramming army jamming equipment across the Middle East.

His military technology experience and his functional understanding of DOC applications and systems sets a strong foundation for this role. Andrew is also working on his master's degree for IT Management and anticipates graduating in May of 2022. Andrew is enthusiastic about technology and is always looking for ways to improve business processes and functional areas through its capabilities.
Open University in Session at Lino Lakes

By Randall Bergman, MCF-Lino Lakes Education Director

On a recent Saturday morning, forty college students at MCF-Lino Lakes eagerly prepared for college lectures to begin on the Education Channel. Professor Julie Rooney, a Teaching Fellow at Yale University, is leading a Contemporary Art course, and University of Minnesota’s Ruby Nguyen, Ph.D is teaching “Our Health.”

Adhering to COVID-19 health safety protocols, students sit in small groups wearing masks or in their cells alone with their TVs. Even though the students are incarcerated, much hope and warmth can be felt as they engaged the newly designed Distance Learning platforms each week through socially distanced conversations and classroom discussion through group chats.

The DOC’s Open University program is a truly innovative program made available this year through a private grant from Ascendium Education Group in Wisconsin. Although we do not always have the modern infrastructure and resources typically available to students attending colleges and universities in the general public, the desire and determination of our incarcerated people to achieve academic success is certainly present and strong across facilities. These single credit courses are being provided at MCF-Lino Lakes this spring through Metropolitan State University with much thanks to Daniel Karpowitz for his vision as Assistant Commissioner, Interagency Lead on Criminal Justice and Special Advisor to the Governor.

To make these courses work in a correctional setting, both professors selected textbooks, bundle course materials, and record lectures each week. DOC Education Directors ensure students have materials and facilitate viewing through designated facility TV channels. A diverse group of students of all ages and backgrounds chose to take advantage of this higher learning opportunity. At MCF-Lino Lakes, even our high school students are concurrently enrolled in these classes as they complete their Walter Maginnis High School diplomas. This has allowed them to gain exposure to rigorous and rich college course content and with feedback from their college professors.

Professor Rooney shared her “deep desire to truly expose students to the academic study of art and connect them with the larger art community” by offering her course this term. This is a meaningful experience for many students to be taught by a Yale University graduate and associate professor. Several students expressed how much they enjoy telling their families about being in college. One student even mentioned how “honored [he] feels to be in an Ivy League class,” when he never thought “college would ever be possible for someone like me,” for most of his young life.

For most students, this truly is an opportunity of a lifetime. For the K-12 eligible students whom are dual enrolled, they are now thinking about not just their coming graduation day but also about how completing college will make a difference for them while incarcerated and better job prospects when they return to their communities as well educated and forever changed adults.