Don’t Call Them Guards: Navigating Corrections Culture

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Workshop Presenters

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Just Detention International

JDI is a health and human rights organization that seeks to end sexual violence in all forms of detention.

Core goals:
1. Hold government officials accountable
2. Change public attitudes about sexual violence behind bars
3. Ensure survivors get the help they need

Special Thanks

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The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this webinar are those of the presenters and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.
Workshop Logistics

- Professional courtesy
- Self-care
- Terms and Definitions
- Questions

Objectives

**By the end of this session, participants will be able to:**

- Understand the culture of correctional institutions
- Develop simple practical skills to better navigate the correctional systems
- Use words and phrases that will help them communicate effectively with corrections staff and prisoners
Workshop Agenda

I. Key Players
II. Internal Staff Dynamics
III. Understanding Culture
IV. In-Person Services Exercise
V. Tips for Working with Corrections Staff

Who Are the Key Players?

- Administration
- Corrections Staff
- Medical Staff
- Mental Health Staff
- Programming Staff
- Contractors
- MD, DDS, RN
- PsyD, DO, LCSW,
Administrative Staff

Corrections Staff
Programming Staff

Contractors
Medical and Mental Health Staff

Challenging Work Conditions

- Stressful environment
- Emergency situations
- Limited resources
Challenging Work Conditions (cont.)

- Understaffing
- Large caseloads
- Long shifts
- Mandatory overtime

Challenging Work Conditions (cont.)

- Corrections “politics”
- Isolation
- Long-term impact
I am probably NOT going to change corrections opinions about the program. However, as the culture at the facility changes, they will most likely buy into the importance of offering survivor services.

— Karin Stone, Director of Client Services, Women’s Center High Desert, Inc.
Career Motivations

Positive
- Honorable
- Well-trained
- Professional

Negative
- “Wannabe cops”
- Uncaring or callous
- “Guards” or “Babysitters”

Public Perception
Team and Family

Staff vs. Everyone Else
Staff vs. Prisoner

Helpful Terms in Corrections

- Safety
- Security
- Chain of Command
- Accountability
Voices from the Field

“It’s impossible to learn all the acronyms and understand what everyone’s role is. The good thing is, you don’t have to! It’s enough to just know one person in order to best support survivors.”

— Jessica Seipel, Prevention Education Coordinator and Trauma Counselor, Rape Trauma Services of San Mateo
Corrections Model

- Paramilitary organization
- Emphasis on chain of command
- Rule-based
- Regimented schedules

Advocacy Model

- Survivor-centered
- Engage multiple community partners
- Support strategies and programs that directly impact survivors
- Mobilize communities
- Educate and involve a broader community
The Advocate’s Principles

• Survivors deserve care, support, good health, and safety
• Perpetrators should be held accountable
• No one deserves to be raped
• Changing rape culture is critical to eliminating sexual violence

Your Approach

• Trauma-informed and survivor-centered
• Promote healing and well-being
• Listen and believe survivors
• Set boundaries and explain limitations
• Follow mandated reporting requirements
The Corrections Official’s Principles

- Public safety and public health
- Care, custody, and control
- Prisoners are community members
- Officials want to see prisoners succeed in life
- Prisoners deserve a second chance

Their Approach

- Safety and security for all staff, visitors, and prisoners
- Dependence on rules and regulations that minimize agency liability and damage to people or property
- Provision of educational and therapeutic programs
- Assistance with re-entry into the community
Key Differences in Culture

• Corrections agencies are paramilitary and hierarchical
• Respect for authority is perceived to increase safety
• Outsiders are sometimes met with suspicion
• Safety and security are paramount
• Survivors have limited autonomy

Advocates: Self-Identification Checklist

• Agency is often under-funded or under-resourced
• Senior-level employees wear multiple hats
• Secondary trauma and long hours play a role in staff turnover
• Staff entered the helping profession because they care for others or about injustice
• Staff are distrustful or cautious around law enforcement
Corrections Staff: Self-Identification Checklist

• Agency is often under-funded or under-resourced
• Employees wear multiple hats
• Secondary trauma and long hours play a role in staff turnover
• Staff entered law enforcement or corrections because they care about the community and justice
• Staff are distrustful or cautious around community-based organizations

You are similar in many ways!
In-Person Services Exercise

The Expected
The Unexpected

Temporary Housing Units

What would YOU DO?
Self-Care

• Maintain healthy boundaries
• Be clear about your limits
• Prepare yourself

“Getting in contact with my advocate saved my life. She was the person who said it wasn’t my fault. That was a real turning point for me.”

— Joe Booth, member of JDI’s Survivor Council
Advocacy Tips

Bob’s Insider Tips

- Be sensitive
- Work to communicate
- Don’t take it personal
Bob's Insider Tips

- Recognize your biases
- Assume good intentions
- Trust the team

Things to Remember

- Demonstrate your commitment to safety and a willingness to follow facility rules
- Work respectfully and cooperatively with corrections staff while remaining a survivor advocate
Things to Remember (cont.)

• Be clear about your role
• Talk about ways you share a vision or certain goals with corrections staff
• Maintain your bottom line that no one deserves to be sexually abused
Advocate Resources

- Advocates Manual

**Advocate Resources:**

www.justdetention.org/advocate-resources

Center:

prearesourcecenter.org
Resource Guide for Survivors

Add your agency to JDI’s Resource Guide for Survivors of Sexual Abuse Behind Bars:

bit.ly/VDap7j

For More Information

Direct questions to: advocate@justdetention.org

For more information: justdetention.org

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