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# MORE program gives inmates hope



From left, Madison County Sheriff Todd M. Hood, Rachel Copland, CAP Care Management Program Director Tennille Kochanowski, MORE Case Manager Melissa Hale. (Photo provided)

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**WAMPSVILLE, N.Y.** — Inmates at the Madison County Correctional Facility are being directed towards a productive post-incarceration life through the efforts of Sheriff Todd M. Hood and members of Madison County’s Getting Ahead Coalition.

They support the Madison County Opportunities for Re-Entry and Employment program. The MORE program was created to increase economic opportunities for those recently released from jail.

The program combines 10-week group training sessions while individuals are incarcerated, followed by individualized case management services upon release. Inmates receive soft skills training while incarcerated. Upon release, the individual will work one on one with an employment coordinator to find jobs.

Soft skills training includes resource awareness, networking, hidden rules and expectations of the work world, and employer and co-worker interaction.

The Center for Court Innovation works through New York State to design and implement operating programs, provide research and give justice system stakeholders the tools they need to launch new strategies.

The center’s projects include community-based violence prevention projects, alternatives to incarceration, re-entry initiatives, court-based programs that seek to promote positive individual and family change and many others. Curriculum is based on the principles of an evidence-based prisoner reentry model.

“We just graduated our first class last week,” MORE Program Coordinator Rachel Copland said. “We have cohorts of ten men and four women right now. We find people who may be helped in this program through surveys we perform during the intake process.”

Hood said a number of risk factors indicate whether someone is at risk for incarceration. They include mental illness, broken families, poverty, substance abuse and lack of self-control. “Any one of us, at some point, could get angry and do something that gets us in jail,” he said.

Copland said that finding housing for former incarcerated persons is a priority along with teaching job skills. “The housing crisis is a big problem,” Copland said. “If you have someone who is around people who are trouble, or if you don’t have a place to stay then you will find yourself in trouble.”



According to Habitat for Humanity, in 2020 30% of all households had unaffordable rent or mortgage payments. Unaffordable is defined as exceeding 30% of monthly household income. More than one in seven households paid over half of their income on housing. The burdens rose most for those earning between \$30,000 and \$45,000. Home prices rose 20.6% from March 2021 to March 2022 and rents increased 12%.

According to the Reentry and Housing Coalition, formerly incarcerated individual experience high rates of homelessness, and between 30 and 50% of parolees are homeless.

“Those who are out and have supervision are actually less likely to have housing insecurity,” Copland said. “Having a male stay with a girlfriend who has an order of protection against him, for example, is not an ideal situation.”

The Alliance for Economic Inclusion grant is a three-year renewable grant and comes to Madison County CAP for the MORE program. The Center for Court Innovation has subcontracted Copland’s position.

Reentry initiatives are on NY’s and national radar and have been prioritized recently in the news by New York State Governor Kathy Hochul and President Biden. The state Division of Criminal Justice has invested in 20 of New York’s 62 counties’ re-entry program. Madison County is not one of the 20 counties currently funded.

“As you can see, the counties that are prioritized do not include most rural counties,” Copland said. “We hope the MORE program will provide best practices and model programming for the state.”

MORE and Healthy Families will be hosting twice-weekly, post-release events for former inmates during certain Thursdays each month from September through December.

The classes include professional development and networking, access to support and resources, and MORE training. Food will be provided and Wi-Fi and internet access will be available.

The CAP will host programs at 1001 New Market Drive, Canastota, the first Thursday of each month from five p.m. – six p.m. The CAP dates are Sept. 1, Oct. 6, Nov. 3 and Dec. 1.

The Oneida Public Library, 459 Main St., Oneida, will host programs the third Thursday of each month from 11 a.m. until noon. The OPL dates are Sept. 15, Oct. 20, Nov. 17 and Dec. 15.



“I wanted to highlight the community support we have received from local employers, specifically Dutchland Plastics, Oneida Molded Plastics, Prime Materials Recovery, and Flour and Salt Café, in exploring what it looks like to employ/support this re-entering, fragile population,” Copland said. “We continue to work on building new and existing employer relationships through hiring plans and employee updates.”



**Roger Seibert**

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