

Federal Bureau of Prisons Life Connections Pilot Program

The Bureau of Prisons Life Connections Pilot Program is a residential multi-faith restorative justice program. The 18-month program is open to adult volunteer inmates in both male and female facilities in five BOP facilities across the country. The mission of the program is to reduce recidivism and bring reconciliation to victim, community and inmate through study of secular reentry-related subjects (e.g., ethical decision-making; anger management; victim restitution) from the inmate's religious or philosophical perspective. Participants also are matched with volunteer mentors of their faith or philosophy who visit weekly and are linked with a church or likeminded group at their release destination in order to enhance community reintegration.

Participants from the same faith study and pray together in small groups. They are led through a secular life-skills curriculum by a spiritual guide of their faith, who discusses what their sacred text (Quran, Bible, Torah) says about the subject (e.g., responsible parenting; budgeting; marriage enrichment; religious tolerance and respect;). They join their respective general prison population worship service (those of no designated faith engage in individual study during chapel times).

Participating inmates must apply for the program voluntarily; except for high security inmates, participants must be within 24 - 60 months of release (females longer); must be recommended by the sending institution's chaplain and approved by its warden. The initial cohort at each site was 32-36 inmates. The second cohort began after six months and the third after 12 months.

Participants must complete 500 hours of community service (such as sewing blankets for HIV-positive babies), participate in Victim Impact Programs, complete 150 hours of addiction programming; provide financial and emotional support to their family through weekly correspondence; maintain regular journaling; and have re-entry goals and action steps.

Participants have no incentive to participate - - other than a desire to change and grow. The LCP facilities are no different that any other cellblock in the facility. The move to an LCP facility of their security level will often take them much farther away from their family for 18 months. Moreover, the classwork and community service prevents participants from working as much as the general population, thus cutting in half their monthly earnings.

The Federal Bureau of Prisons plans to evaluate the program's effect on recidivism and hopes to expand LCP into as many as five more sites in FY 07. In addition, BOP hopes to open single-faith programs in FY 07.

BOP solicits volunteer mentors to work with inmates during incarceration and after their release. Individuals interested in becoming a Life Connections mentor-volunteer at any of the five Bureau of Prisons sites should contact a chaplain or the Life Connections Program personnel at the facilities listed below. Individuals interested in volunteering as a Life Connections mentor for inmates after their release may contact Volunteers of America at (225) 338-0794.

Life Connections Pilot Program Sites

- Federal Correctional Institution, Milan, Michigan (734) 439-1511
- U.S. Penitentiary, Leavenworth, Kansas (913) 682-8700
- Federal Medical Center, Carswell, Texas (817) 782-4888
- Federal Correctional Institution, Petersburg, Virginia (804) 733-7881
- U.S. Penitentiary, Terre Haute, IN (812) 244-4400