

Joy Westrum Stemming Tide of Recidivism with Innovative Prisoner Rehabilitation

When Joy Westrum looks into the faces of men who have hit rock bottom, she doesn't see despair; she sees potential. As President of the Second Chance Program (www.secondchancecenters.com), Westrum has often witnessed the disintegrating lives of men who have committed violent crimes because of their addiction to drugs. Yet she has also been a part of their transformation into citizens who have kicked their drug habits, gained self-respect, and created productive lives. "With the right tools, criminal addicts can turn their lives around," says Westrum. "My passion to help them is fueled by the results we're seeing. It really restores your hope in mankind."

Westrum's work in prisoner rehabilitation began over a decade ago. "I looked at the recidivism issue and saw how it was bankrupting our communities," she says. "The majority of violent crimes are drug- and alcohol-related, so I knew that the prisoners needed tools and a vital education on life issues that would help them rebuild themselves from the bottom up."

Westrum's husband, Rick Pendery, founded the Second Chance Program in Mexico, and the couple worked in prisons in Ensenada and Tijuana. "We worked with nearly six thousand prisoners, and really succeeded in turning a large part of the prisons into functioning rehabilitation centers," says Westrum. "There would be 600 to 800 hardened inmates studying in one large room, with only our staff members to monitor them. The prisoners would study together six days a week, eight hours a day, and we never had a serious incident." The Second Chance Program reduced recidivism by 90 percent, as documented by three university studies.

What's the secret? The cornerstone of the Second Chance Center is four modules designed to restore personal integrity and self-esteem: drug withdrawal and rehabilitation; education; self-respect; and life skills. The drug withdrawal and rehabilitation modules involve drug-free withdrawal using vitamins and a sauna-based detox, then working with the inmate to increase communication skills, gain emotional control, and accept responsibility for his actions. The education module is designed to achieve inmate literacy and increase proficiency, while the self-respect component consists of shifting the inmate's moral compass and increasing personal responsibility. The life skills module involves teaching the inmate to critically evaluate those who have a positive or negative influence on his life and learn tools to help him succeed. The protocol utilized in the Second Chance Program is based on discoveries by L. Ron Hubbard in the fields of drug and criminal rehabilitation.

Westrum's experience led her and Pendery to open up the Second Chance Center in Albuquerque, N.M., last fall. The secure lock-down facility currently houses 55 men who have been given alternative sentencing, and has a waiting list of over 200. The facility has 600 beds with the capacity to treat over 1,000 residents a year. Renovation is underway to bring more of the facility's beds online.

"For the first time, we're actually diverting serious substance abusers from jails and prisons into a facility that gives them what they need to turn their lives around," says Westrum. "Since the cost is equal to or less than what the state would spend to house the inmates, everyone wins. With the low recidivism rate, taxpayers don't have to foot the bill for future incarcerations, and the prisoners have been trained and empowered to lead successful and rewarding lives."

The success of the Second Chance Center has led to plans to expand the Albuquerque facility, and Westrum is fielding calls from other states that would like to bring Second Chance to their jurisdictions. "Ninety-eight percent of the population we serve doesn't want to be stuck in the trap of drugs and crime. They want a way out. I'm thankful that we can give them the education and tools they need to lead successful lives."

About the Author

Kris Nickerson is the Editor-in-Chief of Press Direct International (<http://www.pressdirectinternational.org>), a global information website that provides reliable information tailored to professionals in financial, media, and corporate markets. His thorough knowledge of industries ranging from health care and travel to real estate and financial investing enables him to quickly grasp the nuances of emerging markets and technologies.

Source: <http://www.articletrader.com>