

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
FAITH-BASED INITIATIVE ACTIVITIES

Current Activities:

1.) Children of Incarcerated Parents (CIP)

This program is based on the premise that children of prisoners are unintended victims of their parent's criminal activities, being left behind while their parents are incarcerated. The program aims to ensure that the children are matched with services in the community and attempts to maintain the relationship between the parent and child when appropriate. The CIP grant held a statewide provider summit in Anchorage, developed a strategy for identifying children of incarcerated parents, and developed a process to match those children to services in the community. The program also offers parenting skills classes and group sessions to incarcerated parents to give them the skills to rebuild their families, and runs a program for incarcerated parents to send home video-taped messages to their kids on holidays and birthdays.

2.) Faith-Based Housing Unit at Arizona Contract Facility

This program is offered at the Department of Corrections contract facility in Florence, Arizona. The Arizona facility was chosen because that is where our most stable inmate population is housed (fewer transfers and movement of inmates). Prisoners enter into the program on a voluntary basis and live in one housing unit that follows a faith-based therapeutic community model. A volunteer from the local community who has developed structured activities for the prisoners oversees the program. Participants must follow strict guidelines to stay in the program. Facility officials advise that the unit is, 'the easiest unit in the place to manage.'

3.) Department of Corrections Chaplaincy Program

This program is run under the direction of Chaplain Mike Ensich. Chaplain Ensich coordinates the activities of paid and volunteer chaplains at facilities around the state who provide multi-faith Chaplaincy services. The program also screens persons from the community wishing to serve as religious volunteers and issues departmental volunteer identification cards. There are currently two paid chaplains at Department of Corrections facilities in Seward and Juneau. The Chaplaincy program has been immensely successful, in 2001 alone, the program provided 25,983 donated volunteer hours and inmate attendance topped 100,000, and in 2002, private financial donations exceeded \$107,000.

Activities Under Development :

1.) Teen Challenge

Teen Challenge is a nationwide program that provides substance abuse treatment and life skills training to at-risk adults in a faith-based setting. Teen Challenge is currently offering the Department of Corrections up to 20 treatment beds for women in a semi-secure housing unit, similar to other contract halfway houses. Women placed in the unit would pay for their room and board, would be required to work, and would participate in intensive group and individual treatment. The department is working out the details to finalize the arrangement so that women can be placed in the facility on furlough.

Teen Challenge currently is pursuing State of Alaska certification with ADA, to ensure that women placed in the facility on furlough will get credit for attending court-ordered substance abuse treatment.

2.) In-State Faith-Based Housing Unit

Director of Institutions Mike Addington is working with facility-level staff and Chaplainensch to identify a possible facility and housing unit to establish an in-state faith-based housing unit. This program would be run on a community model, similar to the department's faith-based housing unit at the Arizona contract facility. Inmates would choose to enter the housing unit and program voluntarily. Once part of this special housing unit, the inmate would be subject to strict guidelines, and the facility chaplain and/or trained religious volunteers would coordinate and monitor activities.

3.) Children of Incarcerated Parents (CIP) Expansion to Anchorage

Catholic Community Services is seeking a grant from the National Institute of Corrections that would fully expand the CIP to the Highland Mountain Correctional Center, the long-term facility for women. The program would offer the parenting classes and group sessions. The Department of Corrections has written a letter in support of the grant.

4.) Expand Department of Corrections Chaplaincy Program

The department, along with a very active volunteer corps is working to expand the Chaplaincy program with the ultimate goal of having chaplains in every Alaska institution. The department is working to expand the program as much as possible within current financial constraints.