

Making Changes from Within the Walls

Missouri Eastern Correctional Center (MECC) inmate William Elrod's eyes remained focused on Helping Offenders Maintain Stability (HOMS) Chief Executive Officer Felece Brown as she talked to a group of nearly 15 offenders about life skills they will need upon their release from prison. For Elrod, who is expecting to be released in August after serving 13 months for robbery, the mentoring was something he welcomed because he never had it before in his young life.



"I have been in and out of jails since I was a teenager, and I am tired of being locked up. I want to make a change," Elrod said. "I've never had a father figure in my life, but having a mentor in here provides a lot of perspective in areas that I am going to need help with when I get out of here. I want to stay out of here and get a job, and re-engage with my family."

ARCHS was awarded \$265,944 by the U.S. Department of Justice to create a pre and post release prison release mentoring partnership to serve non-violent offenders who are set to be released from MECC and the Women's Eastern Reception, Diagnostic and Correctional Center in Vandalia. ARCHS is the first organization in Missouri to be awarded "Second Chance Act" federal funding.

The two-year grant, which began in February of this year, is expected to serve 280 offenders. It has already served 240 in the first year of the grant.

The ARCHS' Reentry Partnership will provide offenders with pre-release mentoring activities that include family reunification support services, life-skills classes, group mentoring and access to case management and wraparound services. Post-release services including mentoring, job and soft skills training and access to mental health and substance abuse, housing and other community support activities.

"This is a great opportunity to get the appropriate people into the prisons who can help with the transition back into society upon release," said Les Johnson, ARCHS' Vice-President of Partnerships. "Mentoring in any form can be beneficial, but this allows us to meet with offenders who are about ready to be released and learn about what obstacles they may have to overcome. This allows us to engineer a map for successful release back into their communities."

ARCHS contracted HOMS and others to go into the prisons and provide the mentoring and other support services.

"This is an opportunity to start working with them while they are still in prison, which helps us to learn what their barriers are," Brown said. "We are building a relationship with them before they get out, and there is no other agency in the area coming into the prisons to do that."

In addition to the grant award, ARCHS and its partners will provide an additional \$106,442 of in-kind funds to support the grant's activities. The partnership is designed to enhance existing pre-release services provided by the Missouri Department of Corrections.