

# Writing from Within Poetry Project: A Poetry Workshop at Belknap County Department of Corrections

June 24, 2014

## **Introduction: Tell us about your organization**

**Mission of Belknap County Department of Corrections:** The Mission of the Belknap County Department of Corrections is to provide protection of society through the detention and confinement of pre-trial detainees and post-trial confines in a safe and secure condition. Belknap County Department of Corrections will provide humane treatment of the offenders during their time of confinement. This will be accomplished by complying with Constitutional Requirements, Correctional Standards, and by providing physical and mental health services and an opportunity for educational, religious, and recreational services. It is the goal of BCDOC, through proper care from the staff that the offenders will leave no worse and possibly better than when he or she arrived at the facility. Care will be taken to insure positive growth and re-integration into the community upon release.

## **1. Why do you want to undertake this project:**

Over the past few years several inmates at Belknap County Department of Corrections (BCDOC) have expressed an interest in a poetry class. The arts have been an important outlet for many of the inmates here and they use the arts as a way to express feelings that perhaps cannot be expressed in any other manner. Many of the inmates draw, journal and write poetry on a daily basis as a way for them to cope with their anger, loss, sadness, loneliness, grief, and the daily frustrations that incarceration can bring.

The goals for the Writing From Within Poetry Project (WFWPP) are: (1) Introduce the inmates to the works of different Poets and styles of Poetry; (2) Help the inmates find their own authentic voice for writing their own poetry; (3) To participate in the poetry readings at BCDOC and to have their poems “published” in the final book of poetry created from this project; (4) Teach the inmates how writing is therapeutic and a socially appropriate way for them to express their feelings; (5) Encourage the inmates to continue with their writing on the outside and connect them with different classes and writing groups they could be involved with once they are released; and (6) To reduce the number of inmate disciplinary reports for the inmates participating in this project.

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This project will be beneficial to inmates because many of them feel as though they don't have a voice. Through this class they will not only explore the writings of famous poets and create their own writing, but they will get their voices and feelings heard by getting their words down on paper writing their own poetry.

In the mission statement for BCDOC it states that inmates will be provided with "an opportunity for educational, religious, and recreational services". The WFWPP will provide an educational service for the inmates by learning about poets, the craft of writing, and how to devise their own poetry. This project will also provide a recreational service for the inmates by getting them out of their units and by being involved in an activity that they enjoy.

The mission statement also says "the offenders will leave no worse and possibly better than when he or she arrived at the facility". The arts have shown to be beneficial for many of the inmates here and if more inmates were able to participate in artistic programming they might develop a greater self-awareness and emotional health, and they might find a clearer sense of purpose and direction than when they first arrived.

## **2. What community support do you have and how will the community benefit?**

The internal community of BCDOC consists of the Correctional Officers, the Inmates, the Superintendent, the Deputy Superintendent, the Programs Director, the Medical Staff, the Sergeants, the County Commissioners, the Finance Director and the County Administrator. The external community of BCDOC includes the volunteers and community agencies that come into the facility and the organizations and businesses within Laconia and Belknap County.

By offering this WFWPP to the inmates the internal and external communities will benefit. By giving the inmates the opportunity to express themselves creatively in a pro-social way the internal community of BCDOC will benefit as will the inmate themselves. Just by getting an inmate out of their housing unit and interacting with others from the community they are learning social skills and are improving their self-regulation and self-control. If an inmate is engaged in a program he or she is less likely to be bored which in turn can lead to less destruction in their housing units, fewer conflicts among the inmates and a reduction in disciplinary reports. When inmates are involved in programming it allows them the opportunity

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to self-reflect on their decisions and thought-processes that led to their incarceration, leading to a greater self-awareness and understanding.

This WFWPP will also benefit the external community of BCDOC by allowing outside community members to come to the jail as teachers and guest poets, and work directly with the inmates. This community involvement will help to break the stereo-types of inmates and Correctional Facilities. This project will help foster an understanding within the community that BCDOC and the inmates incarcerated here, are part of the larger community and will be returning to that community upon release. The more the community is able to put into the jail in terms of resources, volunteers, and programming, the greater the success the inmates will have upon re-entry into that community and the less likely they will be to re-offend.

Some of the internal and external community support for this project include: Daniel P. Ward – Superintendent of BCDOC, Dave Berry – Deputy Superintendent of BCDOC, Sue Cagle – Educator at UNH Cooperative Extension, Oriana Filiault – DCYF Jail Liaison, Deborah Tasker – Consultant and High School Equivalency Administrator at Bureau of Adult Education, Kathy Keller – Executive Director of New Beginnings, Shannon Robinson-Beland – Director of Family Resource Center of Central NH, Erika Lea – Parent Educator/Family Support Specialist of Family Resource Center of Central NH, Jacqui Abikoff – Director of Horizons Counseling and Nathan Brody Substance Abuse Program, Captain Steve Warren of the Laconia Salvation Army, Margaret K. Selig – Director of Laconia Adult Education, Carol Cantin – Manager of NH Employment Security, and Thomas Goulette – Vice President of Academic and Community Affairs at Lakes Region Community College;

### **3. What are you planning to do?**

We are planning to offer the WFWPP in four – six week sessions to male and female inmates during the course of the grant year. We also plan to schedule at least two poetry readings for the inmates; one where the inmates will have the opportunity to read their own work and one where the inmates will be able to hear the work of the poetry teachers and guest poet volunteers.

The WFWPP will occur during the grant calendar year of November 2014-September 2015 and all classes will be held in the classroom at BCDOC. Our target audience and participants will

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be male and female minimum and medium security inmates at BCDOC. The instructors for this project will be local published poets, Timothy Muskat and Linda Kunhardt. \*Please see attached background summaries and work samples.

**4. How are you going to accomplish your project?**

The planning started in May 2014 and the implementation of the WFWPP will be ready to start in November, 2014. Tamara McGonagle, the Programs Director at BCDOC, will be the Project Director for the WFWPP. \*Please see attached resume.

To “advertise” the WFWPP, memos will be put up in all the inmate housing units and the inmates interested in participating will submit a request form to the Programs Director. The memos will credit that this is a grant-funded program through the NH State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts.

The cash match will be met through funds provided through BCDOC which will pay for composition books, poetry books, and writing books – either “The Artist’s Way” or “The Writer’s Way”, as well as pay for the preparation and planning time for the instructors. The in-kind match will be met through the Programs Directors time, the time of a part-time Correctional Officer, and the use of property services such as: AVA equipment, utilities, internet, projector, photocopier, laptop, closet space and filing cabinet space.

All inmates, including those who are senior citizens and those with disabilities, will be able to attend and participate in this WFWPP and accommodations will be made if necessary.

To evaluate the program we will use a combination of baseline data, entrance interviews, BCDOC disciplinary reports, and post-data collection which will include at least one or a combination of: post-program surveys, exit interviews and/or follow-up phone screenings.

The baseline data will include information such as: age, race, gender and ethnicity. The entrance interviews will gather data regarding criminal history, educational status, employment history, substance abuse and/or mental health issues, and past participation in art projects. The exit interviews and post-program surveys will assess the success of the program for the inmates that participated by asking the inmate what he/she has learned about him/herself through this

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program. This will all be evaluated by the inmates and their ability to reflect on the program and on themselves.

Follow-up phone screenings will be used to evaluate the impact and success of the program. This evaluation tool may not be possible to complete as inmates tend to be a transient population, but if possible, these phone screenings will be conducted 3-6 months after the close of the WFWPP. The purpose of these phone screenings will be to assess the status of each participant i.e.: have they reoffended, do they have employment, are they continuing with their education, are they in a substance abuse program and/or attending counseling, do they have a place to live or are they homeless, and are they seeking out the support services within the community. Tracking the recidivism rate will be accomplished through these phone screenings by keeping track of the percentage of inmates that were participants in the WFWPP and have returned to BCDOC, or if known, to another correctional facility.

**WFWPP Budget Narrative and Justification:**

- A. **Professional Technical Services:** The professional services for the WFWPP instructors will be paid for with the NH State Council on the Arts General Project Grant. The part-time program employee will be part of the in-kind match through BCDOC. The professional services are determined by the cost per class per instructor. The preparation time for the instructors will be paid for through the required in-kind cash match of BCDOC. All costs of managing and overseeing the WFWPP will be the responsibility of the Programs Director/Grant Manager and selected BCDOC staff.
- B. **Other Services:** Property, including use of the classroom, the closet in the classroom, and filing cabinet space will be provided through BCDOC. The use of a TV, DVD, photocopier, photocopier paper, laptop, projector, utilities and internet will be provided through BCDOC.
- C. **Curriculum:** The composition books, lined paper, manila folders, poetry books and writing books will be provided through the required in-kind cash match of BCDOC

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**V. Writing from Within Poetry Project Budget**

EXPENSES		REVENUE			TOTALS
ITEM	AMOUNT	CASH	IN-KIND	NHState Council on the Arts	
<b>PROFESSIONAL TECHNICAL SERVICES</b>					
WFWPP Instructor Services: 4-6 week sessions @\$450.00 a session = \$1,800 x 2 instructors = \$3,600	\$3,600.00			\$3,600.00	\$3,600.00
Instructor Preparation & Planning Time: \$22.00/hr x 16 hours =\$352.00 x 2 instructors = \$704.00	\$704.00	\$704.00			\$704.00
BCDOC Program Director/Grant Manager Time- Entrance and Exit Interviews, Follow-up phone screenings, supervision of WFWPP programs and grant management (140 hrs X \$22.86/hr= \$3,200.40)	\$3,200.40		\$3,200.40		\$3,200.40
PT Correctional Officer- assist with the Entrance/Exit Interviews and with supervising the WFWPP (57 hrs x \$20= \$2,000.00)	\$1,140.00		\$1,140.00		\$1,140.00
<b>OTHER SERVICES</b>					
Utilities, Internet, AVA Equipment, Laptop, Projector, Copier, Classroom & Closet Space	\$2,000.00		\$2,000.00		\$2,000.00
<b>CURRICULUM/SUPPLIES</b>					
Composition Books, Lined Paper, Poetry Books & Writing Books (Either the "Artist's Way" or "The Writer's Way")	\$1,096.00	\$1,096.00			\$1,096.00
<b>TOTALS</b>		<b>\$1,800.00</b>	<b>\$6,340.40</b>	<b>\$3,600.00</b>	<b>\$11,740.40</b>

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**Attachment A**

**Current Programs at Belknap County Department of Corrections:** The current programs and services at the BCDOC are: (1) weekly AA meetings; (2) weekly NA meetings; (3) The Adapt Program (12 week psycho-educational substance abuse self-awareness group); (4) Alternatives to Violence Program (AVP is a 1-2 day workshop for male inmates offered every 3-4 months); (7) SERVSAFE -Food safety/food service class – currently offered through the CTE grant; (8) The High School Equivalency Test and HiSET certificate program; (9) weekly Writing class; (10) Weekly Male Book Club; (11) Weekly Female Book Club; (12) Communication and Conflict Resolution, (13) Money Management, and (14) Parenting classes are all taught through UNH Cooperative Extension; (14) Nurturing Parenting Skills taught through the Family Resource Center of Lakes Region Community Services (15) weekly Yoga class for female inmates; (16) weekly Yoga classes for the male inmates; (17) weekly non-denominational Church services; (18) weekly non-denominational female bible study groups; (18) weekly non-denominational male bible study groups (19) Health Services; (20) Pastoral and Mental Health counseling services; (21) weekly “Chances and Changes” program for female inmates offered through the Educators of New Beginnings in Laconia; (22) the Going-Home/Re-entry group; (23) weekly Knitting classes for male inmates; (24) weekly Knitting classes for female inmates; (25) Impact of substance abuse during pregnancy and Shaken baby syndrome (offered 3-4 times a year taught by Ruth O’Hara, RN from LRGH); (26) OSHA – 10 hour general construction safety course – currently offered through the CTE grant; (27) Tai Chi Chih – offered to both male and female inmates; (28) Anger Management – will be offered the fall of 2014 ; (29) Poetry Classes for female inmates (offered 3x a year at 5 weeks a session); (30) Job Skills Class through NH Employment Security, (31) LRCC Informational Sessions, and (32) a weekly Art class offered separately for male and female inmates.

**Attachment B**

**Community Collaborations:** Organizations within the community that BCDOC has collaborated with are: Belknap County Nursing Home, Belknap County Economic Development Council, AA and NA, NH Department of Education, Belknap County Police Departments, 4-H chapter in Laconia, NH Employment Security in Laconia, 911 Fire and Dispatch offices in Laconia, Belknap County Court House in Laconia, Belknap County Youth Services, Belknap County Juvenile & Adult Diversion, United Way, Horizons Counseling, Genesis Behavioral Health, Salvation Army, Catholic Charities, Habitat for Humanity, Health-Link, New Beginnings of Laconia, Community Action Program, Laconia Adult Education, Lakes Region Community Services and the Family Resource Center, Department of Health and Human Services, Lakes Region Community College, Lakes Region General Hospital, the Belknap Mill and Busiel Mill, and Multi-Cultural Market Day in Laconia