

Mother and child reunion

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Editor's note: Washington, D.C. Department of Corrections public affairs specialist Anthony Diallo returns to describe his department's decision to move the female population from its jail to a privately managed treatment facility.

The District of Columbia's Department of Corrections transferred its female offenders from the D.C. Jail to its Correctional Treatment Facility,

which is privately managed by the Corrections Corporation of America, in an effort to provide this population with a more palatable and accommodating setting.

“Transitioning the women to the CTF is [part] of a series of progressively oriented initiatives that we embarked upon in our efforts to become a national model,” says DOC Director Devon Brown.

“It affords the women the luxury to receive close contact with children, which is aligned in our attempts to break the intergenerational trend of incarceration,” Brown continues, emphasizing the importance of mothers bonding with their children.

The total inmate population at the CTF and the jail last August was 3,081. The daily average population of women at the jail then was 83, while the daily average of male inmates was 1,832. Next door at the CTF, the daily average population of women in August was 237 while the daily average of male inmates was 890. No juveniles are at the CTF because of a prior contract.

These numbers shifted in September. At the CTF, the average daily population of women burgeoned to 319, while the male inmates actually dropped to 821. The percent of females at the CTF rose from 21 to 28 percent in September, reflecting a seven percent increase in the daily female inmate population. October and November had similar numbers and percentages.

CTF resident, Leslie Jackson, is a mother of five who has been a resident since August.

The twenty-eight year old prefers the CTF space as opposed to the older, antiquated jail.

“The actual visiting room here is be much better since you can actually touch your kids, hug them, and speak to them all at once,” said Jackson, a southern Maryland native whose children live in Charles County with her family. “It would be hard for them to fight over the telephone and speak to me behind those glass walls. I like it here. I like the chapel. I was not expecting to see something like that, so special.”

Although Alexis Wilkins, 24, enjoys the close contact visit she received with her two children” “The visits are nice. We touch like a regular contact visit. I was happy that when my [two-year-old] daughter was on the floor having a temper tantrum, they let me pick her up after I was seated,” Wilkins said.

According to the Chief of Unit Management and Program Manager Walter “Sonny” Fulton, the District entered into a 20-year contract with CCA in March 1997, to operate and manage the Southeast facility. CTF was constructed five years earlier in 1992 to serve as a specialized medium-security substance abuse treatment resource for male and female inmates. It is an eight-story structure surrounded by 10.2 acres adjacent to the jail.

The department and CCA completed an agreement in January 2003, to change CTF from an adult correctional and treatment facility into a detention and treatment facility. Medical services for inmates at the jail and CTF are the same. Services are provided by UNITY Healthcare, Inc., which has optimized the continuity of care between the two facilities. ARAMARK Food Services Corporation provides meals to the inmates at both institutions.

DOC and CCA partnership continues to evolve, and the ties that bind each institution continue to strengthen. The American Correctional Association recently recommended that the CTF receive its accreditation renewal while the jail prepares for its accreditation by 2009.

“We go to tremendous efforts to ensure that our inmates have positive and productive programming each day, including the weekends, from the time they get up to the late evening when it is bed check,” says DOC Deputy Director Patricia Britton, who was a former warden at the jail.

The various programs and services at CCA include Restoration Ministry, which provides women with direct intervention and survivor support. Women’s Wing is another program offered to the female offender that teaches life skills and domestic violence survival tips. Other programs, like Miracle Hands, Moral Reconation Therapy, and the Books to Prisons Project are open to both genders.

Now that the new initiative for female offenders is well underway, DOC officials are addressing their juvenile population. They plan to develop and implement programs that will best stimulate their minds while suit their needs in these confined surroundings.