

Silverdale program teaches life principles

BY CLINT COOPER
STAFF WRITER

Gene Lewis, chaplain at the Silverdale Detention Center, has letters posted around his office from former inmates expressing appreciation for the facility's new program on life principles.

"The idea is to stop people from going in and out (of prison), to break the cycle, to show them there's another way of living," Mr. Lewis said.

The faith-based Life Principles Community Program, created by Corrections Corporation of America and the Institute in Basic Life Principles, gives offenders the chance to live in a designated unit for socialization. They learn principles of integrity, personal responsibility and accountability for use inside and outside prison walls.

Corrections Corporation of America operates the Silverdale facility. The Institute in Basic Life Principles is an Oak Brook, Ill.-based organization established to give instruction and training on how to find success by following biblical principles.

Thirty-eight women are enrolled in the three-month Silverdale program, which began in July, Mr. Lewis said. Women study in the program each weekday for four hours a day, he said.

John Lanz, director of indus-

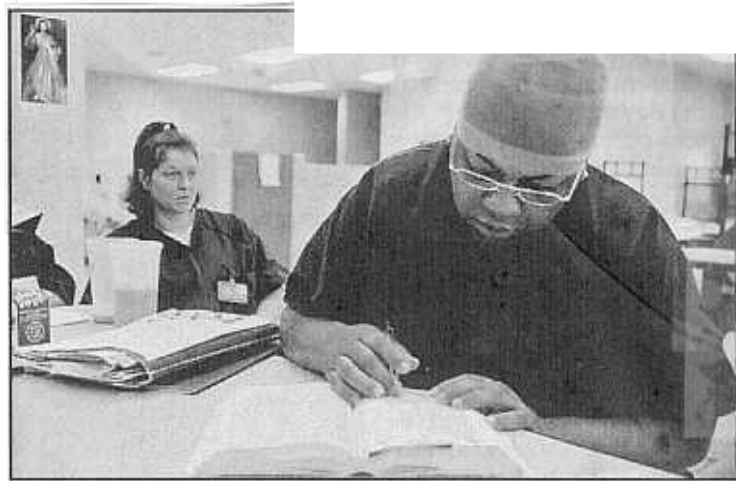
“The idea is to stop people from going in and out (of prison) ... to show them there's another way of living.”

— Gene Lewis,
chaplain,
Silverdale Detention Center

try and special programs at CCA in Nashville, said the program will be operating in 20 facilities by the end of the year and 18 additional facilities by the end of the second quarter of 2005. On any given day, 1,500 people, including 250 women, in 19 states and the District of Columbia are in the program, he said.

Locally, he said the program has been approved by Tennessee and Hamilton County and is open to all female inmates, regardless of religious affiliation.

"No inmate who participates is required to revise or change their religious views," Mr. Lanz said. "We have inmates of all faiths in the program."



STAFF PHOTO BY KATHLEEN GREESON

Debra Kelly, right, is one of 38 women at Silverdale Detention Center participating in a faith-based life principles program.

Mr. Lewis said the strength of the program is that it goes beyond the religious instruction offered in the worship services Silverdale already has.

"That's the problem I have with church in jail," he said. "We come in and preach and put them right back in the same (prison) environment."

This program goes further, Mr. Lewis said. It houses the women who are involved in the program in what is known as the Faith Dorm and teaches them together.

The curriculum offers 750 or more hours in seven seminars, according to Mr. Lanz. Seminars include "Principles of Life," "Character Qualities," "Financial Freedom," "Anger Resolution," "Family Dynamics," "Thinking Process" and "Communication."

"Principles of Life," which deals with different perspectives on authority, is the initial seminar used at Silverdale. Gradua-

tion certificates for the course already have been presented to seven or eight inmates since it began in July, Mr. Lewis said.

The women seem to like the motivation the voluntary program offers, he said. Many had been prostitutes or drug addicts and had little self-esteem, he said.

"They don't have much reason to be lifted up," Mr. Lewis said. "We're trying to tell them there's more to life than (prostitution or drug addiction)."

One woman who generally "scared off" other inmates is typical of the program's success stories, he said. "They gave her a wide path," Mr. Lewis said. "But she approached me and the warden" and explained that she wanted an opportunity to prove herself. Now, "she's one of the best women I've got. She's beautiful inside. Now, they just love her."

E-mail Clint Cooper at ccooper@timesfreepress.com