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# Common Ground

The Newsletter of the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department  
**Andrea J. Cabral, Sheriff**

## C.R.E.W. Program Provides Tools, Hope For Successful Re-entry

The Community Re-Entry for Women (C.R.E.W.) program recently conducted its 26th graduation for participants incarcerated at the Suffolk County House of Correction (HOC).

Amidst a ceremony that featured a musical performance by the HOC Women's Choir and several emotional speeches and original poems delivered by members of the graduating class, a palpable sense of hope seemed to radiate as the graduates addressed the assembly.

"I want to thank you for the support you've given," said one graduate addressing C.R.E.W. instructors. "I needed to make a change and this program will help me do that."

"If I can accomplish this, I can accomplish even more," said another speaker. "Maybe I can even make it out there."

Created in 2004, the C.R.E.W. program is a collaborative effort – sponsored by the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department, Project Place, and the South End Community Health Center – that prepares female offenders for re-entry through the delivery of life skills instruction, job placement and health care services. Through the program, female offenders with sentences of at least three months are eligible to participate in an eight-week life skills class during their incarceration while receiving pre and post-release case management to assist them with personal and housing goals, career goals, and health care services.

Among the many services that C.R.E.W. provides, participants learn how to: write resumes and cover letters; fill out employment applications; identify health care resources; how to achieve personal, housing, and career goals; interviewing techniques; and other strategies that can help participants to lead positive lives.

Upon return to their respective neighborhoods, C.R.E.W. members receive continued case management to assist with housing and personal goals, ongoing career



C.R.E.W. Case Manager Ilana Zablow recognizes graduates of the program

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coaching to help guide them through job searches, and health care services for both themselves and their families. To date, over 200 women have graduated from the C.R.E.W. program.

According to Christina Ruccio, Director of Women's Programming for the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department and C.R.E.W. Program Director, many of the women in the C.R.E.W. program have lived in the vicious cycle derived from having low self-worth, which stemmed from physically and mentally abusive relationships, which led to substance abuse and addiction, which fed on the feelings of worthlessness and low-self esteem. Coupled with the absence of a supportive environment and a lack of essential life skills, the participants of the program have found themselves making choices that ultimately led them down the path to incarceration.

"Many of these women are feeling supported for the first time, in this program," said Ruccio. "Some of them are in here for issues that stem from abuse and they have a lot of anger that they don't know how to manage. We provide the skills that they need to begin making changes in their lives that can have a lasting, positive effect."

As a C.R.E.W. Case Manager, Ilana Zablow has witnessed that effect on program participants.

"A lot of our women are eighteen and older," said Zablow. "There are some people who believe that once someone reaches a certain age, they can't change and so, they tend to give up on people. But, they do change. The women in our program want to change, they just haven't had the tools or support to do it."

One of the keys to that aforementioned change, said CREW Case Manager Nusirrat Hassan, is instilling in class members the belief that they actually can do it.



*Christina Ruccio, Director of Women's Programming & Director of C.R.E.W. speaks to graduates at the event*

"I'm big on hope," Hassan said. "I think that one of the most important things that our program does is give these women hope that they can change and live more positive lives. I think it has extra significance because these women are mothers, daughters, aunts, sisters – and they are going to have an effect on people once they return to their families. It can be a positive effect or it can be a negative effect, depending on how they leave."

Judging from the decidedly positive nature of the statements given by some of the current C.R.E.W. members, it appears that the key concepts of the program have been fully embraced.

"It's a very supportive place and that's big because a lot of us don't come from situations where we had encouragement and support from people around us," said one current participant. "We see that there are other ways

to react and that Cristina Ruccio and the instructors are really here for us. They support us 100%."

"This class has helped us to want to change," said another member. "I would say that at least half of us are here due to anger management issues and with the techniques and tools we've been given, we can see the difference, how the program has affected us. Don't get me wrong – it's hard. They give us a lot of work to do, but I think this class should be mandatory. Everyone should have to take it. It's that important."

Ruccio concurred, saying, "It's more than just a job. I consider it a civic obligation to work with the people in this program to ensure that they leave this place better equipped than they were when they came in here. It's a group effort beginning with Sheriff Cabral and continuing through everyone in the program."

Speaking the thoughts of the other members of the C.R.E.W. program, one participant expressed the same tangible sense of hope and confidence that was so powerfully evident in those exiting the program, armed with the tools to succeed upon reentry to their respective communities.

"I plan to keep it going after I leave here," she said. "I want to build on what we did on the inside and follow it up with the case managers outside. I think that I'll be able to make it when I get out. I think I'll be able to make it out there."

To learn more about the C.R.E.W. program, call Christina Ruccio at (617) 635-1000, ext. 2205.

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