

ST. KITTS AND NEVIS

*By Mr. Ashiela Dolphus Connor
Assistant Superintendent of the Prison*

I Prevention of prison violence

We prevent violence in our Prison by firstly seeking to separate persons who have issues with one another because of gang membership or other reasons. We also at times use confinement as a means to achieve this.

Educational classes are used as a means to prevent violence. We believe that if you teach a man to read, then he learn to reason, if he can reason then he uses his fist as a last resort rather than his first resort. Religious and physiological counseling are used to help the individual in channeling his anger into something positive and encouraging and challenging inmates to use their time doing something positive. A lot of the inmates make and design greeting cards while others do painting.

The selection of inmates for programs such as Alternative to Violence Program, House of Healing and Bible Study has proven helpful. Organizing of games competition once or twice per year where inmates select teams to play against each other in games such as cricket, football, basketball, drafts and dominoes and be rewarded at the end of the competition helps. Knowing that to fight or misbehave one can loose his privileges such as visit, recreation and what we strive to do is reward good behavior.

Challenge:

- The consistence of the over crowding.
- Lack of space
- Staff in consistence to execute or enforce the policy
- Lack of resource, finance and personnel.

II. Disciplinary regulations

There are two types of regulations that which have to do with staff and that which have to do with the inmates.

For staff it is to ensure that their behaviour is governed, so that the best is derived from staff in terms of performance and a level of control is maintained in terms of what they do on the job to prevent corrupt practices and to ensure fairness to foster and maintain a chain of command and to encourage respect of self and others. To ensure that those that they supervise is in no way taken advantage of and so the system allows for staff to complain inmates and inmates to complain staff. The Regulations provide for checks and balance in the system. Without Regulations there will be no system. Prison rely and depend on Regulation for survival, imagine a Prison without regulations then imagine a Prison with regulations just for staff, now imagine a Prison with Regulations just for inmates see just how vital, necessary and important Regulations for both staff and inmates are we will not survive without guidelines.

Where inmates are concerned it is important for good order, decorum and deportment. Inmates must understand that there are rules that he or she has to adhere to and to infringe the rules has consequences. This becomes or forms part of his/her rehabilitation and if learned and practice could and would result in a different individual. Staff must not use these Regulations to inflict pain but see them as a tool for rehabilitation.

Challenges:

- Staff adherence to the Regulations
- Staff administering the Regulations in a fair and impartial matter
- Superintendent has little power and therefore this threaten his control of staff
- Those with the power or control of staff takes to long to administer justice

III. Reform and social rehabilitation of prisoners

Reform is important for any Prison and so it must be continuous. The prisoners we saw yesterday are not what we are seeing today hence, reform must keep pace with the changing face of Prison. The fundamentals remain the same but the problem has gotten bigger and more complex. However, we must always remember the fundamentals in dealing with the problems because that is how we will solve the problems when dealing reformed. We must introduce programs with the aim of reducing the population that is a major part of the fundamental, but we move away from that constructing of bigger Prisons hoping to solve the problems. For us in St. Kitts/Nevis we do need a Prison but it is a necessity but not the answer. We have to find programs and implement them in such away that the end result is yearly target driven reduction in population. Reform must take into account pre-release, sentence planning, career guidance, counseling and some form of assistance and follow up upon release.

Any rehab program must have as it cored physiological and religious counseling and skill training will follow. Teaching the individual to read is a must so that he can grasp or learn and understand the program. Programs must be population reduction based. If we continue to build Prisons we will fill them, the country must get the simple yet important message that rehab is all of us.

Challenge:

- To get the church and civic groups involved
- Introduce programs to assist inmates after leaving prison.
- To encourage the public and private sectors to hire and give these persons a fair chance.

IV. Penitentiary legislation and public policies

Penitentiary Legislation, although staff must or should be aware of what the legislation states, it must not have any affect whatsoever on staff performance. Staff does not make or legislate and should only be concerned with how the legislation impacts the prison in terms of population. However that should not be the focus of the staff but rather what could be done to soften the impact in terms of programs and the focus must be population reduction.

Penitentiary Legislation is for the safety of the population and not to make prison staff duty easier and so staff must pay attention to whatever the regulation is with the aim of doing whatever in their power to minimize its impact. Legislation will impact on our scarce resources for we will spend more on programs, food, equipments and materials.

We should not allow Public Policies to influence our performance and function. We should always remember it is not the public perception of what prison should or should not be that matters but rather for us to understand that the inmates come to prison as a punishment, not for punishment. So, it is never what the public wants it is always what we have to do and that is to be fair, firm and

professional at all times. At all times treat the prisoners as a person. Public sentiments should never make us sentimental, emotional, nor sympathetic one way or the other.

Challenges:

- Resources for continuous refreshers training for staff
- To ensure that staff do not become contaminated by or fall prey to public policies
- To ensure that staff always deliver service to department and public alike of high quality and integrity.

V. Conditions of detention

Conditions of overcrowding should not prevent prison from executing its programs nor should the Regulation be laps or sacrificed because of overcrowding. At all times conditions should remain conducive as far as possible to facilitate the programs for rehabilitation and reform. The necessary adjustments should be made to allow continuation if not all of the programs most of the programs. Health standards should be enhanced, increased and improved to meet minimum standards at all times. More vigilant attention should be paid to staff behavior and that of the inmates to ensure fairness and professionalism.

Every effort should be made to maintain high nutritious food standards in terms of quality and quantity. The rights and privileges of the inmates should not suffer this puts pressure on staff to strive to arrive at a balance. When officers feel safe and prisoners get or seem to get their due share, for example library time, recreation, visits and other such privileges, time to attend classes and other programs.

Challenges:

- Increase in staff increase
- How staff is developed
- Finance increase in food
- Usage of time
- Staff ability to adapt and be creative
- Inmates readiness to adjust and adapt to the changes that may become necessary
- The involvement of prisoners as a stakeholder in the improvement of conditions so that implementations become easier.
- The public must see improve conditions at the prison as a national issue and as a political issue.

VI. Selection and training of penitentiary staff

Selection of the staff is taken from the applications received. The applications are assessed, persons are then asked write an examination after which an interview is conducted a selection is then made based on the examination results and the interview. The selectees' names are then given to the Special Branch of the police department for back ground checks. Senior members of the prison department go into the selectees' neighborhood to get an assessment and community spirit of the individual. After which the names are then sent to the Ministry for final approval. After all of the above is done the selectees under go an eight (8) weeks essential training where they are taught in a number of different areas including, Prisons subjects matters and weapon training, after which their training continues on the job. After one year of having on the job training, there is a one week

refreshers training course for new staff. Staff remains on probation for up to three (3) years before being appointed to the Civil Service.

Challenges:

- Not enough persons apply for the job
- Government takes far too long to approve selectees as a result we lose potentially good candidates.
- Some form of mechanism needs to be put in place to speed up the process

In a small country like ours where everybody knows everybody, where we are all some how connected or related, persons don't want to become Prison Officers, maybe we need to do a better job of selling the job as a service to the community and country. Showing how our job is related to money in people's pocket, nation building and just how a stable Prison is key to sustainable development, including tourism which is the main stay of many of our economies.