

56 CIM inmates move beyond violence with special graduation

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From left, front row, CRM-OT Arlene Marquez, Dr. Nena Messina, CRM AGPA Robin Franklin and Education/Staff Sponsor Cynthia Rodriguez. Back row, from left, are CCIII (Retired) Carlos Ramirez and inmate Facility C MBV Program Facilitators.

By Carlos Ramirez, CCIII (retired)
California Institution for Men

The California Institution for Men (CIM) Facility C recently hosted its third inmate graduation ceremony to acknowledge the 56 inmates who successfully completed the Moving Beyond Violence-Building Resiliency Program. Correctional Counselor III (retired) and MBV Coordinator Carlos Ramirez were masters of ceremonies for the event.

CIM executive staff showed their support of the program and graduates. Attending the event in late August in the Facility C Visiting Yard were CIM Education Department / Staff Sponsor Cynthia Rodriguez, Arlene Marquez and Robin Franklin of the Community Resource Manager's Office, Associate Warden-Programs Lavelle Parker, and assigned Facility C custody staff. Other special guests included Dr. Nena Messina, UCLA Criminologist and founder of the Envisioning Justice Solutions.

MBV is a volunteer self-help program, facilitated by trained inmate facilitators. MBV teaches how to identify what trauma is, how to better understand it, and how to build resiliency. Inmates work in small groups to explore past trauma; learn different ways of thinking, feeling and acting; examine guilt, shame and anger; and learn how to build healthy relationships in their families and communities. They learn skills to recognize situations that trigger past trauma, and explore how to confront anger and other intense emotions in a more productive, non-violent manner. Through the support of Warden Dean Borders and his staff, this program is offered as a self-help rehabilitative program here at CIM-Facility C.

The event started out with motivational speeches from the MBV facilitators, class valedictorians, and CIM staff. The speeches offered hope and stressed the importance of attending rehabilitative programs so to prepare oneself for that day they are released back into society. MBV facilitators talked about what the program meant to them personally. Facilitators also thanked Facility C second/third watch custody staff for making access to the program possible. One Facilitator stated, "Without custody staff support, none of these types of programs would be possible."

The facilitators then presented the graduation certificates to their students.

For this special event, CIM permitted the inmate graduates to invite a pre-approved visitor to witness the ceremony. This was very well received by the graduates and visitors alike. Many of the visitors displayed tears of joy and happiness for their loved ones.

A graduate's mother and wife said, "We are so proud of him. I have noticed a positive change in his behavior towards his family."

Another graduate's wife said, "This is not what I expected at all. This ceremony was just like attending a regular graduation ceremony. We are so proud of our son's accomplishments. Please keep up this great work you'll be doing here at CIM."

After the graduation ceremony, the students were permitted to wear a cap and gown, and take a picture by themselves or with their families. This was again a very emotional moment for many in attendance.

One visitor tearfully stated, "This was the first time I ever saw my son in a cap and gown. I am so proud of him."

One of the graduate's family members said, "I will proudly show off this picture to the rest of my son's family that could be here. That way they will see his accomplishments and that he is honestly trying to become a better person. Thank you."

For staff, visitors and graduates, this was a very good day at CIM.

Any questions about this event or the MBV Program at CIM, contact CCIII Carlos Ramirez at 909-597-1821 x5819 or by email at carlos.ramirez@cdcr.ca.gov.

