

CIM inmates don caps and gowns as they move beyond violence

by Contributor | Feb 13, 2018 | Featured Story, Rehabilitation



CCIII (retired) Carlos Ramirez with the CIM Facility C MBV Facilitators, have a team meeting before the graduation.

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Last month, Facility C at California Institution for Men hosted an inmate graduation ceremony to acknowledge the 58 inmates who successfully completed the Moving Beyond Violence (MBV)-Building Resiliency Program. This event took place at Facility C Visiting Yard.

CIM executive staff was on site to show their support of the program and graduates. Other special guests included Dr. William Burdon, UCLA Program Research/Analyst; Dr. Nena Messina, UCLA Program Supervisor; and program co-founder Dr. Stephanie Covington, with the Center for Gender & Justice.



Dr. Stephanie Covington, of the Center for Gender & Justice as well as the co-founder of the MBV program, stands with MBV Inmate Facilitator Jesse Cardenas.

The MBV is a volunteer self-help program, facilitated by trained inmate facilitators. The MBV teaches how to identify what trauma is, how to understand it better, 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 begin 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 productive, non-violent manner. Through the support of Warden Dean Borders and his staff, this program is being offered as a rehabilitative program at CIM- Facility C.

The event started out with motivational speeches from CIM staff and the special guests. Every speech offered hope and stressed the importance of attending rehabilitative programs so to prepare oneself for that day of release back into society.

The MBV Facilitators then presented their individual speeches about what the program personally meant to them. They also thanked Facility C second and third custody line staff for making the program possible. One of the facilitator's stated the fact that without custody staff true support, these type of programs would not be possible. The facilitators then presented their graduation certificates to the program students.

CIM also permitted the inmate students to invite up to two pre-approved visitors to witness the event. This was very well received by the inmate graduates and visitors themselves. Many of the visitors showed tears of joy and happiness for their loved ones.

One visitor stated that this was the first class her son had ever graduated from. Another mother and wife of a graduate gave a heart-filled thanks for allowing this program to occur at CIM because it had created a profound effect on their son/husband's attitude towards the family. The mother and wife attributed the positive change to the MBV program. Many other visitors asked where they could get more information about trauma and how to better deal with its effects.

After the graduation, the students were allowed to wear caps and gowns to take a picture with their families. This was a very emotional moment for many in attendance. One graduate's family member stated this was the first time her son had ever worn a cap and gown.



Front row, from left, are Dr. Nena Messina, Dr. Stephanie Covington, and CIM Community Resource Manager Delinia Lewis. In the middle, from left, are Facility C MBV inmate facilitators. Back row, from left, are CCIII (retired) Carlos Ramirez, CIM Associate Warden Lavelle Parker, who oversees rehabilitative programs, and MBV facilitators.