

Friends in deed helping out friends in need

'When these women get out of jail, they might have a living place but they have no job, no training and no skills. They'd like to get out of that cycle. Otherwise when they're released, they repeat their offense and come back.'

BY SHERRY KAHAN

Twice a week Pat Hickmott drives to the Wayne County Detention Annex at the Wayne County General Hospital in Westland. She works with female prisoners there in a program sponsored by the YWCA of western Wayne County.

Once at the jail Hickmott shows her face through a window and announces the intent of her visit. When recognized, she is buzzed through the door. She makes her way toward the living quarters of the prisoners. Here she again identifies herself at another series of doors before a guard opens them for her and then re-locks them behind her.

The volunteer's destination is a large room about 100 feet by 20 feet surrounded by bars connected with cyclone fencing. It is the temporary home of about 20 women prisoners. Along the back is a row of double-decker bunks. Along the front is a row of cots broken by a picnic table. At one end, open to view, are showers, toilets and washbowls.

This is the room for sentenced female prisoners. There is a similar room for unsentenced prisoners, those detained in the annex because they could not afford bail. Most of the inmates are in jail on prostitution or larceny charges. Their terms are less than a year.

Except for an hour or so a day in the recreation room working in arts and crafts or studying for the high school equivalency test, the prisoners spend their life in this room, sleeping, eating, talking. Hickmott also is there to talk. She is part of two prison programs established by the YWCA, one for volunteers and one for students doing field work for academic credit.

Working toward a master's degree in guidance and counseling at Eastern Michigan University, she only recently began the prison visits. After five trips to the facility, she is beginning to feel at ease in the company of the women.

"People have begun to know I'm coming," she said. "They know me already. Some are happy to see me. Some are really anxious to have someone to talk to."

However, sometimes she has to let them down. "Last week I wasn't very useful," she said. "Their TV had been taken out. I don't know, it might have needed fixing, or maybe it was something else. But there was no way I could get it back for them."

IN HER COUNSELING Hickmott looks for ways to help the women out of the cycle they seem to be in.

"When these women get out of jail they might have a living place but they have no job, no training

and no skills," she said. "They'd like to get out of that cycle. Otherwise when they're released, they repeat their offense and come back."

"I'm calling today to get a catalog from Wayne County Community College in case there is something they are interested in doing to get more education or training. They talk about wanting a job, maybe in fast foods. Others would like training in cosmetology, office skills or skills to enable them to get in a nursing home."

But she feels her main purpose is to help them deal with their feelings, to give them the opportunity to air what's inside. So far she has visited with them in small groups, and on an individual basis. For private talks, she and the prisoner involved must move to an unoccupied corner of the large room.

"Jail is very traumatic for these people," she said. "I hope I can help them through that experience. They really need contact with people in the outside world."

TWO OTHER women involved in the program are Jan Purcell of Northville and Lisa Dion of Taylor. Purcell is a probation officer for the 35th District Court, which includes Plymouth and Canton Township. She is a volunteer. Dion is a social work student at Eastern Michigan University doing field work.

"I love them, they're great," said Purcell, who then added that she couldn't believe how much she missed the prisoners when she was on vacation. "I got big hugs when I got back."

"They can't figure out why I am here," she said. "They don't understand why I do this. But after we volunteers are here for a period of time and establish rapport, they realize we care. When they understand we're not getting paid, they realize we're here because we want to be. They see we are concerned, that we show love. For some it's the first time they've ever received it."

Purcell works a great deal on a one-to-one basis, and finds this especially rewarding.

"IT MAKES ME feel important," she said. "I listen and try to help them think over their lives. Sometimes I can see the wheels turning as they think. I'm not going to change their lives a whole lot. But it is rewarding to me that they are truly thinking about the direction they want to take."

"A lot of these girls have potential if they only had the opportunity and wherewithal to channel it in a constructive way. They get to a point when they want to change. But they need help to do it. Not only do they need to be led to the doors of opportunity, they need the doors opened for them. They feel in a state of despair, that there is no help available."

"Some of them are not strong enough to make it on their own. There is not enough discipline in their lives or self-esteem."

Listening is appreciated, Purcell added. "Some never had anyone who sat down and really listened to them. I work on goals, and help them to help their children."



Lisa Dion (lower left) talks about future activities with inmates (from left) Pamela Hoover, Christina Lillen and Ingrid Hill, while Jan Purcell (far right) discusses pending business with Beverly Coleman. (Photos by Art Emanuele)

LISA DION ALSO has high regard for the women she meets at the prison.

"I don't feel sorry for them," she said. "They ac-



Conversation is important and Christina Lillen (right) makes a point in talk with Jan Purcell.

cept us. We've become good friends. It's not just giving on our part, but an even give and take."

Miss Dion often brings in fingernail polish because the women appreciate such feminine items. She leads them in exercises and other activities, but also helps them clarify their values.

The YWCA of western Wayne County is looking for more volunteers for this program. Those interested may contact Leslie Frederick at 561-4110.

"The (police) department is happy to have the Y people involved," said Inspector William Riquemore of the Wayne County Sheriff's Department. "They are the catalysts who start conversations. The prisoners get a chance to talk about their kids and themselves. They ventilate things inside them. It's nice, if confined, to think someone is interested in them."

"It's a worthwhile experience," said Hickmott. "Certainly it's not a beautiful situation to be in. If you are looking for beauty, you don't belong there. But if you're willing to work in the situation they are in, then it's a very personally rewarding experience."

"They are extremely grateful, and let us know it," said Purcell.

"It's hard for them to believe anyone could care for them," said Miss Dion.

Chemical addiction workshop

The Michigan Alcohol and Addiction Association (MAAA) is sponsoring a workshop headed by Sharon Wegscheider, who works in the field of chemical dependency.

"Sculpturing and the Dynamics of the Enabling Process" is intensive advanced skill training to take place from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. March 6 in the Finnish Center in Farmington Hills.

For registration, contact the MAAA office at 474-1291.

Movies focus on women

The University of Michigan-Dearborn's Cultural Events Committee and Women's Center will present two films focusing on the images of women.

George Cukor's 1939 classic, "The Women," will be shown at 7 p.m. Friday, March 13. It stars Rosalind Russell, Joan Crawford, Paulette Goddard and Norma Shearer. A discussion will follow.

"Terminal Island" by Stephanie Rothman will be shown on March 20. This film depicts a future in which capital punishment is replaced by a system of prison islands on which alternative societies develop, based on sexual equality. It is rated R.

Both showings, free, are in Room 179 of the Engineering Laboratory Building on the University of Michigan-Dearborn campus. Evergreen Road, between Michigan Avenue and Ford Road.

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As a community service, Botsford General Hospital will be offering a free training program for area citizens in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). The ultimate purpose is to enable citizens to perform CPR for heart attack victims until emergency medical personnel arrive. Certified instructors will teach the course.

The one session, 3 hour "Heart Saver" course will be offered Thursday, March 5 at 7 p.m. in Classroom 203 on the second floor of the Botsford Professional Building which is located in front of the hospital. The CPR course will resume its regularly scheduled monthly meeting on the first Thursday of each month thereafter.

To pre-register, please call 476-7600, Ext. 444 on Monday thru Friday from 8:30 AM-4:30 PM. Class size is limited so please register early. Botsford General Hospital is located at 28050 Grand River Avenue, Farmington Hills, 48024 (north of 8 Mile Rd., behind the Botsford Inn.)

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