

N E B R A S K A

JAIL BULLETIN

Number 68

September, 1990

SPECIAL NEEDS INMATES PART IV

SUICIDAL INMATES

PRESCRIPTION--PREVENTING PRISONER SUICIDE

Personnel Selection and Retention of Capable Staff

All personnel who work directly with prisoners or who come into contact with prisoners must be fully qualified for the complex duties through careful pre-hiring screening of applicants and rigorous evaluation of incumbents to ensure that only appropriate staff are retained.

Staff members are the heart of all suicide prevention efforts. To perform their complex and demanding duties, staff must bring to the job specific characteristics, aptitudes, abilities and interests. These should be known through the selection process (interviews and testing) prior to hiring a staff member.

The authors have concluded that selecting and retaining the appropriate personnel to operate detention and corrections facilities warrants additional attention by most managers. One researcher has suggested that lockups should be staffed by human service workers rather than law enforcement personnel. Another believes that the status of correctional officers should be upgraded, encouraging officers to look beyond their role as enforcers so that they may also serve as role models.

While the inventory outlines the GED levels and abilities which should be sought, Joseph Rowan, a correctional consultant, suggests that a more important consideration is the degree to which a staff member understands and respects himself. In seeking the "non-rejecting" staff member, Rowan believes that self-respect is a cornerstone which, if missing, frustrates other selection, retention and training efforts. Rowan stresses the importance of conducting careful investigations of prospective staff backgrounds, social histories and employment histories. He has also developed the "MAP" training program, which emphasizes officer motivation, attitudes and philosophies.

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STAFF TRAINING

All personnel who work directly with prisoners or who come into contact with prisoners must be fully qualified for their assigned tasks through pre-service, basic and ongoing in-service training efforts. Personnel must be able to demonstrate their mastery of training content by successfully passing written examinations.

The knowledge and skills of each employee can be expanded and reinforced through initial and ongoing training efforts. As recent studies indicate, the job of detention or corrections officer is complex and demands an ongoing commitment of training resource. Some training must be delivered before a staff member assumes any duties; other training can be delivered during the first months of duty. Many training issues must be regularly reinforced through ongoing in-service training efforts. Personnel must be able to demonstrate their mastery of training content by successfully passing written examinations.

Lindsay Hayes, an expert on jail suicides, believes that training efforts need to clarify the responsibility of detention/corrections officers with regard to prisoner suicide. He suggests that officers should not feel responsible for preventing prisoners from considering suicide, but that their role is to prevent prisoners from successfully acting on their suicidal thoughts.

A variety of training materials have been developed, focusing on suicide prevention. A videotape has been developed by the National Sheriffs Association. The NIC Information Center has training curricula from several sources. Most important, however, is a full training curriculum developed by NIC in 1988.

SUPPORTIVE SERVICES — IN-HOUSE AND COMMUNITY-BASED

A variety of human services must be available to facility staff and prisoners through a combination of in-house staff efforts and through arrangements with community-based resources. Staff must know how to gain access to services and resources.

Mental health services, including crisis intervention, staff training and consultation, direct services (individual and group), testing and referral should be immediately available.

Emergency services should be available around-the-clock through written agreements with local providers.

Other support services should also be available through agreements and arrangements with human service providers (including social services, screening and referral).

DIVERSION AND REFERRAL SERVICES

All prisoners who cannot be safely housed and managed in the facility must be transferred without delay to appropriate alternative sites; arrangements should be made in advance with such sites to ensure ready and easy access at any time. Prisoners should be released from confinement as soon as legally possible.

Knowing the limits of the facility/operations is essential. Reducing the overall population of detention facilities through diversion efforts decreases the number of prisoners at risk.

INTAKE AND ADMISSION PRACTICES

All incoming prisoners must be provided with a thorough intake screening process and must be closely supervised during the first hours/days of their confinement. The initial intake process is a crucial period for each prisoner. Staff efforts must identify prisoner problems and needs while attempting to reduce the uncertainty which increases anxiety.

Many suicides occur because there is not enough communication at the time of admission. For example, it is crucial for receiving staff to interview the transporting/arresting officers to ascertain the condition (mental and physical) of an incoming prisoner. Intake efforts should include systematic provisions to use these and other resources.

In addition, the overall intake process and environment should be evaluated. Initial admission is a confusing, frightening and disorienting experience for most prisoners. Practices should reduce the uncertainty of the process; the physical setting should decrease disorientation by providing a sense of order, safety and human scale.

SHORT-TERM HOLDING/INITIAL CONFINEMENT

Prisoners must be provided with additional supervision and support during the first days of their confinement. Supervision and support efforts should only be reduced as the classification process indicates that it is safe to do so.

Prisoners with special needs, including any prisoner who may have special problems or needs, should be under the constant, direct observation of a staff member or other trained person.

Audio or visual communication equipment should not be used as a substitute for personal staff supervision or direct observation. Such equipment is a valuable supportive tool but too often results in a false sense of security. Electronic monitoring does not provide the same information as direct observation or supervision, and often increases prisoner disorientation and dehumanization.

Research has shown that the first days of confinement are the most suicide-prone periods for prisoners in all types of detention/corrections facilities. Until the classification process supports easing of supervision efforts, a high level of supervision is warranted. There is no substitute for staff efforts.

QUIZ

Nebraska Jail Standards require that jail staff receive eighteen (18) hours of in-service training each year. The Jail Bulletin may be used to supplement in-service training if an officer studies the Bulletin, completes the quiz, and this process is documented by the jail administrator for review during annual jail inspection.

SUBJECT: SPECIAL NEEDS INMATES - IV

NAME _____

NUMBER: 68

DATE _____

1. _____ is a cornerstone which, if missing, frustrates other selection, retention, and training efforts.
 - a. The ability to defend yourself
 - b. A quick comeback
 - c. Physical presence
 - d. Self Respect

2. Jail officers should not feel responsible for preventing prisoners from considering suicide, but their role is to prevent prisoners from _____

3. If a prisoner cannot be safely housed in your jail, they should be _____

4. Many suicides occur because there is not enough _____ at the time of admission.

5. When should prisoners be provided with additional supervision and support? _____

CREDIT: 1/2 HOUR CREDIT FOR JAIL INSERVICE TRAINING REQUIREMENT

ANSWER SHEET SHOULD BE RETAINED BY JAIL ADMINISTRATOR OR TRAINING OFFICER

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SUBJECT: SPECIAL NEEDS INMATES - IV

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1. Self Respect is a cornerstone which, if missing, frustrates other selection, retention, and training efforts.
 - a. The ability to defend yourself
 - b. A quick comeback
 - c. Physical presence
 - d. Self Respect

2. Jail officers should not feel responsible for preventing prisoners from considering suicide, but their role is to prevent prisoners from successfully acting on their suicidal thoughts.

3. If a prisoner cannot be safely housed in your jail, they should be transferred to an appropriate alternate site.

4. Many suicides occur because there is not enough communication at the time of admission.

5. When should prisoners be provided with additional supervision and support? During the first days of their confinement.

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