

# Meeting the Needs of Incarcerated Women

## MTC's Approach to Gender-Responsive Correctional Services

### Incarcerated Women in the United States

Research supports that women involved in the criminal justice system have unique needs and concerns. To ensure their successful rehabilitation, it is important to understand the differences between incarcerated males and females in terms of their criminal pathways, life circumstances, and risk factors. These include higher rates of victimization, mental health, and substance abuse issues. The most recent studies on incarcerated women show that:<sup>i</sup>

- Most have experienced sexual abuse in their lifetime
- The vast majority were convicted of a non-violent crime
- 80 percent are mothers and most are single mothers
- Over 80 percent have a drug and/or alcohol dependency
- 75 percent have symptoms of a mental health disorder

### MTC's Approach to Meeting the Needs of Incarcerated Women

At MTC, caring about others, giving back, and making a social impact are the foundation of all we do. MTC began in 1981 as an operator of residential Job Corps centers, training hundreds of thousands of disadvantaged youth for college and career success. MTC applies these same core values in the rehabilitation of incarcerated men and women.

In August 2010, MTC took over the operations of the Gadsden Correctional Facility, an all-female facility in Florida. MTC partnered with The Moss Group, nationally recognized experts in gender-responsive corrections, to develop programs and policies tailored to the needs of incarcerated women. In their initial assessment of Gadsden, the Moss Group found that MTC's core principles were already closely aligned with the principles of gender responsiveness.



### MTC provides tailored programs and approaches to prepare women for reentry

**Lockhart Correctional Facility** in Lockhart, Texas rehabilitates 1,000 women

**Gadsden Correctional Facility** in Quincy, Florida rehabilitates 950 women

**East Texas Treatment Facility** in Henderson, Texas rehabilitates 350 women

**Otero County Prison Facility** in Chaparral, New Mexico rehabilitates 145 women

**Willacy County Regional Detention Facility** in Willacy, Texas detains 56 women

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*A gender-responsive approach means creating an environment that reflects an understanding of the realities of women's lives, and adjusting practices in ways that appropriately respond to those conditions and unique needs.*

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MTC is committed to applying the principles of gender-responsive correctional practice to the rehabilitation of approximately 3,000 women daily. Everything MTC does reflects this commitment, from developing a corporate policy that guides facility level operations and practices, to intensive staff training, to gender-responsive programs, education and treatment approaches. Additionally, each MTC facility that houses women has a multidisciplinary committee that uses results from a baseline assessment to guide gender-responsive practices, priorities, and initiatives.

MTC's approach to meeting the needs of incarcerated women includes:

- Promoting a culture of safety, respect, and dignity
- Addressing trauma, mental health, and substance abuse issues
- Providing women with opportunities to improve their socioeconomic condition
- Promoting healthy connections to children, family, communities



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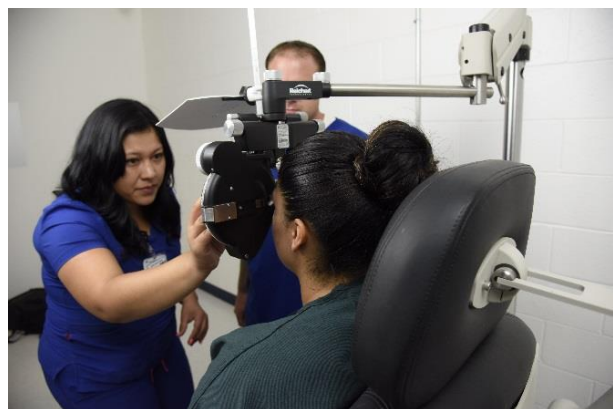
*“The leadership here, you know they care. The officers here speak to you with kindness. The warden, the captain, they are in the hallway, you can stop and speak to them, they talk to you, they listen, they hear you.” – Toni B., Lockhart Correctional Facility*

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#### Promoting a Culture of Safety, Respect, and Dignity

MTC instills the BIONIC (Believe it or not, I care) philosophy in all staff. BIONIC means promoting a caring culture for change based upon safety, respect, and dignity. MTC's BIONIC philosophy drives every interaction between staff and men and women incarcerated or detained at MTC facilities. Additionally, all MTC staff are required to complete an intensive Moss Group-developed gender responsive training, which fosters further development of the principles and practices of creating a safe, respectful, and dignified environment for incarcerated women. In addition to staff training, MTC facilities have implemented numerous gender-responsive practices, including:

- Conducting a trauma-informed pat search training for staff
- Providing new underwear to new arrivals and increasing accessibility to hygiene items
- Adding additional cameras and staff to increase security in areas housing females
- Adding shower curtains or barriers to maintain privacy and improve safety
- Assigning female officer to grievance investigations



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*“It's very rare and a unique experience to have a warden and a facility that is so welcoming to us and to their local rape crisis center, and that they work so closely together to ensure that victims of sexual violence have access to support.” – Liliana Olvera-Arbon, California Coalition Against Sexual Assault*

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### Addressing Trauma, Mental Health, and Substance Abuse Issues

Understanding that the majority of justice-involved women have experienced trauma at some point in their lives, MTC works closely with community partners to ensure that the women in MTC facilities are receiving the trauma and sexual violence counseling and mental health treatment that they need. For example, MTC's Lockhart Facility partners with a local community organization to provide the 'Healing Trauma' program, shown to reduce trauma symptoms and rates of depression among incarcerated women.<sup>ii</sup>



Because 80 percent of incarcerated women have a drug and/or alcohol dependency, MTC also provides comprehensive substance abuse programs at its correctional facilities. Participants of Lockhart Correctional Facility's Driving While Intoxicated (DWI) Intervention Program say the program has been paramount not only in their recovery from addiction, but has also helped build their confidence and self-esteem.

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*"Recovery is a lifestyle. It's made me want to live a better life and a healthier lifestyle. And I won't end up in prison again. A lot of women lose their self-worth out on the streets, and here, you gain it back." – Cher M., Lockhart Correctional Facility*

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### Providing Women with Opportunities to Improve their Socioeconomic Condition

MTC's correctional facilities offer women the opportunity to learn new career skills while incarcerated, including certification in careers such as culinary arts, electrical, veterinary technician, printing and imaging, and horticulture.

Women at Lockhart Correctional Facility in Texas have a unique opportunity through two companies – Onshore Resources and Henderson Controls – to gain on-the-job training while incarcerated. While most prisons offer inmates opportunities to work, the partnership at Lockhart allows these women to earn market wages and pay child support while they learn valuable manufacturing skills and earn industry-recognized credentials.



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*"How many people can actually pay child support or send money home to their families while they are incarcerated? Especially for women, that is just unheard of." –Michelle L., Lockhart Correctional Facility*

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## Promoting Healthy Connections to Children, Family, and the Community

MTC provides parenting classes at all of its correctional facilities and encourages family visitation. Lockhart has developed a child friendly area in the visitation room. Other life skill programs include:

- self-esteem classes
- parenting
- anger management
- personal finances
- conflict resolution
- workforce readiness



MTC also seeks out partnerships with community-based reentry programs to ensure that women have the help that they need when they leave MTC's care. For example, MTC's Gadsden Facility works closely with Hope House, a reentry program in Clearwater, Florida that provides housing and employment support to women recently released from prison.

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*“The rehabilitation and reform that is provided here gives us a second chance at life and is truly a gift to our children. You’re not only helping this generation. There is a trickle-down effect. I am so grateful to you and Gadsden for helping me make the much needed changes in my life.” – Inmate at Gadsden Correctional Facility*

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<sup>i</sup> Fact Sheet on Justice Involved Women in 2016, National Resource Center on Justice Involved Women, <http://cjincludedwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Fact-Sheet.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> Covington, Stephanie & Burke, Cynthia & Keaton, Sandy & Norcott, Candice. (2008). *Evaluation of a Trauma-Informed and Gender-Responsive Intervention for Women in Drug Treatment*. Journal of Psychoactive Drugs.