

Kent Co Jail chosen for pilot program

One of 6 in the country picked for TJC

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- By Susan Samples

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (WOOD) - Angela Norby is a new mom. She's new to jail, too. Her crime is credit card fraud and bad taste in boyfriends.

Eureka Whitehead's addicted to drugs. "I would not be here if it wasn't for drugs and alcohol because I wouldn't have reason to do the things I do," she told 24 Hour News 8.

She doesn't want to share what she's done for drugs. "I've been in quite a few times," she said, laughing.

Frank Dow's a frequent guest of the Kent County Jail, too. He's had several DUIs plus too many 'driving on a suspended license' charges to count.

"This time around, though, I asked how many times I've been here and they told me 19 in 15 years," he said. "I knew it was up there, but I thought that was kind of phenomenal."

Phenomenal, maybe. A record, hardly.

One person has been in the Kent County Jail 112 times - and according to Capt. Randy Demory, that's probably still not a record.

"We walk them to the release door. We show them the outside and we know with an absolute certainty that they're going to be back," Demory told 24 Hour News 8.

Demory explained a new pilot program, **Transition from Jail to Community**, for which the **Kent County Jail was chosen**. Out of 3,365 independently operated jails nationwide, the Kent County Jail was one of only six chosen for the program created by the **National Institute of Corrections** and the **Urban Institute**.

The jail was chosen in part because the county is already committed to helping its inmates. Norby, Dow and Whitehead are housed at the Community Re-entry Center section of the jail.

"It's all part of this idea that you screen them on the outset and see what everybody feels that their needs are," Demory said. "You know, the thing that keeps them coming back."

At the moment, Paul Snyder is an incarcerated check forger. But his profession, his passion, is as a college professor. Snyder is able to help while he's on the inside.

"The lady in intake said, 'Well, if you have a masters in education, maybe you could help with the GED program. I said absolutely.'"

Dow and Whitehead took advantage of the sober living program available for non-violent offenders who live at the jail's lower risk **Community Re-entry Center**.



"I just needed help with my alcoholism," Dow said. "I didnt understand the extent of how bad I was."

Whitehead added, "They're trying to help me with the root of my crimes, why I commit the crimes."

What jail officials say the Transition from Jail to Community program will provide is critical technical support to set up a system to screen each and every inmate, identify their unique problems, and get them in programs while they're in jail to prepare them for release.

Success depends largely on collaboration between the jail and the community, say the program founders. Joint ownership of the problem of repeat offenders, and joint efforts to solve it.

"These are people that we live with in our community and it's a community issue," Capt. Demory said. "It's not just a jail issue. We very much see this as a crime prevention strategy and something that's going to prevent future victimization."

There are many victims: the target of the crime, the taxpayers who foot the bill for justice and kids like 3-month-old Maurice, who needs his mom, Angela Norby, at home.

Jail officials need volunteers, too, as teachers, mentors, even yoga instructors. If you'd like to help, **contact the TJC Project Leader Tina Worrall at 616.632.7737**

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