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## Hancock County Work Force Development Program

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The Hancock County Jail is a 58-bed facility and is consistently at or over housing capacity. A large percentage of the jail's resident population is currently fighting a substance abuse problem. These addictions include alcohol and drugs. The inmate population's substance abuse is consistent with the struggles of non-incarcerated individuals. The residents held at The Hancock County Jail have a very unique opportunity. Unlike an individual that is not incarcerated, the jail's residents have an opportunity to focus on their recovery with fewer distractions. They do not have to worry about their next meal, a place to sleep or constant pressures from individuals that are not supportive of recovery. These individuals are often seeking the path to sobriety.

Prior to the implementation of The Hancock County Work Force Development Program, the residents of The Hancock County Jail had variety of programs available. Many of these programs are still available at this time. The Hancock County Jail provides as much inmate programming as possible. The programs offered are "self contained"; each volunteer works with individuals or groups that meet their programming criteria. The jail's operational budget is the major barrier for inmate programming. This budget limits staffing and potential funding for program growth. The Hancock County Jail is blessed to have a group of volunteers that work closely with the resident population. This group of volunteers is the strength of the inmate program.

More than year ago, Hancock County Commissioner Percy Brown presented the idea of a Hancock County Work Force Program. Commissioner Brown assembled a meeting with Joanna Russell from Eastern Maine Development Corp, Barbara Royal from Open Door Recovery and myself. This is the first time we attempted to bring programming together and work toward a common goal. During this meeting, Commissioner Brown expressed his vision for the program. Commissioner Brown wanted to provide a support system for the jail's population and all that live in Hancock County. Eastern Maine Development Corp, Open Door Recovery and the jail's programming was a perfect match for the start of this program.

The work force program started inside the jail in early 2017. The inmate population was screened as they attended the Open Door Recovery Program. Open Door Recovery has been involved with the jail for several years. Three individuals were selected to become the pilot group of the program. These three individuals continued with all programs while incarcerated at the jail. During this time, they also attended the work force program. This program consisted

of three individuals that would create resumes, learn soft job skills, attend mock interviews, discuss future employers and discuss other needs for work placement. Following their release from the jail system, they continued substance abuse treatment with Open Door Recovery. Open Door Recovery would enroll the individuals into the Eastern Maine Development Corp, when they determined the time was appropriate. At this time, the individual would work towards future employment.

After the initial individuals complete the program they will be placed into the work force. The dedicated work from Eastern Maine Development Corp found local employers to hire these individuals. Two of these individuals are still working today and most importantly are substance abuse free. I strongly feel that if we did not have this program one of these individuals would have continued their lifestyle and been arrested frequently. It is important to know this program is also available to individuals that are not incarcerated. We feel if we can reach individuals prior to incarceration, we can prevent individuals from becoming a resident of the jail system.

This is more than a jail program, it provides assistance to individuals inside and outside of the jail. This is a program that pulled programming together for a common goal. Hancock County Work Force Development Program is making a difference not only to the inmate population. The incarcerated individuals are leaving the jail with the feeling of sobriety, hope, a meaning in life and the feeling of pride. I do not think words can describe how former jail residents feel when they leave knowing they have a future. Will this program create a substance abuse free society? No, but it will change the thought process of some individuals. This will change lives and strengthen families. I am excited to see what the future holds for this program.

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