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PEP in Prison

The People Empowering People (PEP) program is designed to build on the strengths of adults and older teens. It recognizes the unique strengths, life experiences and capacities of each person. Individual change is encouraged through training sessions, trust team building exercises, and discussions. PEP supports community action through participants' projects to change and improve the community. Along with being conducted at family resource centers and community based organizations, PEP is being conducted by trained volunteers in prisons.

Since 1999, with the support of the CT Department of Correction, 66 female inmates have graduated from PEP programs at York Correctional Institution, Niantic, and 45 male inmates from PEP programs at Brooklyn Correctional Institution, Cheshire Correctional Institution, Enfield Correctional Institution, Gates Correctional Institution, Niantic and Radgowski Correctional Institution, Uncasville. The PEP groups have conducted a variety of projects: crocheted blankets for the homeless, created decorative afghans for a Big Sister/Big Brother fundraiser and a

firehouse at Ground Zero, developed literacy coloring books for children visiting their mothers, read books on tape and the books and tapes went to children in shelters, prepared booklets on their lives for youthful offenders, conducted skits for youthful offenders at the prison, collecting food and clothing which were distributed to churches, read magazine articles on tape for the blind, etc.

As reported by facilitators, 100% of the participants showed improved communication skills, 66% showed improved problem solving skills, 50% showed enhanced understanding of parenting practices, 83% worked as a team to accomplish project goals, 100% conducted at least one project, and 76% shared new skills or knowledge with at least two other people. A more extensive evaluation of the entire PEP program conducted by the UCONN School of Family Studies graduate student Shirley Higgins will be available later this spring.

For information on volunteering for the program, contact **Cherry Czuba**, Extension Educator, Community Development, Families.



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