

# IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## MDOC Expands Thinking for a Change Classes

JACKSON – The Mississippi Department of Corrections is expanding the use of a proven cognitive behavioral change program under Commissioner Pelicia E. Hall’s goal to offer more meaningful rehabilitation.

Thinking for a Change (T4C) classes are now being offered in pre-release, education and alcohol and drug programs at the state prisons and probation and parole offices. They are also included in the curriculum at some community work centers and the new Recidivism Reduction Program (RRP.)

“We are hoping that offering Thinking for a Change in more areas will make a difference in our recidivism rate,” Hall said. “We know it has the potential because the evidence is there that it does make a difference. And, if we lower the number of people returning to prison, then, of course, we lower the cost of incarceration. This is something in which the effects are not immediate but may be shown over time.”

Two female inmates who graduated the program at the Flowood Community Work Center say it has made a difference in their thinking. Terri Holifield, 27, and Shirley Warren, 64, are each serving time for possession of a controlled substance in a facility.

“I learned self-control and thinking before I react,” said Holifield, who spoke to graduates at the Oct. 27 program about her experience from a previous class. “I was angry, frustrated. (The class) gave me a chance to grow before returning to society.”

Warren, one of the 14 offenders graduating, voiced similar sentiments. “At first, I didn’t want to attend the class, but it was a condition of my release,” she said. “Now I am glad that I did and I am thankful to MDOC for offering it. Through this program, I learned to be silent and think before I speak and think about other persons’ point of view. It helped me learn how to deal with stress and other people

in a positive way. It has made me a better person and I think every inmate should go through it.”

There are 25 lessons in the program. They are usually completed in 30 one- to two-hour sessions that can be held once or three times a week.

Thirty-one MDOC employees were among 35 people completing training sponsored by the National Institute of Corrections and hosted by Kmodity Corp., of Denver, Colo., in Jackson in August. The four-day training session, a first in the state, was designed to prepare facilitators to take the program back to their locations. Several of the staffers are expected to be trained to train others in 2018.

“One of the components I like is the role playing because it is something they can connect with,” said Lisa Herndon, interim pre-release director at South Mississippi Correctional Institution (SMCI), who is now teaching what she learned during training in Jackson.

With limited funds for intervention programs, Commissioner Hall said the department understands the importance of offering those that are evidence-based.

“There are a lot of expectations from the prison system when it comes to rehabilitation, but we don’t have a lot of money,” Hall said. “So MDOC has to look for evidence-based programs as well as partnerships that are relatively cost effective.”

A PEER report released in June lists T4C as a high quality program in the state’s inventory. “Thinking for a Change ... ranks highest in cost-effectiveness,” the report states.