

# FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Date:** March 15, 2018  
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## **Pilot Re-Entry Program Launched in Mississippi Prison System**

FLOWOOD – A nationally known author recently featured in *People* magazine for her work with incarcerated women and a nationally known businesswoman have chosen a Mississippi women’s facility to launch a re-entry workshop using principles routinely applied in the corporate world.

Deborah Jiang-Stein and Arianna Huffington, founder of Thrive Global, co-founder of *Huffington Post* and also an author, sponsored the four-hour Thrive Live workshop at the Rankin County satellite facility in Flowood.

Jiang-Stein, whose story of being born in prison is captured in her book *Prison Baby: A Memoir*, said Mississippi’s prison system was a perfect fit for the pilot program. She previously visited Central Mississippi Correctional Facility (CMCF) in Pearl, and features the prison in a video about her work for which she was named a 2017 L’Oréal Paris Women of Worth Honoree.

“The culture of openness and progressive approach to new programming that I have experienced through MDOC and their hospitality in welcoming my past visits made (it) a perfect location,” said Jiang-Stein, founder of the unPrison Project. “The number of incarcerated women has risen 800 percent over the last 20 years, twice that of males. That makes this a timely collaboration between unPrison and Thrive Global.”

Jiang-Stein and Kim Fulcher, a facilitator for Thrive Global from San Francisco, Calif., spoke to 30 female inmates on Friday. The session was the first time Fulcher said she had applied the strategies with offenders, as most of Thrive Global’s clients are in the corporate environment.

“I was very impressed with the camaraderie and the support the women had for each other,” Fulcher said. “Their enthusiasm is inspirational. The women really want this information, and I think it was a very positive experience for them. They can take these skills and make their lives better.”

Like other states, Mississippi’s female population has risen in the last 10 years. There are 1,988 women incarcerated now compared to 1,406 in March 2008.

Commissioner Pelicia E. Hall said MDOC welcomes partnerships that help the department achieve meaningful rehabilitation, especially those offered at no cost to the state.

“The Mississippi Department of Corrections fully appreciates this opportunity to provide another way that our female offenders can learn valuable skills for life in the free world,” Commissioner Hall said.

Thrive Live workshops focus on physical well-being, wisdom, connection, and purpose. Beliefs, nutrition, and sleep habits are included in the conversation. So are the latest science, storytelling and performance-enhancing strategies.

“Our program focuses on the mind, body, and spirit and helping to make sure the changes they (listeners) experience stay with them when they leave,” Jiang-Stein said. “It is about finding productive ways to connect with people, breaking the self-destructive habits that led them to prison, recognizing emotional triggers, and making better choices.”

Inmates Helen Kellar, Kristal Holliday, and Amanda Baugh were among those attending the workshop. All vowed that they want to do the right thing to stay out of prison.

“I have been in and out of prison several times but programs like this were not offered when I was here before,” said Kellar, 63, who is incarcerated for possession of a controlled substance with intent. “I have been through ‘Thinking for a Change’ and now this. It all means so much. This time when I get out, I’m not coming back.”

Holliday, 49, who also was convicted of possession of a controlled substance, said, “This program has given us good skills to have a better balance in life and to do the right things. I don’t intend to return.”

Baugh, convicted of nonresidential burglary, said she believes her chances for a better life are possible. “All of these topics they talked about really spoke to me,” Baugh, 35, said.

Thrive Global and the unPrison Project funded the Mississippi workshop. Their goals include seeking opportunities to expand to other prisons across the nation.

“For now we offered the one-time training and will review the outcome surveys and follow up with the women to gauge the possibility of more,” Jiang-Stein said. “Our goal is to make an impact on reducing recidivism and enhancing the quality of wellness and well-being for women in prison and for after their release. I believe we can make systemic changes in the culture of prison and the health and wellness of incarcerated women and at the same time for the professionals who serve them.”