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Cover photo shows Dr. Herbert Kaldany speaking out.
INSIDE WORD
with Acting Commissioner Marcus O. Hicks, Esq.

The Murphy Administration is committed to making New Jersey a national leader in efforts to halt the transmission of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and related infections such as Hepatitis C, and I’m proud to report that we in the New Jersey Department of Corrections are at the forefront of that effort.

On World AIDS Day in 2018, the New Jersey Department of Health announced Governor Murphy’s commitment to end the HIV epidemic in New Jersey by 2025 by promoting innovations in testing, linking individuals with treatment and medications that are effective in preventing transmission of the virus and retaining them in care.

I’ve often said that all of us in the NJDOC have a responsibility to rehabilitate the entire person, and that includes medical, mental health and substance use disorder needs. Within this Department, appropriate medications are made available to HIV patients without restrictions. Those treatments are provided in tandem with consultation that emphasizes patient education. As a result, HIV suppression among those patients who have been treated by the NJDOC for at least six months exceeds community standards.

It also should be noted that a subset of the inmate population, comprised of those with substance use disorders as well as the Hepatitis C virus, has been identified. Through a new initiative, this population will receive HCV infection treatment.

Various other state agencies, among them the departments of Human Services and Health, are playing significant roles in these critical initiatives as well. For all of us in the Murphy Administration, ending these epidemics is a top priority.

Sincerely,

Acting Commissioner Marcus O. Hicks, Esq.
A MATTER OF TRUST

Offender Population Responding Positively To Peer Navigator Program

By Matt Schuman

When a state-sentenced inmate is about to embark on the potentially overwhelming discharge planning and reentry process, it doesn’t have to be a one-person journey.

Help, in the form of peer navigators, is available. Since the establishment of the program a little more than a year ago, peer navigators can begin meeting with an inmate six months prior to release and continue to provide assistance up to a year after the release date.

“Oftentimes, offenders, especially those who have burned bridges with their families, have little or no support, so the peer navigator becomes the primary support system,” said Dr. Herbert Kaldany, director of mental health and addictions for the New Jersey Department of Corrections.

“To carry out their job responsibilities, peer navigators have been trained on what community services are available and how to make a connection for their clients to get access to those services,” he continued. “A peer navigator can, in essence, tell the offender, ‘Let’s do this together.’ To the offender, the importance of those words cannot be overstated.”

The peer navigator program is a joint collaboration between the NJDOC, the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, and Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care (UBHC), which is contracted by the NJDOC to provide the peer navigators.
The program has been developed based on a research project done at the University of Pennsylvania called Critical Time Intervention, which analyzed how best to connect released offenders with community services.

Positions exist for as many as 30 peer navigators to provide assistance to up to 600 inmates – 200 who receive Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) and another 400 who are not on MAT but who require substance use disorder services.

Significantly, when the program was still in the planning stage, Kaldany insisted that each peer navigator must be in recovery or must be a former inmate.

“We wanted them to have the experience of being in recovery or having been incarcerated so that they could relate to the clientele, which has that same background,” he explained. “They are able to function as a model for current offenders, who can say, ‘At one time, you were in my shoes, and you succeeded. Maybe I can succeed, too.’ An offender may not be able to identify in the same way with a professional without that background.”

Peer navigator James Ryals agreed.

“I have experience dealing with substance abuse and incarceration,” he said. “I’m able to use that experience to help relate to people going through similar situations.”

Added Adam Cortes, NJDOC supervising program development specialist, who works closely with peer navigators and their clients: “When someone can directly relate to you, the period it takes to develop a rapport and a level of trust tends to be much shorter. The peers are able to identify with an inmate’s experiences, and the inmates respond to that.”

According to Micah Hillis, UBHC program manager, peer navigators must have demonstrated sustained recovery and be at least five years removed from criminal involvement.

“There have been no negative issues to date among peer navigators,” Hillis reported. “On the contrary, the individuals who have been hired are thriving in their roles.”

By necessity, peer navigators receive extensive training.

“In the community, we have peer specialists, and we have navigators,” said Kaldany, who meets with the peer navigators on a regular basis. “We wanted to get both sets of qualifications in one person. That way, one individual could have the shared experiences as well as the training.”

In addition to their other duties, peer navigators are part of the inmate’s Intensive Recovery Treatment Support (IRTS) team, which also includes a nurse, primary care provider and case manager, among others. Involvement with the IRTS team helps the peer navigator to create a wellness and recovery plan for each client.

“On the healthcare side, there are people who are familiar with creating a plan to treat an individual’s illness or injury,” Kaldany said. “The peer navigator is designing a wellness and recovery plan to prevent a problem from occurring or an addiction from flaring up. In other words, the goals are to avoid a new problem and keep an old problem from resurfacing.”

The program has become so popular among the offender population that the JPay system has added a feature that specifically enables inmates to request peer navigator services.

“Whenever you’re trying to engage the inmate population, credibility is a factor,” Cortes said. “The inmates want to take advantage of the opportunity to receive help and guidance from individuals who can relate to their personal experiences.”
BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

Acting Director of Transitional Services Built Career Around Two Passions

By John Cokos

Everything was leading to a career in law enforcement for Leanne Cook.

She was finishing a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice and was excited by the possibility of working for the Drug Enforcement Agency.

With most of the courses required for her degree behind her, one class completely transformed her vision.

“During my last semester, I had a serious discussion with my professor in a class I took that was social work-based,” said Cook, acting director of Transitional Services for the New Jersey Department of Corrections. “I told her I didn’t think law enforcement was the path I wanted to take anymore.”

The course had peaked her curiosity about the idea of choosing social work as a career. “But where do I start?” Cook asked.

After listening to some suggestions from her professor, Cook began her career in social work at a domestic violence agency in Middlesex County.

“I did a little bit of everything at that agency, and I absolutely fell in love with the profession,” Cook said. “I was going to save everybody.

“I didn’t save everybody,” Cook admitted.

Leanne Cook’s career combines her love of social work with her love of law enforcement.
“Nobody showed me how to pace myself or explained that I couldn’t save the world, so I got a little burned out.”

Shortly thereafter, Cook found what appeared to be a career opportunity that would combine the best of both worlds.

“When I found out that I could be a social worker in corrections, a light bulb went off,” Cook said. “I would be able to combine the two things I loved, social work and law enforcement.”

And so began her career with the NJDOC. In 2003, she started as a social worker at Garden State Youth Correctional Facility.

“I learned so much about corrections, and I kind of caught the bug. I really liked it,” Cook said. “My family thought I was out of my mind at first, working at a prison. But I have always felt safe and secure.”

While obtaining her Master’s Degree in social work from Rutgers University, Cook moved to the recently established Office of Transitional Services (OTS) as an assistant social work supervisor. There, she was part of a small group of social workers that helped further develop OTS.

“I loved it. This was what I wanted to do,” Cook said. “I was in the field, working hands on with inmates and community partners. I was helping to create programs and develop reentry initiatives that increased success for inmates after they were discharged.”

OTS has changed and grown significantly since its inception, but the goal is still the same.

“Whether an inmate is in for two years or 20, our focus has always been to prepare offenders for release,” Cook said.

Social work in a corrections environment offers a unique set of challenges that tests even the most skilled social workers.

“It’s tough at first, because there are boundaries set in corrections that might seem unnatural to social work,” Cook said. “Part of social work is making a connection and building a rapport with your client. I’ve had to find ways to reach my goals while respecting those boundaries.”

In some ways, the rigidity at NJDOC has made Cook’s job easier.

“I thrive on rules and structure,” Cook said. “When I understand what the expectations are, what I can and can’t do, then I can create a plan.”

Regardless of the method used, what is most important is that the message is received.

“I get to listen to offenders speak during OTS program graduations, and when I see that we’ve opened someone’s eyes to new things, or that we’ve changed someone’s thinking in some way, I know it’s working,” she stated.

However, the corrections environment is unique, and Cook tries her best to paint a clear picture for new employees.

“I always try to make sure new hires are coming in for the right reasons,” Cook said. “With this job, you need to be flexible. If you’re bothered by change on a daily or sometimes hourly basis, this is not the right fit.”

As the acting director, Cook misses going out into the field, but she has plenty to keep her busy.

“Our ultimate goal is maintaining public safety by providing inmates with the resources and services that will help them achieve success upon release,” Cook said. “With 13 facilities, there is always a new scenario to address and always more work to be done.”
Correctional Police Sergeants Nicholas Stanicki and Donald McGee helped a state trooper apprehend a suspect who was fleeing the scene of a fiery tractor trailer accident on the New Jersey Turnpike.

**ALWAYS ON DUTY**

**Correctional Police Sergeants Make Quick Decisions During Incident on the New Jersey Turnpike**

By John Cokos

After a busy workday in January, colleagues Nicholas Stanicki and Donald McGee left work together, grabbed a quick cup of coffee and engaged in some friendly banter as they cruised along the New Jersey Turnpike.

The two correctional police sergeants from East Jersey State Prison are 11-year veterans of the New Jersey Department of Corrections. They had spent the day at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst conducting firearms training for correctional police officer recruits.

While enjoying their coffee and the ride home, the duo noticed plumes of black smoke rising in the distance.

Just ahead, at rest on the shoulder of the truck lane, a tractor trailer burned wildly next to a streak of burning fuel it had left along the barrier wall. As the duo approached the scene, they quickly noticed something even more bizarre.

“We knew something wasn’t right,” said McGee. “We saw a guy with no shirt running across the truck lanes with a state trooper behind him in pursuit.”

The tractor trailer driver had escaped serious injury and was running from the scene.

The trooper continued after the shirtless man (See **ALWAYS ON DUTY, page 9**).
After 19 Years, CRAF’s Julian Scheese Will Soon Take Her Last DNA Sample

By Shaheed M. Morris

When Julian Scheese began her career as a senior identification officer in the New Jersey Department of Corrections, she was nervous about stepping inside of a state prison.

“I was afraid,” Scheese said, “Truthfully, you never know what’s going to happen.”

Not only did she overcome her fears, but she ultimately thrived in her career.

Scheese was recently honored by the New Jersey State Police for completing more than 5,000 DNA samples in nearly two decades with the department.

“I was shocked and honored by the award,” Scheese said. “I have worked with them throughout the years, but it’s nice to be acknowledged.”

Scheese, who is 65, is retiring from NJDOC, as of April 1, and relocating to Georgia.

“I have worked with some incredible people,” Scheese said. “It’s been an education.”

Before working at Central Reception and Assignment Facility (CRAF), Scheese worked at Mid-State Correctional Facility for 10 years gathering intake and DNA samples. She also previously worked as an Emergency Medical Technician for nine years.

From 1994 to 2002, only sex offenders were subjected to DNA testing. In 2003, testing was expanded to include murder, manslaughter and second-degree aggravated assault. Then, in 2004, a state law was passed requiring all New Jersey inmates to undergo a DNA test.

The testing is completed by a mouth swab. Each DNA result is sent to the New Jersey Forensic Science Technology Center for processing.

Scheese’s second day on the job with the NJDOC in 1999 is one she will always remember.

“My second day on the job, I had to get a DNA sample of a deceased inmate at St. Francis Medical Center,” Scheese said. “Working as an EMT really prepared me. I saw much worse as an EMT.”

Rose Mendoza-Miller, a retired supervising identification officer, served as a mentor for Scheese when she first started with the department. Mendoza-Miller took Scheese to the different institutions as she trained her.
“Rose taught me a lot about what goes on,” Scheese said, “She was always helpful. And when I made mistakes, she never got upset with me.”

Besides collecting DNA samples, Scheese’s responsibilities also include paperwork, fingerprinting and Megan’s Law notification procedures.

Born in Trenton and raised in Washington Crossing, Scheese graduated from Hopewell Township High School in 1972.

“I really love my job,” Scheese said. “It is so rewarding to see the inmates change on the inside.”

CRAF Administrator Robert Chetirkin said he’s known Scheese for nearly 20 years. Chetirkin met Scheese when he was a parole officer at Northern State Prison.

“She’s been fantastic, easy-going and loves her job,” Chetirkin said. “She’s one of the people that has been truly a pleasure to supervise. She will definitely be missed.”

In Georgia, Scheese said she plans to visit the local police stations and correctional facilities to seek part-time employment opportunities.

Scheese said it will be strange not reporting to work any longer this spring.

“It will take a while getting used to not getting up every morning at 4 a.m.,” Scheese said, “I will miss the people the most. They are my family.”

ALWAYS ON DUTY

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across the truck lanes, over the metal guardrails into the car lanes and eventually into the path of Stanicki and McGee.

“I jammed on the breaks and stopped right in front of him,” said McGee. “He paused like a deer in the headlights.”

But the man began to run again, heading in the direction of the dangerously fast-moving southbound traffic toward the woods. Without hesitation, the two NJDOC employees took action.

“It was funny, because we literally didn’t say one word to each other,” said Stanicki. “Sergeant McGee hit the overhead lights and pulled over, we both hopped out, jumped the divider and positioned ourselves on opposite sides to assist the trooper. No words were exchanged.”

All three law enforcement officers jumped over the concrete barrier into the shoulder of the southbound passing lane.

“Fortunately, in conjunction with the state trooper, we were able to quickly take the man down and secure him with handcuffs,” McGee said.

“Otherwise, the outcome could have been much worse for everybody,” Stanicki added. “Traffic in the southbound passing lane was much heavier.”

It was all over as quickly as it began. Afterwards, although it was unexpected, the two correctional police sergeants weren’t at all surprised or distressed by the incident.

“We’re first responders. It’s instinctive to us,” McGee said. “In the heat of the moment, whether it’s inside a prison or out in the public, we’re professionals trained to handle anything that comes before us as quickly and efficiently as possible.”

“We’re not thinking so much about our own safety during an incident, but preserving the safety of the people we are sworn to protect,” Stanicki added.
LEARNING EXPERIENCE

NJDOC Assembles Multi-Agency Roster of Speakers for Training Conference

By John Cokos

The mission of the New Jersey Department of Corrections is to protect the public by operating safe, secure and humane facilities.

The Department is better preparing its employees to support that mission by hosting a newly designed annual training conference.

Top management from the NJDOC as well as an eclectic lineup of guest speakers representing healthcare, higher education and various other law enforcement agencies in New Jersey and beyond gathered in Atlantic City for the first NJDOC Conference and Training Event.

The curriculum for the event, which was held Feb. 19-21, was crafted to deliver a comprehensive and in-depth examination of a variety of complex topics.

Although the NJDOC hosted various gatherings in the past, the most recent one is the first of its kind for the Department.

“The Conference and Training Event hosted by the New Jersey Department of Corrections was unlike any of the previous retreats because it focused on topics and issues that are relevant specifically to correctional leaders,” said NJDOC Acting Commissioner Marcus O. Hicks, Esq. “The correctional setting is so unique, and we cannot assume that a ‘one-size-fits-all’ training will suit the needs of our staff.”

Speakers explored issues such as gender responsiveness in women’s prisons, suicide prevention and correctional leadership. The presentations also helped to reinforce the effectiveness of new initiatives taking place within
the Department such as the peer navigator program, Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) and employee wellness.

“When selecting the presenters, we were careful to choose instructors who have an extensive background in corrections or law enforcement,” Hicks said. “For example, the staff wellness piece was taught by the former Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Corrections; therefore, it encompassed not just overall staff wellness, but staff wellness specific to the correctional professional.”

Director of Mental Health and Addictions Dr. Herbert Kaldany led discussions on opioid addiction and moderated a panel discussion on MAT, which underscored other presentations given on substance use disorder and behavioral health. The panel included the Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Health, Dr. Shereef Elnahal, as well as prominent members of the New Jersey Psychiatric Association and the Cooper Medical School of Rowan University.

Other presentations featured members of the NJDOC custody staff, who discussed gender responsiveness, and Rutgers University staff specializing in criminal justice and correctional healthcare, who led discussions on mental health and women’s roles in corrections.

Senior members of the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness closed the conference with discussions on terrorism awareness and active shooter response.

Further setting this training apart from others the NJDOC has hosted in the past was the attendees.

“We extended invitations to county jail staff, halfway house personnel and other state agencies that we work in conjunction with on some of these topics, so as to provide them with the information and knowledge, as well,” Hicks said.

As a result of that diverse audience and lineup of speakers, a great deal of information was received and circulated.

Participants also benefited from opportunities to network, not only among NJDOC employees, but also with professionals from other agencies.

“The conference provided a venue and an opportunity for all of us to gather, share stories, problems, insights and ideas,” said NJDOC Director of Operations Alfred Kandell. “The curriculum that was offered was interesting and beneficial. Additionally, being able to meet and talk with the people that we generally only speak to over the phone or occasionally is also invaluable. It helped us to cement relationships and facilitate our ability to work through correctional issues that always seem to arise.”

Added Garden State Youth Correctional Facility Administrator Tracey Shimonis-Kamiski; “The training addressed many of the trending topics that are at the forefront of what we do every day. It provided a platform for us to deepen our understanding of contemporary issues in corrections.”
Major Hector Smith (above) and Senior Correctional Police Officer Jennifer Noll (below) discuss Gender Responsive Training.

An NJDOC Honor Guard enters the conference.

Participants in the NJDOC Conference and Training Event listen to a presentation.