

D.C. center aims to combat recidivism



(Greg Whitesell/Examiner)

Lead counselor Horace Anding teaches his community support and coping skills lesson to ex-convicts on Monday at the new D.C. Reentry and Sanctions Center, a 102-bed, 28-day stay rehabilitation center.

Scott McCabe, The Examiner
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WASHINGTON -

The most difficult criminals leaving federal prison and returning to D.C. will come to a new center housed in the former doctor's dormitory on the grounds of D.C. General Hospital.

The Reentry and Sanctions Center will show off today the 102-bed facility that will treat 1,000 of the 2,300 offenders who reenter District society each year. It opened informally in February.

The participants are those offenders who were most likely to return to a life of crime and drugs. If the center can rehabilitate the most difficult offenders in the criminal justice system, it'll have the greatest impact on public safety, said Leonard Sipes, spokesman for the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency for the District of Columbia.

"This is their last chance to change themselves from tax burdens into taxpayers," Sipes said.

The center — run by the court services and offender agency, a federal unit — deals directly with the individual's substance abuse and mental health issues because those factors are strongly connected to crime, Sipe said. About two-thirds of parolees returned to prison in 2005 went back because of drug abuse, not a new arrest, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.

Most participants are between the ages of 18 and 25. The 28-day program assesses the person to see what makes him or her tick, Sipes said. Many of these ex-convicts began using drugs and alcohol when they were 11 or 12 years old and committing crimes by 13.

The center then works with its clients on jobs, education and mental health. While most states have two face-to-face meetings a month with its parolees, CSOSA will contact its graduates up to eight times a week and can drug test.

A University of Maryland 2001 review of a pilot program for the center found that the arrest rate of participants fell by 35 percent compared to the year before.

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