



# One Juvenile Facility's Answer to Retention: Training and Mentoring

By Mario Hesse

A major correctional work force issue facing current administrators is retention. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) has projected a 14 percent increase in U.S. correctional positions between 2006 and 2016 — a projected need of 164,000 additional correctional employees.<sup>1</sup> These estimates demonstrate the possibility of there being more jobs than there are people to fill them. Employers have options to address current facility shortage issues.

Juvenile correctional officers (JCOs) employed at the Hennepin County Juvenile Detention Center (HCJDC) in Minneapolis have taken steps to address the dilemma brought upon by these projections. The issue is not the inability of the detention center to hire qualified applicants; rather, the issue is the retention of current full-time JCOs within the facility. As with most correctional facilities, newly hired HCJDC employees gain experience and then leave. Gunderson, Jones and Scanland reported that one of the several reasons for this is that jobs for skilled and talent-

ed people are more plentiful. According to J.L. McKeown, supervisors fail to treat employees with respect or properly recognize them. Additionally, and perhaps more applicable to the corrections field, Kaye and Jordan-Evan reported that worker overload, stress and burnout influence an employee's motivation to actively seek positions that afford some reasonable balance.

During the past few years, lateral transfers within Hennepin County have increased due to the numerous opportunities available to staff with 12 to 14 months of juvenile correctional employment experience. These types of opportunities were once only accessible to staff with eight to 10 years of experience.<sup>2</sup> In order to keep JCOs from vacating their positions, detention center administrators needed to address the contributing factors.

## Identifying the Need

Although administrators are advised to address all issues pertaining to retention, supervisors overseeing JOCs

at HCJDC have addressed two aspects of retention by implementing a new employee orientation and mentoring program. In an effort to try to implement some ideas from past conversations, meetings and brainstorming sessions on the current training process, several items within the preservice training were changed in late 2006 to remedy turnover. Before the changes, newly hired JCO staff had an exhausting three-week training program. The employee spent numerous days with various human resources individuals, numerous hours reading policy and procedure, and very few hours gaining practical experience on a living unit. Past newly hired staff were bored and felt no applicability between the training received and their actual job duties.

In formulating a new curriculum, the detention center's goal was to create an applicable training curriculum that would more efficiently train a JCO. By the second week of training, new hires would have the same responsibilities as any post-trained JCO. This new policy allows more time to acclimate newly hired JCOs to the agency. The goals of these changes are to allow for full programming and for new hires to work with a regular co-worker/mentor during the training process to offer guidance, coaching and evaluations.

## A New Training Curriculum

McKeown surmised that new employees tend to identify their level of comfort within the first three weeks of employment, and that orientation — filling out numerous forms and reading policies — should be separate from training. In the case of HCJDC, core policies essential to living unit operations were identified to alleviate the reading burden during the initial training period. Traditionally, employees would set aside two full days during the three-week training period for “core policy reading.” All policies are now read within 45 days of the start of employment, as directed by the Umbrella Rule.<sup>3</sup> This change allows an additional 16 hours of practical training. In addition, the county mandated that staff be trained and “tested out” in behavior management and restraint training by the end of their first week of service, which allows staff to participate in juvenile restraint situations, if necessary, during their second or third week of training. Previously, the participation of a JCO in living unit planning or the physical restraint of a juvenile was prohibited until full training had been completed. Other changes to the training curriculum include the implementation of “well-being” (i.e., room) check training and documentation. In previous years, employees were not allowed to sign off on any paperwork until after their initial three-week training. Now, once the core policies and well-being check training are complete, new staff can perform these checks during training.

## Mentoring

Mentoring was one final important addition made to the training curriculum. Before the change, the only contact a newly hired employee had with a detainee was under the watchful eye of a full-time JCO. HCJDC decided to assign a field training officer (FTO) to each newly hired JCO during

the three-week training. In addition, the detention center developed the position of supervisor of building operations staff development. The duties of this supervisor are to expand the FTO duties (e.g., guidance, evaluation and feedback) throughout JCOs' 12-month probationary period — and, more important, throughout tenure. This implementation leads to an increase in knowledge and self-assurance on the job. HCJDC's purposes for the assigned FTO and the supervisor of building operations staff development were mutually beneficial for a number of reasons. It provides continual development of a JCO regardless of employment tenure; development of leadership skills for FTOs; an avenue for the sharing of experience and knowledge; and the opportunity to discover new ways of thinking.

Correctional mentoring, as reported by numerous authors including J.B. Rowley and P.M. Wittenberg, allows for the following:

- Increased personal knowledge and organizational awareness;
- Enhanced understanding of one's role in the organization;
- A developed environment that supports constructive criticism;
- Opportunities to offer wisdom, advice, help and encouragement;
- Opportunities for networking; and
- An environment for thinking about potential future employment options.

Additionally, mentoring enhances service delivery because agency staff are better informed and more skilled. It stimulates the workplace, making it more effective, and promotes increased communication and sharing of values.

Mentoring addresses the four basic outcomes of “guard socialization” that Crouch and Marquart say result after a correctional officer completes his or her rites of passage among correctional officers. These authors advance that a correctional officer becomes either an abject, a ritualist, a successful officer or an insider. Similar to the inmate subculture, correctional officers experience their own form of occupational socialization. This process not only teaches a new hire the formal policies and procedures, but perhaps more important, it teaches the informal procedures. This is perhaps best represented in *The Shawshank Redemption* when Warden Norton exclaimed, “[T]he other rules you'll figure out as you go along.” Although experiences among correctional officers vary from state to state, all officers can find application to at least one of the listed socialization outcomes within their correctional organization. In the case of HCJDC, appointing mentors provided the means to train successful officers regardless of tenure at the facility. New staff work with one trainer for consistency, which is an attempt to add accountability to the training process.

## Improving Retention

It should be noted that administrators employed within HCJDC were well aware that they would have no control over the career paths of each staff member. However, the new training curriculum and the assignment of mentors

were implemented in an attempt to make the position more fulfilling, more manageable and more practical for both new and post-probationary JCOs.

The new training addresses strategies to improve retention rates within the facility. These policy changes reflect the work of Riley and Wilder, wherein the authors provided a seven-step plan to address employee retention. Steps include facilitating cross training; recognizing staff accomplishments; establishing realistic performance goals and objectives; incorporating staff into the decision-making process; and controlling the environment, trainer and mentor from the time of initial contact to provide the appropriate first impressions. Helping supervisors understand the role they can play in improving staff retention will improve the economic image and promote greater facility efficiency.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> “Projected growth” represents the estimated change in total employment over the projection period (2006-2016). “Projected need” represents job openings due to growth and net replacement.

<sup>2</sup> HCJDC reported a turnaround rate of 22.9 percent in 2007, compared with an average of 10 percent for 2000. Additionally, 78 full-time JCO positions were filled out of 99 full-time slots (Dec. 31, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> For more information on the Umbrella Rule (Umbrella Rule Chapter 2960), visit [www.corr.state.mn.us/org/supportserv/umbrellarule/default.htm](http://www.corr.state.mn.us/org/supportserv/umbrellarule/default.htm).

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