

R.E.E.F.S. Program at Wakulla C.I. Teaches Inmates to Use Money and Time Wisely

On Wednesday, Secretary McNeil and the executive leadership team at Corrections hosted a press conference and tour at Wakulla C.I. The press conference was a hit with reporters and several staffers from the Florida Legislature and Governor's Office stayed after for the tour of the Faith and Character-based institution. One of the programs visited was the Realizing Educational Emotional and Financial Smarts, or REEFS. Designed and run by inmates, REEFS provides a holistic approach to re-entry at minimal cost to the state.

The program is composed of five courses: Credit and Debt Management, Time Management, Small Business Concepts, Personal Finance and Investing, and Life Mapping. The course names give an idea of just what the REEFS program is all about. Inmates looking to prepare themselves for re-entry can take whatever combination of courses best suites their needs.

Wakulla Education Supervisor Erin Armstrong explains that the REEFS program began as just the Small Business Concepts course, which used a curriculum developed in 2005 by two inmates. When Horizons, an in-prison ministry service, was contracted with the department several years later, they liked the course so much they decided to sponsor it. Under their sponsorship, Inmate Instructors Mark Brackmann, Jeffrey Botsford and Darryl Simpson developed four more courses modeled after the Small Business Concepts Curriculum. "We realized the Small Business Concepts course was doing what it was designed to do, but there were a number of needs it didn't address." Thus the REEFS program was born, incorporating Small Business Concepts as one option in a broader holistic curriculum.

While each course can be taken independently, inmates are encouraged to start with Life Mapping, where they complete a Pre-Self Discovery Survey and evaluate their strengths in eight areas of daily life. The goal is to figure out where they need help and where they can help others. An inmate who is strong in personal finance might, for example, be able to exchange talents with another inmate who is weak in personal finance, but strong in spirituality.

The materials for each course are thick with substance. They contain engaging exercises that help inmates identify their potential and build a map toward realizing it. And the state spends just fifty cents a book per 10-week class. Inmate Instructor Jeffrey Botsford points out that the materials offer information usually not even taught in most high-school curriculums.

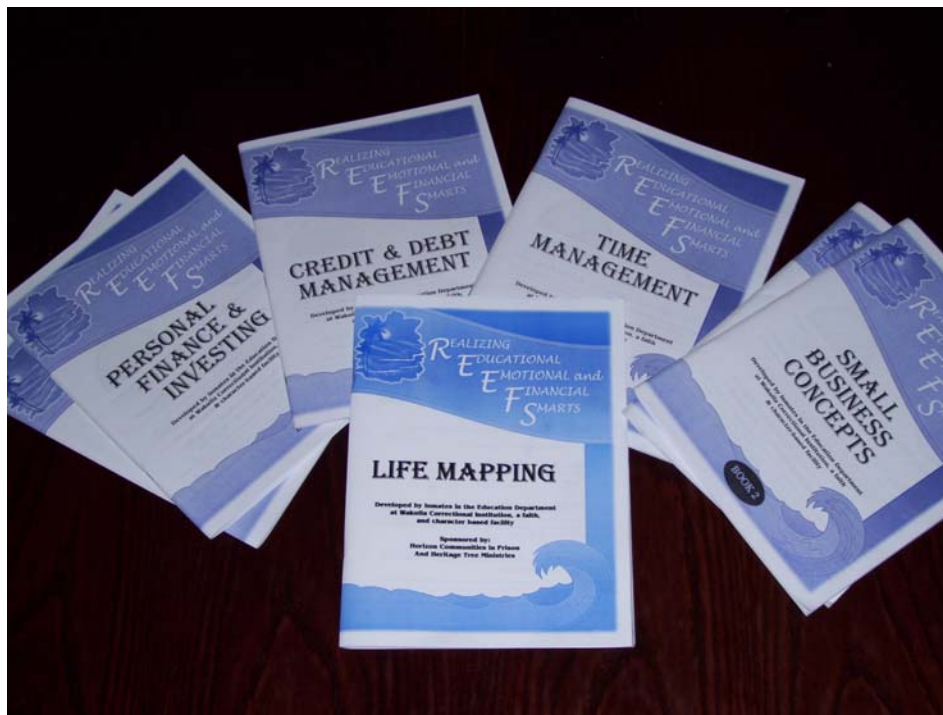
Small Business Concepts, for example, includes lessons and advice on sales strategy, competition analysis, identify and maintaining a customer base, advertising, budgeting and more. And the lessons are invaluable. Inmates frequently have trouble finding employment after prison because of their criminal record and their gap in employment history. Empowering them with the tools they need to turn their talents into a business means they are less likely to return to the business of crime when they're released.

Ms. Armstrong characterizes the curriculum as targeting areas of post-release life inmates struggle with most. Inmates are taught to look at their lives before they were incarcerated and consider their weaknesses with an eye to their post-incarceration life. She says, "It is important to me and the institution that our students walk away with a comprehensive understanding of the

real life concepts taught in these classes. My hope is that the skills and concepts learned in our program will assist inmates in their ability to lead a more positive, productive life upon release.”



Inmates designed the curriculum and instruct REEFS courses. Pictured are the current instructors at Wakulla: (from left to right) Jeffery Botsford, Mike Jacknow, Donald Hines, Dirk Williams, William Padgett, Mark Brackmann, Ken Kline, Darryl Simpson, Bryan Stenstrup, Chris Hoehn, Antwan McCoy (in front).



Textbooks for the courses cost just fifty cents a piece.