



WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Governor Tony Evers / Secretary Kevin A. Carr

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Helping an Underutilized Resource Boost Wisconsin's Workforce

Plymouth, Wis. - Devonte Jackson sat at a computer screen at Kettle Moraine Correctional Institution (KMCI) on Tuesday and explained why the task he was working on may be the most important to ensure his future success

"I want to learn as much as I can about the employment process, including interviewing, job research, and resume development, with the ultimate goal of a job before release," Jackson explained. "A job where I can continue to develop my skills in order to open up more opportunities."

Opportunity is key for Jackson. He is 27 years old and a felon due to a guilty plea in a 2013 forgery case. He is also among the men in DOC care at KMCI who are using the institution's Job Center in hopes of finding a good job that can help set them up for success in the community.

"Finding a job can be one of the largest obstacles for people leaving DOC care. They've been in prison, so they may have no recent work history, plus there is the stigma of having a criminal record and being recently incarcerated," Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC) Sec. Kevin Carr said at the Job Center on Tuesday. "We cannot wipe away that stigma, but we can give people in our care a head-start on their job search before they return home."

DOC's Job Centers are a joint effort between the DOC and the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD). They provide access and support to help people in DOC care create a Job Center of Wisconsin account that they can continue to use when they return home. They also use the Center to look for jobs, apply and interview.

James McInnis, Education Director at KMCI, says one man who used the Job Center received a job offer while still at the facility in late May and began his employment within days of his release.

"Wisconsin, like the rest of the Midwest and United States, is facing a worker quantity shortage," said DWD Secretary-designee Amy Pechacek. "We have, right now, about two open jobs for every job-seeker, so we have been coaching employers around the state that there are many talented, yet underutilized, pools of individuals, including folks who have been incarcerated, who are returning to the communities and can help fill their workforce needs."

Secretary-designee Pechacek was one of several visitors who recently toured the Job Center, which is just one example of how the DOC, under the Evers Administration, is partnering with other agencies to strengthen a state workforce that needs more employees.

Visitors also had the opportunity to tour KMCI's various vocational education classes, including welding, barbering and mechanical design. DOC partners with Moraine Park Technical College (MPTC) to provide these opportunities to earn certification in various fields.

"It's important for us because we serve the employers in our district, and we want to make sure that every population has the opportunity to help our employers find the talented workforce they need," said MPTC President Bonnie Baerwald. "We also realize that a lot of justice-involved populations are released at some point in time. So, we want to make sure they have the best opportunity that, once they are released, they don't come back. I'm very proud of the academic programming that we are able to offer here."

"Every year, thousands of people leave Wisconsin DOC custody. Most will be looking for employment when they go home," said Sec. Carr. "With our partners we're giving them the skills to compete for a job and the tools to help them find a job before they leave us. It's a win for them and for the state's economy."

DOC and DWD have worked to greatly expand the number of Job Centers at DOC institution under the Evers Administration, going from one in 2018 to 11 currently. The one at KMCI is the newest, having been in use just a couple of months. The KMCI Job Center has 12 work stations and is staffed by DWD employees. The institution prioritizes use of the Job Center for those within six months of their release date.