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WI DOC Receives 2011 Wisconsin Financial Literacy Award Governor's Council on Financial Literacy Recognizes Education Program for Inmates

Madison, WI—Governor Walker has presented a 2011 Wisconsin Financial Literacy Award to the Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC) for educating prison inmates on money and personal finance as part of a comprehensive program to prepare them for successful reentry into the community.

The DOC was among eight organizations and 14 individuals presented with the Department of Financial Institutions 2011 Financial Literacy Award at the State Capitol Thursday for their work to advance and improve personal finance skills in Wisconsin schools, workplaces and communities.

DOC was recognized for its work to highlight and expand financial literacy education inside institutions with seminars that covers everything from credit and checking issues to obtaining a loan and owning a home. Last year, 1,165 inmates took more than 500 financial literacy seminars and boosted their knowledge of personal finance on the average from a score equivalent to a "D" to a "B".

The DOC financial literacy effort formally began after 2007 when the Department implemented a statewide Pre-Release Initiative. That initiative requires each offender complete modules of instruction in subject areas determined to be essential for offender reintegration into society after release from prison.

As this Pre-Release initiative was being implemented, DOC teachers became aware of a financial literacy seminar facilitated by the Community Education Program at M & I Bank (now BMO Harris Bank). Based on Money Smart curriculum developed by the FDIC, the seminar was taught at several prisons around the state and, ultimately, was adopted as standard curriculum for one of ten education modules in the DOC Pre-Release Initiative.

The standardized financial literacy curriculum is taught by Bank personnel but trained DOC teachers at institutions statewide now handle most of the seminars. Various statistics are reported to the Bank at the conclusion of each seminar, including pre-test and post-test scoring.

DOC Secretary Gary Hamblin, Reentry Director Mary Kay Sergo and Jim Abig of Redgranite Correctional Institution attended the Financial Literacy Award Ceremony.

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“With as many as 97% of our offenders releasing from prison one day, programs like financial literacy are a key part of our comprehensive initiative to make sure offenders can secure housing and jobs and lead crime-free lives once they get out,” said Secretary Gary Hamblin.

DOC supervises nearly 22,000 offenders in prisons and correctional centers statewide and supervises an additional 68,000 living in Wisconsin communities. Its mission is to protect public safety and reduce repeat crime by helping prepare offenders for productive lives after they complete their court-ordered sentences.

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Pictured from left: Gary Hamblin, Secretary of the Department of Corrections; Peter Bildsten, Secretary of the Department of Financial Institutions and Co-Vice Chair of the Governor's Council on Financial Literacy; Mary Kay Sergio, Director of the DOC Reentry Program; James Abig, a teacher at Redgranite Correctional Institution; Governor Walker; and Ted Nickel, Commissioner of the Office of the Commissioner of Insurance and Co-Vice Chair of the Governor's Council on Financial Literacy.