

Employment Readiness in DOC Town Hall March 22, 2022

Zack Osell: Okay. It looks like we're ready to get started. Thank you all for joining us for today's virtual town hall on employment readiness in DOC, where we'll be discussing the ways that our agency actively seeks out ways to promote collaboration and employment opportunities for individuals who are returning to the community from incarceration and how they can be a valuable addition to the work force. My name is Zack Osell and I'll be moderating today's event. I am a communication specialist in the Office of Public Affairs and one of the key responsibilities of my position is stakeholder engagement. But before we move on today, I want to go over one of the features we'll be using in our Zoom Webinar. You should see a question and answer icon near the bottom of your screen. We will be looking at all the questions submitted using this feature throughout today's webinar and we will have time near the end to open up the floor to our panelists to answer some of the questions that we receive. I also want to note that today's session will be recorded and shared at a later date for those who are unable to attend today's live event, and also as we have done in the past, we will post an FAQ document on our public website after the event that addresses the questions we don't get to today. That's it for me, I am now going to turn it over to Secretary Carr for his opening remarks and some more information about our panel members for today's topic.

Secretary Carr: Thank you, Zack. Good afternoon and thank you for joining us for our town hall on employment readiness in the Department of Corrections. Governor Evers and I know one of the top issues facing Wisconsin's businesses right now is their inability to hire and retain enough employees. The labor shortages are not unique to our state or any one industry. This is a nation-wide crisis we're all trying to navigate together after battling more than two years of a global pandemic.

Our agency felt there was no better time than to hold, no better time than today to hold today's event and to share how DOC is working to prepare folks for employment after incarceration and assist in building the work force in our state with skilled workers. The work we're doing not only helps employers in our state but also for individuals releasing from incarceration, the prospect of finding employment at a living wage may seem overwhelming. Knowing these challenges, our agency continues to look for ways to leverage opportunities that will help fill vacancies. We are doing this by increasing programming across the state and investing in partnerships with other agencies such as the Department of Workforce Development. Doing this provides incarcerated individuals the opportunity to learn new skills and increase their chances for employment after release. The majority of folks entering our system leave and return home to their communities within two years. In fact, only about 10% of those incarcerated are with us for longer than five years.

As I've mentioned in our past town halls, when a person comes into the custody of the Department of Corrections, we look at their time with us as an opportunity to address issues that led to their incarceration, to see what we can do to ensure that they never come back and we know one of the best anecdotes for recidivism is a family supporting-wage job. Integrating workforce strategies and training can lead to a decrease in unemployment, reduce turnover and assist individuals with a criminal record to meaningfully participate in the workforce and stay in the community.

Today our panelists are going to walk you through, walk you through some of the exciting things we're doing at our agency related to workforce training and partnerships. We have subject-matter experts from a number of divisions, agencies and organizations. From our Division of Adult Institutions, here to discuss programming and work release during incarceration, we have administrator Sarah Cooper, our Office of Programs and Service Director Lisa Reible and Superintendents Maria Silao-Johnson and Julie Ustruck Wetzell. From our Division of Community Corrections, here to discuss programming and partnerships within the community once an individual has been released, we have Correction Services Supervisor Josey Lopez. From our reentry unit here to discuss reentry efforts and initiatives to assist in the successful transition from incarceration to the community, we have Employment Program Manager Becky Heth. We also have a few folks from outside our agency who I'm really excited to have here with us today. Human Resources and Production Manager from Staffing Synergies, Katie Berry and a recent graduate of one of DOC's Career Technical Educational, partnerships programs, Shauna Howick. During Shauna's incarceration she was able to participate in a training program and later participate in work release prior to returning to the community. Shauna is going to share her

experiences with us today as well as discuss her life after incarceration and current employment opportunities. I would like to thank both Katie and Shauna for being here today and sharing their experiences.

Now before I hand things off to our panelists, I want to share a couple of brief video messages. The first is from Governor Evers and the second from Secretary-Designee Amy Pechacek of the Department of Workforce Development. Governor Evers has been working alongside both of our agencies to do the right thing for our state, employers and those returning from incarceration every chance he gets. Knowing the impact of COVID-19 has had on Wisconsin employers, Governor Evers continues to find ways to invest in our workforces and help employers come back stronger than ever. An example of that commitment includes the recent 130-million-dollar investment into solutions to address the state's workforce needs and to support innovative pandemic recovery efforts. The groundbreaking investment builds on Wisconsin's leadership and workforce development and advances the state's economic competitiveness. I couldn't be more grateful for the support and partnership of both the Governor and Secretary-Designee Pechacek. I hope you enjoy the presentation and I look forward to hearing your questions and feedback. Thank you.

Governor Tony Evers: Hey there folks, Governor Tony Evers here. It is my pleasure to help welcome everyone to this town hall. I want to thank Secretary Carr for inviting me and thank all of you for joining us to talk about such an important topic. The struggle of Wisconsin employers to find and keep qualified workers is among the largest concern facing our state. It's a challenge they've faced for years and we're responding by investing heavily in our state's workforce and our infrastructure. Through our Workforce Innovation Grant Program, which was part of 130 million investment in our workforce, I was proud to support 12 regional projects with nearly 60 million dollars in grants to develop long-term solutions to Wisconsin's workforce needs. This investment will support training and attract healthcare workers throughout rural Wisconsin and developing the state's advanced manufacturing workforce. In fact, as part of this program, up to 5.7 million dollars in funding was awarded to support the University of Wisconsin System's Prison Education Initiative and their work to deliver workforce ready curriculum to teach employable skills to students while incarcerated and continue supporting them post-release through program completion and career placement.

This is important work but we can continue to do more. Each year thousands of people leave DOCs Correctional Facilities and return to their families and communities, and ensuring folks can safely re-enter our communities is critically important for families and for our state's workforce. We've worked hard to make sure folks have the support in resources they need to get treatment, get trained and prepare to enter our workforce and to find family supporting jobs upon their release. And folks, this is an evidence-based common-sense solution. We know that programs like this lower recidivism and help keep our communities safer and ultimately save our state in long run.

The Department of Corrections and the Department of Workforce Development have collaborated on great projects from expanding the number of job centers in our institutions, to strengthening our relationships with the Wisconsin Technical Colleges to offer more hands-on skill training to those in our care. Today you're going to learn much more about these collaborations and what DOC has done, especially throughout the pandemic to increase opportunities for justice involved individuals. You will also learn how our administration is seeking out new opportunities because much more work remains. So again, thank you to Secretary Carr and the DOC for facilitating this discussion, and thank you to everyone here for being part of this conversation. Thank you.

Amy Pechacek: Thank you Secretary Carr for the opportunity to join in this important town hall meeting. I am Amy Pechacek, Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, and hello to all my friends at DOC. This is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate our ongoing collaboration and recognize your efforts to advance workforce readiness among those in your care. I feel fortunate to follow Governor Evers' remarks and I'm even more honored to be in his cabinet. Governor Evers has appointed women to 10 positions of his 16 total positions in his cabinet which is just amazing. This Governor's Cabinet is one of the most diverse in state history and is truly a cause for celebration during this women's history month. Under Governor Evers' leadership, the Badger State is bouncing back. As we leave the space of the COVID-19 pandemic, a robust recovery is already underway. The state's unemployment rate is at historic lows and the state's general fund is exceeding earlier projections. To maintain this momentum and address workforce challenges that have been decades in the making, Governor Evers is investing 130 million dollars in funding through the

workforce solutions initiative. This investment provides innovative solutions to overcome workforce barriers such as access to childcare, transportation and affordable housing. From this investment, there is much good news and many positive developments that we will continue to share in the months ahead.

But in the brief time I have with you all today, I want to address just two main things. First, Wisconsin employment data and secondly the collaborative efforts between the Department of Workforce Development and all of you folks at DOC. So starting with the employment data, as I alluded to earlier, we've now returned to historically low unemployment levels with a labor force participation rate, which that term refers to a measure of the state's total population that's participating in the workforce, and our labor force participation rate is among the top 10 nationwide. So as a result, employers are facing some worker shortages, especially with so many baby boomers calling it quits during the pandemic. So here's what the latest available data on this looks like for Wisconsin. We have a total of about 5.8 million residents in our state and about one and a half million of those folks do not participate in the labor market, so of that one and a half million approximately one million are aged 55 and over and have retired. So many like the baby boomers that I just spoke about they're off, they're not going come back. So, it's that remaining group which is around 500,000 people of working age that represent a significant opportunity to help combat Wisconsin's workforce challenge. And our evidence-based data driven research tells us that there are four under-utilized talent pools within their group that represent the largest immediate opportunity to help with our workforce shortage issues.

So those first individuals in that first bucket are folks with disabilities, and these are people who with the help of adaptive technology or an accommodation, would be some of the best employees an employer will ever have. The second bucket of folks is our veterans. So vets have a higher unemployment rate than the general population, but as we all know, veterans are motivated, loyal and highly skilled group. Unemployed folks represent the third category of individuals and these are folks that just are unemployed currently and needs some upscaling or training to be competitive and fill the vacancies in our current economy. And then the last group of individuals are our justice involved persons and as you likely know, there are around 9,000 people that are released from the Department of Corrections every year. And I think we can probably all agree, there are number of sound reasons, good public policy reasons to increase the focus on justice involved people. And at DWD, we are doing all that we can and I'm proud to say we make a great team, DWD and DOC working together to find creative solutions.

One great example involves DOC, DWD and Western Technical College. Together, we're delivering high-tech training at Jackson Correctional Institution. Last fall, Secretary Carr and I along with DOA Secretary Kathy Blumenfeld visited JCI and there we toured the CNC Bab. So CNC as in Computer Numerical Control, which is a computerized manufacturing process. And we celebrated the first cohort of individuals to complete CNC training. The participants earned certificates which is an important proof of their skills showing that they meet the qualifications and can perform high demand jobs in Wisconsin's growing and advanced manufacturing sector. Individuals there are learning these in-demand job skills.

Another great example of our partnership with DOC is the new mechatronics lab at the Racine Youthful Offender Correctional Facility. Here DWD and DOC are working together with Gateway Technical College. Secretary Carr and I visited the facility last December. We toured the new jobs lab as well as the mechatronics lab, and this visit was cause for great celebration as we were there to see the first group of trainees who are about to graduate.

A third example and one that holds much promise going forward is Skillful Transitions, a new program in Milwaukee. This effort is funded with a Workforce Solutions grant made possible by Governor Evers workforce investments. Here we're partnering with Employ Milwaukee, which is the local workforce development board. The 5.2 million-dollar grant will provide on-the-job training for over 500 people, and this includes justice involved individuals as well as the homeless, veterans and disabled folks. And these are just a few examples. DWD provides a host of other services as well, including through 10 job labs based at DOC locations as well as mobile job centers that travel from one DOC facility to another. Our apprenticeship and youth apprenticeship programs also provide training with an earn as you learn incentive. The career pass for workers who complete apprenticeship include family supporting jobs and an awesome opportunity for upward mobility. So clearly, we know that there is more work to be done but we at DWD firmly believe that given the strong working relationship we have with all of you at DOC, we can meet these challenges, overcome the

barriers and celebrate each and every win together. Thank you again for having me today.

Zack Osell: Okay, a big thank you to Governor Evers and Secretary-Designee Pechacek for those messages. We will now hear from our panel members within the Division of Adult Institutions, starting with administrator Sarah Cooper. Sarah, I'll let you take over from here.

Sarah Cooper: Great. Thank you, Zack. Good afternoon, everyone. It's a pleasure to be here with you all this afternoon to talk about this important topic of work release for the persons in our care within our division. My name is Sarah Cooper and I am the administrator for the Division of Adult Institutions. Today I'd like to provide you with a high-level overview of the importance of work release for the persons in our care as well as for the community. As Secretary Carr had mentioned in his opening remarks, work release provides the persons in our care with the opportunities to, save money, right, for their eventual release into the community, to develop their job skills which includes some of the soft skills such as teamwork and professional communication and being a dependable employee, and it also allows them to further their job experiences and help round out their resumes so that when they release, they have more employability skills.

Work release gives the men and women in our care the opportunity to feel like they belong to something, to feel like they're part of a positive contribution to the community, to feel like they belong in the workplace and to demonstrate to their friends and family that they are committed to living in a life in a prosocial and responsible way upon their release. Perhaps most importantly for those persons in our care who have children, work release gives them the opportunity to set a really great example for those children and to say you know even if things don't always go as planned in life, you can still pick yourself up and get back on the right path in life and do good things. All of these are positive experiences that many of the men and women in our care didn't have before they were incarcerated, and work release builds their confidence and deepens their resolve to continue on this path when they return to the community. So I would be remiss if I did not reiterate what Secretary Carr and Governor Evers have already spoken about as it relates to the fact that work release really is a significant part of keeping our community safe. Employers such as many of the people who are on this call today who are willing to partner with the Wisconsin Department of Corrections provide an immense service to the society as a whole. By hiring persons in our care, you're giving them the opportunity to prepare for release and to be successful upon release, all of which helps keep Wisconsin safe. This all underscores the value of our partnership with the employers who hire incarcerated individuals for work release. So with that, I'd like to turn it over to Lisa Reible, our Director of Office of Program Services, who can share more information with everybody about efforts within DAI to help prepare persons in our care for gainful employment. Thank you.

Lisa Reible: Thank you, Administrator Cooper and good afternoon everyone. Today I'm going to take a few moments to highlight our programs that we offer in DAI that either indirectly or directly support success in employment. Upon intake to DAI, all persons in our care are classified and assigned program needs. The programs that are assigned as primary programs are anger management, cognitive behavioral programming, domestic violence, sex offender treatment, substance use disorder treatment, adult basic education employment and career technical education programming. These needs are assigned based off of results of the criminogenic needs assessment which demonstrates which areas individuals have a high need to address. While many of these programs are not directly tied to employment, they can aid individuals in succeeding and maintaining employment by addressing areas that have caused them problems in the past.

There are a few programs directly tied to employment that I want to mention today. The first is our cognitive behavioral interventions for employment program. This is an evidence-based program that is facilitated in a group format. It uses a cognitive behavioral approach to teach strategies to manage high-risk situations to obtaining and maintaining employment. It includes skill building and role-playing scenarios to encourage coping skills. We offer it currently at 21 sites either as a stand-alone group or as a component of our substance use disorder programs. For those who may not have a need for employment programming, we also have an employment pre-release module available at all of our libraries or re-entry resource rooms, which can be accessed by anyone. We also offer several career technical education programs at institutions or centers throughout the state. Some of the programs that are offered include baking, building maintenance and construction, barbering and cosmetology, cabinetry, masonry, auto maintenance, computer-assisted

drafting, customer service, food service and culinary arts, machine tool operations, welding and industrial maintenance mechanics just to name a few.

Over the last several years, we have also been working to offer associate degree programs through Second Chance Pell. Second Chance Pell is a federal grant program that allows higher education institutions to offer post-secondary education to incarcerated individuals. Currently, MATC provides opportunities to students to obtain an associates degree in liberal arts or science, and Madison College provides a small business entrepreneur technical diploma to students. While these are the two colleges that we partner with right now, we anticipate expansion in both programs through Second Chance Pell over the next several years, as well as expanding to other colleges.

We also offer several apprenticeship opportunities throughout the system with thirty-two registered apprenticeships approved by the Department of Workforce Development. We've been working to leverage our career technical education programs to develop registered apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs. We currently have apprenticeships in areas such as restaurant cook, baker, carpenter, facilities repair worker, and welding. Individuals who participate in apprenticeships are provided education and on-the-job training.

Finally, I want to mention one more employment related program that we're really excited about and expecting to implement in the next few months. In partnership with UW Extension, we are going to be implementing an entrepreneur and training program. This program uses the evidence-based curriculum provided by Defy Adventures. program participants will learn skills and employment readiness and entrepreneurship training. We plan to offer this program at four facilities starting with Racine Youthful Offender Correctional Facility and the Robert Ellsworth Correctional Center. Lastly while I mention these employment related programs, I do want to note that there are additional programs offered at the institutions and centers that are provided by volunteers or contractors. One example of this is the Suits for Success Program at MSDF, which provides individuals with professional clothing for job interviews. We have several other examples of initiatives or programs that, that assist with employment at other sites as well. There are other initiatives related to employment such as Windows to Work and work release, and for an overview of those programs, I'm now going to turn it over to my colleagues, Superintendent Ustruck Wetzel and Superintendent Silao-Johnson. Thank you.

Julie Ustruck Wetzel: Good afternoon. I am Julie Ustruck Wetzel, Superintendent of the Milwaukee Women's Correctional Center. With me is Maria Silao-Johnson, Superintendent of the Winnebago Correctional Center. We are excited to share with you the work release program today. Work release in the Department of Corrections began in 1965 and since then, thousands of incarcerated individuals in the care of DOC have been employed in communities throughout the State of Wisconsin.

Work release serves to assist incarcerated individuals with successful re-entry into the community. It helps them acquire or improve job skills, develop positive work ethic and prepare for self sufficiency. Work release can provide individuals with a work history and personal references, where maybe this has been lacking in the past. Persons in our care are earning a wage which allows them to pay court-ordered financial obligations like child support, restitution and court fees and provides individuals a better opportunity to support their families and make amends for their past. Earned wages also allow persons in our care to open a savings account, which is money accessible to them upon release. Next slide please.

Work release is operated out of the minimum security facilities located throughout the State of Wisconsin. There are currently 12 male facilities and 2 female facilities which operate work release. Keeping in mind, not everyone placed at a minimum facility is eligible for work release. Next slide please.

When an individual is first placed at a minimum security facility, the facility conducts a risk management review and develops a plan for the individual. The person in our care must be classified as community custody, which means they may be in the community without direct staff supervision. One area the review considers is program needs. If a person in our care has unmet treatment needs, treatment needs will be addressed first. Based on the timing of the program,

persons in our care may be granted work release temporarily with the understanding that when programming becomes available, treatment will be the priority. So for instance, in the women's system, those centers operate work release and treatment programming. It is not uncommon for an individual to work for months in the community and then with several months prior to release, participate in a treatment program. The facility also assesses the person in our care's adjustment to incarceration. Facilities expect potential work release employees to follow established DOC rules such as not engaging in disruptive or disrespectful behavior. Persons in our care are also expected to work a center job prior to work release. This gives the person in our care an opportunity to practice and demonstrate basic employment skills such as coming to work when scheduled, being on time, staying until the end of shifts, accepting supervisor feedback and working well with coworkers.

The Department of Corrections has established many partnerships with a wide variety of community employers over the years. Persons in our care working in all types of jobs from manufacturing, welding, CNC, food service, barber shops and salons and putting into practice skills they learned while incarcerated. Work-release employers work directly with the facility work release coordinator. When establishing a relationship with a new employer, the work release coordinator conducts a site assessment. This includes a site visit. The community site assessment takes into consideration the number of positions available for persons in the care of DOC, the location of the job site to the facility and availability of work hours. DOC facilities provide transportation for the workers, so looking at these factors allow facilities to better balance their resources. Additionally, a work release coordinator considers the safety of the community by looking at things such as individual's potential access to vulnerable populations, access to phones and the Internet and access to alcohol and drugs.

Facilities consider the hourly rate of pay when entering into new partnerships. If an individual is releasing to a community near the work site, there is a good possibility the person in our care may maintain the job upon release. This is a decision between the employer and the employee. Whether or not the individual intends on keeping the job, the goal is that the employer receives the living wage to support themselves and their families both while incarcerated and especially upon release. It is important for the employer and the DOC facility work release coordinator to maintain open communication. The employer and work release coordinator have regular contact regarding hiring, work schedules, work performance. Although it is expected the employer offer the same benefits and expectations as civilian workers, there are additional expectations when employing a person in the care of DOC.

For instance, DOC staff will randomly check on the individual while at work. Unlike civilian employees, it is expected that relationships between persons in our care and coworkers remain professional at all times and that persons in the care of DOC not exchange any type of money or item with coworkers. Next slide please.

As administrator Cooper mentioned, there are many advantages for both the employer and persons in our care to enter into the work release partnership. Interested employers may directly reach out to the DOC centers in their area. To obtain contact information for the facility, I would encourage employers to visit the DOC website or E-mail the general DOC mailbox for assistance. Thank you for your time and for your attention. I will turn this over to Zack.

Zack Osell: Thanks, Julie. Thank you to all our DAI panelists. Next, we have the privilege of hearing from Katie Berry, who is a Human Resources and Production Manager for Staffing Synergies. She'll be talking about some of her experiences partnering with the DOC through work release. Katie, you can go ahead whenever you're ready.

Katie Berry: Good afternoon, everyone. Thanks, Zack. So I've had the privilege to work with the working program for 18 plus years now, had many-many individuals come through my facility. I have had a lot of great success and also some downfalls.

One thing I can say is that the process, how it works is I go down in an interview and I can either accept or decline individuals on how I feel that they will fit in our facility here. We do entry level packaging work here, so I have about 150 employees per shift that manage, just from people on the streets, um, for entry level packaging starting out at 15 dollars an hour. I also offer other positions to the DOC individuals. They can be line leads, not line leads, I'm sorry, forklift

drivers and machine operator so they can build their skills out here. They can come in here, I have seen gentleman that have been incarcerated for many, many, many years, and just working with them and treating them like an individual and the biggest thing I say to them is you have to give respect to get respect and we treat you just the same as everyone else, but you do have your rules you need to follow. All of my individuals when they are employed here, they do get told the rules so they know what their expectation is. When it comes to the individuals that we're working with. But they also have opportunity to be hired on. I've had many gentlemen come back to me, after being released. How it usually works is once they're released, we talk about it. If they reside locally here, they can return as soon as they get home and settled. But then a lot of them say you know Katie I don't want to go back to the life that I was in and you've treated me like an individual here and I'd really like to come up here and work. I said I have a position here if you get permission to come up here. The Work Release Program has been a huge asset to us here, because it feels, we obviously as everywhere is, are having staffing struggles. When the program was closed for I think it was 15-plus months due to COVID, we definitely felt the repercussions from that, because we utilize these individuals to train them up to drive forklift, to do our machine operation, where we get a lot of entry-level workers here, but those, these gentlemen do feel that void here. So those 15 months was a very, I think it was about 15 months, was a very long time to not have it, and that's when we realized what an asset the program is to us.

For employers looking at possibly using it, it's on how you manage the program. I have a great working relationship with the sergeants and captains down at the center. We work hand-in-hand, we, because we've worked together so long we know how, one knows how the other thinks. So it's all in how you build your program and you manage your program. But it does need to be managed closely because things can happen, kind of fortunate that I've never had anything major happen, just minor things, but we have to stay ahead of it and stay ahead of the game I guess is we would say. But it's all in our, the relationships between the work camp and the employer and how again, how manage your employees within the facility. But I think that's pretty much all I have in regard to the program. But if anyone has any questions, please feel free to ask.

Zack Osell: Yes, thanks Katie. And again, you can ask those questions through our Q&A icon which is typically found in the bottom of your screen. Okay, so next we'll be hearing from Becky Heth who is the Employment Program Manager within DOC's Reentry Unit. Becky, I'll let you take over.

Becky Heth: All right. Good afternoon. Thank you, Zack. As Zack said I'm Becky Heth, I'm the Employment Program Manager in the Reentry Unit here with the DOC. I'll be touching on a few our employment training initiatives that are currently occurring in our DAI facilities. Many of them have been mentioned previously. so I'll just expand on some of those. Next slide, Zack.

One of the first topics that we'll discuss are DOC mobile training labs. In an effort to expand training at our medium security facilities, we procured mobile training labs, which are 53-foot long trailers, similar to the one in the picture. Those are mobile classrooms that are placed inside the perimeter fence at those prisons. They provide additional capacity to train individuals in high demand fields, which will aid them in securing employment upon release. We contract with our local technical colleges for onsite instruction in those programs and the picture of this mobile trailer is the computer numerical control, CNC. It's the mobile lab that was procured last year and delivered to Jackson Correctional Institution. From 2015 to 2019, the RCI CNC mobile lab was the only operational lab. And so from 2019 to today, we've procured another four labs and those are listed on those bullets. Next slide.

Another way that we've expanded our career in technical education trainings is for about the five past years, we've expanded our CTE programs to offer these short-term training academies to better prepare the persons in our care in high demand fields. We also contract with the local Wisconsin Technical College partners to offer these training academies, and these occur through the work or through the study release process and accumulate in the individual earning a technical diploma or certificate program, certificate within the span of about two to four months. So I've listed the facilities or the correctional centers and the programs that are delivered there in partnership with the local technical college. So the, the first group listed is the Wisconsin Correctional Center System, so that is a male correctional center system, and then at Robert E. Ellsworth we partner with Gateway to offer the CNC training program for the women. As I

mentioned, we partner with the tech colleges and we determine market, we use labor market trends in determining the field of study for those individuals, and each training, we try to keep it short, approximately two to four months for that individual to earn their technical diploma or their certificate.

One of our latest initiatives is the expansion of our institution based job centers. It's well established that justice involved populations face a host of barriers when attempting to obtain employment, particularly after release from incarceration. Further, it is clear that individuals with barriers to employment benefit from coordinated strategies across agencies and systems. DOC has placed an emphasis on integrating correctional and workforce strategies for individuals releasing from incarceration through the expansion of the career and technical education opportunities, as well as the development of Correctional Workforce Development partnership. The Wisconsin Department of Corrections, in collaboration with the Department of Workforce Development, created the first institution based job center in 2018 and that was opened at Oakhill Correctional Institution. Since then, the DOC and DWD have worked together to successfully open a total of 10 institution based job centers and one mobile job center. Within these job centers, individuals or persons in our care are able to create unique Job Center of Wisconsin accounts, develop resumes, search and apply for jobs, improve their keyboarding skills and also receive access to services if they are a veteran, if they've participated in a registered apprenticeship and individuals with disabilities. The persons in our care are then able to transition seamlessly to receiving those services at their community-based job centers upon their release. Here's the map showing the 10 institution based job centers and the one mobile job center that we have throughout the state.

The last program I will touch on is the Windows to Work Program. Windows to Work, um, the mission statement is to promote self-sufficiency for individuals returning to the community through the development of constructive skills and modification of thought processes related to criminal behavior. The goals of the Windows to Work Program are to reduce recidivism for participants after their release from incarceration, to increase their employment placement opportunities, increase the length of employment retention and increase wages of participants. Windows to Work is a pre-release, or excuse me, a pre- and post-release program designed to address criminogenic needs that can lead to recidivism. There is a focus on targeting specific criminogenic needs of employment, education, antisocial cognition, antisocial personality and antisocial companions through a five-component curriculum outlined in the pre-release phase.

Wisconsin DOC contracts with each of Wisconsin's 11 Workforce Development Boards to provide or subcontract to provide a Windows to Work Program at selected state correctional institutions or county jail facilities in each workforce development area. There are two parts of the program. The curriculum portion, conducted in the pre-released phase of the program, and then the ongoing community case management, in the post-release phase. Instruction begins in the institutions approximately 3-to-12 months prior to a participant's release and continues in the community for approximately 12 months following the participant's release. Instruction for county jail sites can start within 30 days prior to release. Following a person's release from incarceration, the coach can collaborate with the Division of Community Corrections agent to assist participants with job searching and job retention activities. Also, during the post-release phase, participants may receive additional assistance in accessing available community resources to address their needs of food, shelter, clothing, transportation and other services depending on the board area's funding.

The next slide shows the list of DAI facilities that now offer and deliver the Windows to Work Program. It is now in every minimum, medium and maximum security facility with the exception of Dodge Correctional Institution, which is the intake facility. In FY20 a pilot program was started at Green Bay Correctional Institution, a maximum security facility. Although the pilot was placed on hold shortly after it started due to COVID, it was re-initiated in 2021 in July. In 2022, we've expanded to additional maximum security prisons, one of those being Columbia Correctional Institution and the other one, Waupun Correctional Institution and then lastly, just earlier this month, programming started at the Wisconsin Secure Program Facility.

And then we have the list of the county jail sites where the Windows to Work Program is also delivered. So, I just wanted to thank you all for letting me share today some of the DOCs employment readiness efforts, which ultimately support the department's mission to provide persons in our care opportunities for positive change and success. I would really like to introduce our next speaker, Shauna Howick. Shauna is a 2018 CTE completer of the Robert E. Ellsworth

Correctional Center CNC Operator Certification Training Program that we partner with Gateway Technical College on. She is also a former work release participant. After her release from Robert E. Ellsworth in February of 2021, Shauna maintained her employment for a total of four years in the position she obtained while on work release. After, after release, she continued her education with Gateway and completed her machine maintenance technician degree. She also became the first female employee at Cyborg Engineering to ever earn an apprenticeship for machine repair. I am really excited and grateful to Shauna for sharing her story with us today. With that said, Shauna, I'll turn it over to you.

Shauna Howick: Hi, thank you so much for having me today. It means a lot to me to be able to share my story and my experience of everything that I've been through, and my experience with work release and education upon being incarcerated.

So my story going back from the beginning prior to becoming incarcerated, um, I had a really bad addiction problem from a young age and really struggled overall in my life with employment, education and just staying sober. I struggled with a really bad heroin addiction for a long time. And anyone who knows anything about addiction understands that when your body and your mind starts to go into a spiral like that everything else seems to follow. So, education no longer seemed important work no longer seemed important, and I stopped developing the skills that I was going to need to be successful as an adult. So, made a lot of bad decisions, ended up incarcerated and did about five and a half years.

So when I was incarcerated, the first two years, you're, you're kind of just stuck. You're sitting there, you're getting used to how things go being incarcerated. You are kind of like on a wait list for like an AODA Program or like an education program or work release. So that's kind of where I was at. And I heard about the CNC class and I had no idea what it was about. But I decided you know why not, anything that could help me make my life different than how it had been going could only be a benefit. So I signed up not knowing at all even what CNC meant but thought I would give a fair shot and, at first there was such a big group of women that wanted to be a part of it that I was wait listed. And the second year that we had it, I was finally able to go and it changed my life completely.

At first leaving the center and going to Gateway Technical College, I was so nervous that I hadn't been in the community for about two and a half years at that point and had never continued my education outside of high school and it was just a really overwhelming feeling. And the staff members at Gateway were absolutely phenomenal. Neil Peterson, who was my instructor at Gateway, like still to this day is a mentor to me and I go in and I seek his classes. We stay in touch. I go to him about advice in this field of work. All the time he made everyone feel really comfortable and like really drove home to us that we were able to do anything that we put our mind to, even if it was something completely new that we were uncomfortable with, that we were going to get there. Gateway has an unbelievable program for CNC. They are not going to let anyone fail. As long as you show up and you want to learn a new trade or you just want to better your life, they're there to support you, 100 percent. They're not going let anything hold you back from getting good grades and being successful.

So I did do that program and I completed that program and then I was able to get a job through work release with Cyborg Engineering, and I was there for a number of years. My relationship with that company is also a huge moment that changed my life. These companies that you get a partnership with in work release have amazing employees that you never feel judged by them, they're always there to work with you or help, help you. They realize that you have things come up at the center or if you are not able to work because you know something came up there they work with you. The people there were huge mentors in my life as well, and a lot of them I still go to about things just like the Gateway instructors. They realized the women that came from work release that were incarcerated, we became their hardest workers. I was the first female inmate to ever work there, and I've always heard that we kind of set the bar really high. At that point in your life, you are still coming off of such a low, I'm trying to rebuild, that you just want to put forth all of your effort to create something better of your life, so we were willing to be there every day on time and work extra hours, and we were thirsty for knowledge and wanted to learn more because finally for once we had, had a skill that made us feel worthy of having a really good career and having the confidence that we knew that we could make a great career. It takes, um, it takes a lot of people to help rebuild an inmate, especially someone who has had trauma or done a long sentence. It's very hard to adjust back into the community and this program is what helped the most in my

life. These, these jobs understand that we're nervous about going there or we might not have we, we may not have worked a job in a really long time and they are very patient and kind. So those are the types of things that helped shape my life and because of that and because of the confidence and the positive reassurance that I got about how smart I could be and how hard of a worker I could be, it kept me just striving, it kept me more driven to want to keep doing more and more and more to better myself.

The biggest thing for me has been I had had a child before I was incarcerated, and thank God I have a really supportive family that stepped up and took care of him while I was gone and for the first time ever in my life, upon release, I could get custody of my child back and didn't have to worry about how I was going take care of him. And I don't just have a job anymore, I have a full-blown career. I've gone back to school a couple of times now and I'm still making something of myself in building, but I know at the end of the day that I am definitely going be okay and I feel confident in the type of employment that I have.

I ended up leaving Cyborg Engineering and moved on to a higher position at Intech, Bradshaw Medical which is where I am now, and they actually also have a partnership with REECC in the work release department, so it's kind of cool to continue to get to give back to this program and let people know my story. But at the end of the day, I don't think I would be here right now if it wasn't for that program. The confidence that it gave me and the support that I have gotten through connections with the work release program. I didn't know how to live life on my terms so it showed me that was on a positive road and it, it's had amazing results for me, so I couldn't be more grateful and I'm truly grateful that you guys all have a part in saving us, so thank you for letting me be a part of it.

Zack Osell: Yes, thank you so much for being with us today and sharing your experiences Shauna. We really can't thank you enough for taking the time out of your busy day to share such a powerful and inspirational story with us all so, thank you again. All right, we'll now move on to our next panelist today, Josey Lopez, who serves as the Corrections Services Supervisor within the Division of Community Corrections. Josey, I'll turn it over to you.

Josey Lopez: Thank you. Zack. And first of all, congratulations, Shauna, for all your accomplishments and success. I'm very thankful for you being here presenting on your success story.

Welcome and happy day to all. Like Zack said, I am Joselyn Lopez and I'm representing the Division of Community Corrections. I oversee the, the community services that we have, including CCEP. I'll be sharing with you services that are available for clients who are supervised in the community. The Division of Community Corrections, probation and parole agents meet with clients and identify their employment readiness needs during the intake phase of their supervision in the community. After they conduct the intake assessments, the agents speak with the clients to develop the case plans that guide actions that must be taken during the supervision period.

Since the agent is guiding the clients through the supervision process, they also educate the clients on opportunities that are available to them. One of these opportunities is the Certificates of Qualification for Employment, also known as CQE, and it follows the Acts 123. This certificate is granted by the Counsel on Offender Employment and it provides a client with relief from a collateral sanction that is a result of their criminal record. Even though the Department of Corrections has no participation in the actual granting consideration of the CQE, the agents do educate the clients about this opportunity and provide them with copies of the application process and guide them through the process.

For clients who have limited employment history or who need further assistance with secured employment, agents will refer clients to the DCC Regional Employment Coordinator for other community services that we have available to provide our support and partner with the department in the community. Next slide please.

DCC uses the Community Corrections Employment Program to address most of our work and education related needs. CCEP offer services throughout Wisconsin to assist clients in gaining the skills necessary. The coordinator works closely with the employers and other community agencies and they connect clients with employment opportunities and offer resources and preparation such as assistance with resumes, job search, applications, certifications, connections to

trainings and connections for additional employment experience. For clients releasing from the institution, the coordinators connect with them prior to their release to initiate preparations and connections in the community. They also assess participants to ensure that they are provided the assistance needed based on their level of skill and work readiness.

There are three main focus areas once the clients are in the community. The first one is the work experience, and this is when the employment program coordinator secures an approved work site such as Goodwill Centers, where the clients are provided opportunity to gain work experience and DOC covers the wage for the clients. We recently worked on increasing the work experience wage to improve retention and increase interest in our population to participate in the service. The second area is a CCEP on-the-job training program. This one provides a contract agreement between the employer and CCEP. It states the employer agrees to hire the participant in the permanent position at the prevailing wage set by the employer for the position, and in exchange for this commitment, the coordinator, on behalf of DOC, agrees to reimburse the employer for part of the cost of the training. As a third option, we have the Training Opportunities for Placement Program also known as TOPP, and this one provides financial vouchers for individuals who are enrolled in a credited post-secondary education or certified vocational training programs. The vouchers can be used for tuition, fees, books, supplies and other required material. Next slide please.

This slide contains the contact information for all of our regional coordinators. We've included the counties of each region to ensure that you have better connection with our staff, since our regions are divided a little bit different. Next slide please.

As other panelists have shared, the department works closely with other agencies such as the Department of Workforce Development, and we have established contracts and agreements in place with Wisconsin Technical Colleges and other community agencies. DCC contracts with community based residential facilities that offer inpatient programs, where the primary focus is to address the clients' criminogenic needs with cognitive based programming for long-term impact, overall success and to lead clients to employability. After the clients have completed the targeted treatment needs, the staff in these facilities work with them and their agents to assist them with employment readiness during the final phase in the program. This way, they're prepared for discharge into the community and to help them sustain long-term employment. For any questions on our community employment related services, please contact the regional employment coordinator that was assigned to your county in the slide before. Thank you for your time.

Zack Osell: Okay, thank you Josey. I just want to mention that the slide show will be posted to our public website, so if you missed our CCEP contacts, you can always go back to review and get those contacts. But thank you again to Josey and for all those who shared with us today. We'll now transition to the next part of today's events, which is our live Q&A session. We've been reviewing the questions that you've submitted using the Q&A feature and we will now take some time to answer those questions. I'll issue one final reminder to submit any last-minute questions before the conclusion of today's town hall so that we can provide an answer in our written FAQ document at the very least.

Okay, so I think I am going to start with the question for Superintendent Silao-Johnson. The question asks, "what initiatives allow those that are in work release programs during incarceration to remain in that area where they will have a job with benefits on release?" This specific employer currently works at Winnebago Correctional Center and says that it's very rare for someone working through this program from their area, and that they are transferred and released back to the area where they got into trouble, and they ask, "wouldn't it make more sense for that person to release somewhere that they know they'll have a stable job?"

Maria Silao-Johnson: So, thank you for whoever submitted that question. We realistically, the way the process works now for the men that are in our care is that upon release, they are released back to their county of conviction. There have been cases where the men in our care that have been able to establish employment within the local community, even though it is not, you know, their county of conviction, they have been afforded the opportunity to request a change of county supervision and that is, you know, it's a decision that's usually, definitely made, not made at our level, but we do process their request. There are many, reasons, positive reasons for that to happen and of course having the

person already employed is huge so is it possible? Yes, it is possible, and there is a process in place to make that happen.

Zack Osell: Okay, great. Thank you. Okay, this next question I will throw over to the Secretary and this question reads, “is the DOC concerned with the safety aspect of work, work release programs?” This person knows that work release provides a boost to employers, especially in a time of need but what steps do, do we take to ensure the community is remaining safe while those in our care enter our communities?

Secretary Carr: Well thanks, Zack. First and foremost, I want to say that the safety of the community, our staff and individuals in the care of the Department of Corrections continues to be my number 1 priority. As many of you know, I come from a law enforcement background and understand that safety should always come first. Now with that being said, there’s a lot that we can do to help folks prepare for the transition back into the community after incarceration while continuing to balance public safety. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, most of the individuals who are currently incarcerated leave DOC in less than three years. These individuals will eventually return to our communities whether we provide them with the resources that they need to be successful or not. Knowing this, it’s in all of our best interest to provide them with the tools they need to be successful when they do get released. And besides, it’s just the right thing to do.

In terms of work release, our agency, our agency conducts a lengthy screening process to determine individuals who are eligible for community job assignments. This screening process includes looking at a person’s criminal history, their conduct while in custody, their behavior and available resources. Further there’s an observation period at the work release facility prior to that individual going off site for a job. With all of our programming opportunities, we work incredibly hard to ensure the right people are getting the right interventions at the right time. It’s important to note that the persons in our care are not, are not the only persons we screen. The community job site is also vetted to ensure the safety of the persons in our care who are placed at that job site. Community job sites are visited by the work release staff at least once a week. An annual site assessment is completed to ensure that the working conditions and the surrounding area of the community where the employer is located are appropriate. The work release staff may also conduct random inspections of the community job sites to ensure that the Department of Corrections’ expectations are being met. Thanks, Zack.

Zack Osell: Thanks, Secretary. Okay, I want to give Josey an opportunity to answer this next question. And the question asks, “does the Department of Corrections have team members who are dedicated to connecting job seekers to employment? And if so, are these individuals part of the area’s integrated business services team in their respective workforce areas?”

Josey Lopez: Thank you, Zack. And thank you everybody for the question. As I mentioned, we do have regional employment coordinators. There are eight regions in the Division of Community Corrections and there is one per region. I believe, I think it was on number 26 on the slide show, that has the listing of the coordinators and I'll be happy to share those also with anybody with their respective E-mail addresses so they can be contacted.

Zack Osell: Okay, great. Thank you. This next question I think is a good fit for Becky, and this person asks, “I’ve heard about folks getting certifications in welding, CNC, etc., or apprenticeships while incarcerated. How do employers become connected to these folks?”

Becky Heth: Yeah, as I mentioned earlier Zack, it’s really critical to begin the planning process with participants prior to their release from incarceration, so that we can get them connected with resources in the community, as well as employment opportunities. So, one way that we do that is through our DOC institution based job centers and our partnership with the Department of Workforce Development. So I would say that one way to ensure that an employer has their position listed on jobcenterofwisconsin.com. That way, the users and the persons in our care within our DOC job centers are able to see the positions posted and they can apply any skills that they may have and search for positions that fits with what they were maybe just trained in such as the CNC or welding. And then as work release mentioned in some of the earlier slides, you can reach out of nearest facility to discuss the process of becoming a work release partner

and the contact information for each of those facilities again can be found on our public website by navigating to the home page and clicking under adult facilities. A work release coordinator is assigned to every work release center and can provide any additional answers to questions that you may have.

Zack Osell: Okay thanks, Becky. All right, this next question came in, I think it's a good fit for Lisa, and you may have touched on this already during your presentation, but the question asks, "what kind of work is being done internally to expand work or job opportunities for those in our care."

Lisa Reible: Yeah that's a good question, Zack. I will touch on something that we have kind of in the works right now that I, I did not talk about before, and, and that is we're currently planning an integrated education and training program, and that's going to be piloted at Racine Youthful Offender Correctional Facility and Racine Correctional Institution. And this program is going to be for students who need to earn their HSED. It's a little different from the rest of our HSED programs because students are also going to be earning a basic carpentry skills training certificate and pre-apprenticeship status, so to make them a little bit more workforce ready than, than our traditional HSED, GED Programs. So again, they'll complete their high school education, while also being taught job skills to participants. So, if that program produces good results, we kind of plan to expand that philosophy of integrated education and our adult basic education to other sites in the future.

Zack Osell: Okay thanks, Lisa. This next question I think I'm going to turn back to the Secretary for. The question asks, "what percentage of those in our care are working while incarcerated? Assuming that number is not one hundred percent, what could be done to raise this number?"

Secretary Carr: Thanks for that question, Zack. The percentages by facility and population vary, as not all persons in our care at minimum custody facilities maybe eligible for work release. There are a variety of reasons why this may be the case, such as folks not being in the appropriate security classification to work in the community or having pending programming needs that we need to fulfill before they can get the appropriate classification. For example, at Winnebago Correctional Center, there is a total of 214 persons in our care. Of those, 114 persons are working, 95 of those individuals are working with community employers and 19 individuals are working off grounds at state facilities where they wait for a work release placement. That means 52, 53.2 percent of the population at the site works. The percentages appear to be similar at other centers across state. Another one, for instance, is at Sanger B. Powers Correctional Center. For example, there are a total of 102 persons in our care of which 50% are employed through the work release program. A common challenge that we face is that we have a difficult time finding qualified and licensed drivers to transport workers to and from the facility to their community job sites. We rely on licensed persons in our care to fulfill this need and simply speaking, we just don't have enough drivers to fulfill the number of job opportunities that we have. We continue to work to find additional resources to assist to get more folks working and that is one of our highest priorities at our work release sites. Thanks.

Zack Osell: Thank you, Secretary. All right, it looks like we have time for one more question and I will turn to Superintendent Silao-Johnson for this last one. This question is from an employer. It says the work release program has helped our company in a big way during the workforce shortage. Once a person in our care is released, how would they go about making our work release employees, full-time employees.

Maria Silao-Johnson: I believe this is similar to the previous question that I responded to, and basically, we have a current process where when they are released from custody, they go back into the county that they were incarcerated from, and there is a process in place where if they chose to remain in the local area and work for the employer, they, certainly you know the option is out there and we don't discourage that because the full employment is the end result that we're looking for, so that is my answer to that.

Zack Osell: Alright, great. Thank you. So before we wrap up, I want to note that you can find information about upcoming town halls on DOC's town halls landing page on the public website. This page can be found at [DOC.wi.gov\townhalls](http://DOC.wi.gov/townhalls). We also ask that you watch your inbox for an E-mail with a link to our survey which will give you

an opportunity to provide us with feedback on today's event. And here's one final reminder that we will have access to recordings, transcripts, FAQs and more on our public website for you all to review in the coming weeks. Again, these will all be posted to our town halls landing page. I will now turn it over to the Secretary to close out today's town hall.

Secretary Carr: Thank you, Zack. I want to thank you all again for taking time to be here today and thank you for your thoughtful comments and questions. We at DOC value the feedback that we've receive from our stakeholders because it helps us do our job better. I also want to thank the Governor for the support he's shown to our agency and employers to make the investments in education and programming to support building a skilled workforce in Wisconsin. I'm excited about the work we're doing here at the Department of Corrections and the partnerships that we've built related to employment readiness and skilled training. I hope the audience has a better understanding of the work we're doing in this area and how they can connect with us. Our agency, the Department of Workforce Development and the Evers Administration are committed to advocating for the resources we need to help individuals stop the cycle of incarceration, find stable employment, fill our workforce and make a livable wage to provide for their families. I want to thank all of our panelist for the work they are doing in this area and for being here today to share that work with you. I also want to give a very special thank you to Katie Berry and Shauna Howick for being here today to share their experiences with us. Congratulations to Ms. Howick for all her success so far and boy was she really inspiring, it was a tremendous story. I wish you the best moving forward and cannot wait to see all she will accomplish in the years to come. Thank you all, and enjoy the rest of your day.