



2024 BJA'S IMPROVING INSTITUTIONAL CORRECTIONS TRAINING ACADEMY SPOTLIGHT



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In an effort to improve their agency's practices, the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) has implemented online pre-service training for staff, a collaboration with local colleges for curriculum development and delivery of training academy and moving to a different training academy campus with a positive learning environment.

The new training academy campus, previously located on the grounds of a fallout shelter, was relocated in 2003 to the grounds of an old state hospital center. This move transformed the campus into a college-like environment, complete with a firearms facility and a gym. The new setting, with its positive learning environment, has significantly enhanced the training experience for staff.

Before you can start your service with the department, it is required to complete the pre-service training. This pre-service training provides the basics of what every staff member should know, including but not limited to the use of force, disciplinary process, emergency plans, and more. This is hosted online in direct partnership with a community college. This college sends the training links to staff; they have 30 days to complete it. Pre-service training is hosted on the college's server, and the college monitors and tracks everyone's progress. The college monitors and tracks these trainings. If staff members fail to complete their pre-service training in the allotted time, their credentials are pulled. This collaboration with community colleges has also allowed staff to get college credit for up to 12 hours toward an associate degree.

Like many correctional agencies, staff recruitment and retention has been a challenge across every level of the DPSCS department. A recurring challenge with hiring entry-level positions has been that applicants do not speak English as a first language, which has caused cultural issues and gaps in communication. In the US, females are seen as equal, but not in other parts of the world. With the cultural differences in mind, this has challenged female leadership and caused some staff to have a hard time assimilating to females being in charge.

The greatest challenge DPSCS has faced is getting the agency on board with keeping up with technology. This resistance to change was partially due to leadership buy-in and generational differences. DPSCS is in its infancy of receiving feedback on the effectiveness of these practices but is looking to hire a new captain who will eventually work on receiving more robust feedback.

Some changes were an adjustment at the beginning, but all have been generally well received and positively impacted the agency and staff. When asked what advice they would give, DPSCS suggests being tenacious, enhancing the learning environment for everyone, reaching out to other agencies and getting their opinion, and not being afraid to “steal” other ideas! You shouldn’t let the perfect be the enemy of the good!

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