



2024 BJA'S IMPROVING INSTITUTIONAL CORRECTIONS TRAINING ACADEMY SPOTLIGHT



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The Division of Training and Staff Development of the South Carolina Department of Corrections (SCDC) provides the following training: New Employee On-boarding, Agency Orientation, Certified Correctional Officer Basic, Non-certified Basic, Transitional Certification, Contract Officers Certification, and In-service Annual Training for the entire agency. SCDC's centralized Residential Training Academy consists of 36 staffing positions and an Administrative Training Lieutenant position assigned to each of the 21 institutions.

Over the past two years, SCDC has substantially increased the salary of custody staff and other functional areas, which has increased the number of staff who require training. Unfortunately, the custody training staff at the Training Academy were not eligible for these incentives. Approximately 50 percent of instructors transferred or promoted to institutions or divisions where they could receive these incentives.

Therefore, it became necessary to implement a creative management plan to handle the increase in new hires and maintain a quality training program while operating with fewer instructors. We are pleased to highlight SCDC's promising practices.

(1) Daily briefing for on-the-job training:

Providing new employees with time at their assigned work locations before attending BCT at the academy. Allowing new staff to meet the people they will be working could be another way of making them feel welcomed into the agency and possibly enhance retention. In addition, the 40 hours of live-streamed training has been identified as required content, able to best be shared in this delivery format while reserving classroom time on subjects that require more in-depth information sharing, the opportunity for questions and dialogue, etc.

The OJT sites at the local facilities have been expanded by adding a facility on the outskirts. This facility has experienced staffing challenges that have provided further opportunities for the trainees to apply hands-on skills. Debriefings are now required to be in written format and include more detail about the number of services and activities trainees are involved in, i.e., the number of searches, shakedowns, confiscated items, reports completed, etc.

The practice of providing widely applicable orientation content to staff working at their work locations prior to attending BCT while also offering the opportunity to shadow staff in a like position is an excellent onboarding practice.

(2) Development of subject matter experts:

SCDC utilizes dedicated, specialized staff, which are not training academy personnel, who oversee the training content specific to their area, including delivery of content (e.g., mental health, medical). And SCDC continues, when financially possible, to send instructors to vendor/manufacturer training to become competent authorities/SMEs for the agency. This practice is especially imperative in high-liability courses such as Less Lethal Munitions, Firearms, and Defensive Tactics.

(3) Dedicated basic training program for contracted security staff:

To supplement the agency security staff, SCDC continues to contract and provide various levels of training to contract staff based on what roles and job tasks they have been employed to perform, armed and unarmed. Currently, most contract staff are manning posts at about eight hospitals. They are also tasked with manning the mail front gate, towers, perimeter, and video surveillance. Recently, SCDC was tasked to design and secure curriculum suitable for contract staff responsible for manning a court-ordered mental health unit for female offenders.

(4) A four-day scenario-based training for staff working in restrictive housing units (RHU):

A comprehensive and hands-on four-day training is available for staff assigned to work in a restrictive housing unit. This specialty course provides more in-depth information than the two-hour module in the BCT. The training focuses on skill development related to documentation of essential services, mental health, suicide prevention, the accomplishment of post orders, stress management, crisis intervention, security restraints, video camera operation, report writing, security restraint chair use, medical restraint chair use, and forced cell movement. The information content is delivered via lecture supplemented with extensive practical application exercises. Scenarios are used to engage students in the application of course learning. The training was expanded to a five-day course in May 2023 to include a day of Generated Low Output Voltage Emitter or G.L.O.V. E. Training, a less lethal option.

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