NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
September 13, 2019

Contact: Laura Montenegro
Public Information Officer
Phone: 603-271-5602

Focused on Recovery – Modified Therapeutic Community Opens at Men’s Prison to Treat Substance Use Disorders

September 13, 2019 (Concord, NH) – The New Hampshire Department of Corrections is pleased to announce the final stage of the Focus Unit expansion at the New Hampshire State Prison for Men (NHSP-M) in Concord. The Focus Unit is an 80-bed tier which serves as a modified therapeutic community inside the prison, specializing in substance use disorders. With the NHSP-M expansion, the Focus Unit is now in all three NHDOC prison facilities.

On Wednesday, Sept 11, Deputy Director of Forensic Services, Heidi Guinen, speaks to NHSP-M Citizens Advisory Board, staff members and residents at the newly implemented Focus Unit.

In 2014, the Focus Unit began as a 68-bed tier at the Northern New Hampshire Correctional Facility (NNHCF) as a response to the increase in positive urinalysis and substance use disorder prevalence in facilities.
In 2018, the dual-purpose Focus and Wellness Unit opened in the new women’s facility in Concord. In the Department’s review of prevalence rates among behavioral health diagnoses for women incarcerated in NH, there is a higher prevalence of co-occurring diagnoses, highlighting the need to treat both disorders simultaneously.

The Focus Unit integrates evidence-based practices through group treatment and peer mentoring to help those struggling with substance use disorder work toward recovery. Important themes of the curriculum include motivational strategies, alcohol/drug refusal skills, relationship repair, communication skills, anger management, problem-solving and long-term abstinence and recovery skills.

Heidi Guinen, the Deputy Director of Forensic Services, says an important part of the Focus Unit, is the tiered-system concept - identified by different-colored armbands that corresponds to the accomplishments each resident achieves in his/her recovery process as they complete the phases of treatment in the Focus Unit. Ms. Guinen stated, “I am proud to be a part of the energy residents show when they are beginning to tackle the challenges of their struggles with substance use disorder and watching their growth and personal change.” She further shared that the dedicated staff supporting these residents are committed to the work it takes to make a difference in these men and women’s lives.

Red bands are handed out to residents taking the first step. Whether it is court recommended or voluntary, residents must show a willingness to engage and do the work. This is the most restrictive stage, which lasts a minimum of one to two months. Blue bands are for residents actively engaging in treatment and this stage lasts at least four months. Black bands are earned by those who have completed a clinical phase of the program and apply to the clinical team to become a mentor to others. These residents can facilitate peer committee meetings and act as a mentor to their peers on the unit.

A resident accepted to the Focus Unit shows off his red band, representing the beginning stage of the program.

Additionally, prior to residents transitioning to the community after completing the Focus program and other individualized requirements, case managers along with re-entry care coordinators work to find appropriate outpatient support services to ensure the continuity of care for each individual.

A quote on the wall in the unit reminds the residents of the difficult journey they are all on together. “We as a community have come to understand that we need to change. We are determined to change for ourselves, our family and our future. Let us stay positive. Let us stay vigilant” it reads.