



NENMDF Torch bicyclers.

New Mexico Unites for Special Olympics



GCCF Torch Run.



NENMDF Torch Run.



LCCF Torch Run.



All three GEO facilities in New Mexico were represented when Associate Warden John Beaird of LCCF and volunteers from NENMDF and GCCF met up in Tucumcari with that town's residents, law enforcement, and Special Olympians.

Written by Linda Quintana - The GEO Group's three New Mexico facilities have joined together to meet a \$10,000 goal for the 2009 Law Enforcement Torch Run for the Special Olympics.

Lea County Correctional Facility (LCCF) in Hobbs, Northeast New Mexico Detention Facility (NENMDF) in Clayton, and Guadalupe County Correctional Facility (GCCF) in Santa Rosa combined forces for the actual Torch Run May 19-21, raising an estimated \$4,200. To reach his goal, Law Enforcement Torch Run Coordinator John Beaird, Associate Warden at LCCF, has other projects in mind, including bake sales and 50/50 drawings.

This year's Torch Run started off in Hobbs on May 19th when the Hobbs and Lovington Police Departments, the New Mexico State Police, New Mexico Junior College Police and Corrections Cadets, and students of Lovington High School joined LCCF staff to carry the Special Olympics Torch from Hobbs to Lovington, about 22 miles. The diehards continued the run on bicycles another 20 miles to Tatum. Beaird estimates close to 60 people participated in the Hobbs-to-Tatum leg of the run.



Reading Proves Fundamental

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Written by Lady Hereford - One by one, Palm Beach Atlantic University education students passed through heavy metal doors and the probing gaze of correctional officers at Moore Haven Correctional Facility. They entered a room and sat across from a group of inmates.

No one spoke at first, the students recalled.

"We were all kind of looking at each other," senior Marissa McMillan said. "At that point we didn't know if they were going to like this because they didn't look excited."

The 30 or so aspiring teachers didn't come empty-handed. Each brought a clear plastic storage box containing a children's book and related educational activities handcrafted by each student. The boxes were for the inmates, all fathers, to share with their children during future family visits.

The Father's Book Box program, which concluded with the field trip to the prison west of Lake Okeechobee in November, was a partnership between PBA and the correctional facility in conjunction with the prison's existing Learning Tree program.

Unlikely partnership proves an ideal match

Dr. Chelly Templeton and Dr. Sandra Trinca, PBA associate professors of education, coordinated the project at the prison. "[Learning Tree] is a program where they purposely work on building family relationships," said Dr. Templeton. It offers parenting classes and has a play area where the inmates and their children can interact.

The education students who participated in the book box project are enrolled in two University classes: Early Childhood Guidance and Children's Literature. As a requirement of the courses, the students had to choose a literature book appropriate for a child age 3 through 8 and then develop at least four reading, math and language arts activities that addressed themes in the text. They then packaged these activities, along with the book, in boxes.

The project gave the PBA pre-service teachers a chance to practice creating materials for early reading experiences as well as teaching fathers how to use the materials with their children, instructors said. (The GEO Group, which operates the prison, provided a grant for the materials.)

Each student was paired with an inmate from the Learning Tree program. The students then explained the book and the activities contained in the book boxes. The one-on-one interactions lasted about 15 to 20 minutes, the students said. The activities ranged from crafts to coloring to writing exercises. The students also included instruction sheets for each activity.

"Once I started sharing, he started asking questions," said McMillan, who chose the book *The Rainbow Fish* for her project. "He wanted to know if we had a brochure to send to the mother of his children so she knew that this was available for the kids to play with. By the end, he was like, 'You mean I actually get to teach my kids academic things too?' He was excited about that because he didn't realize he would be able to teach them things."

Ashley Catino, a sophomore, chose the Dr. Seuss book *A Fish Out of Water* for her book box. Like her classmates, she began to have a few doubts upon her arrival. But after speaking with one of the inmates who had a young daughter, her doubts melted away.

"He was very willing to learn," she said. "I was surprised he was interested in learning how to communicate with his daughter."

Sophomore Kristen Scarcella also was able to find common ground with the inmate with whom she was paired. During their talk, Scarcella said, the father of five mentioned his religious faith, which allowed her to reach out to him spiritually. "He completely blew me away. He was completely open" about his family situation and his life, she said.

Hannah Huffer, also a sophomore, admitted she had a preconceived notion that the inmates were "big and bad" and wouldn't be interested in the Winnie the Pooh storybook she'd chosen. But that changed as she saw the inmates' interest in the book boxes. "They sat and really paid attention and were really engaged," she said.

Students previously have created and donated book boxes to a preschool, but this is the first time they have done so for a correctional facility, Dr. Templeton said. At the end of the day, approximately 26 boxes were left at the prison for the inmates to use.

"The prisoners said things like 'Now when my child comes to visit, we have something to do,'" Dr. Templeton said. "They were thrilled. It was the bonding that they were going to be able to create and activities they were going to be able to do together. It really was a blessed collaboration."



Students explain how to use the contents of the book box to engage a child in learning.

"I am happy that there are people out there that care about inmates that do want to change. While we are away from our loved ones and kids, through this program we are able to reach out to our kids. To write to them and read to them and also do work projects when they come visit us. I am very happy for this program because it has been a good use for me and my kid."
Jermaine Bell



Clayton walk.