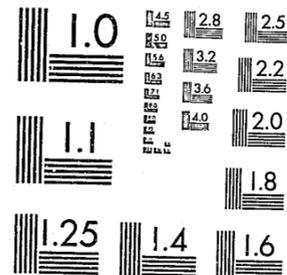


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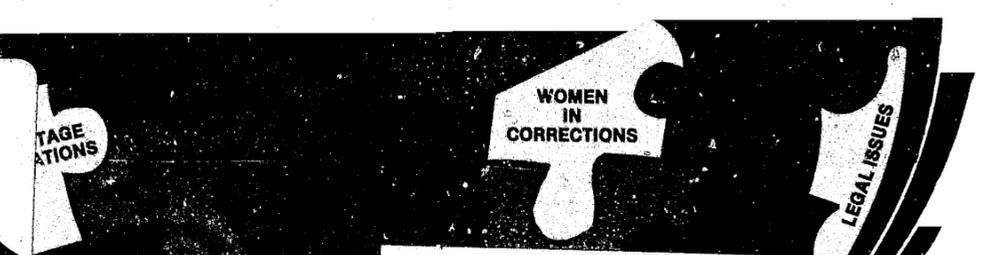
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*ETM*

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# Developing the Work and Life Skills of Handicapped Inmates

by  
John S. Platt, Ed.D.  
Roy H. Tunick, Ed.D.  
Wilfred D. Wienke, Ed.D.

The goal of training programs within the corrections facility is clear; it is to provide the individual with skills that will allow him or her to assume a contributory role in society. How to provide this training is not as clear. The importance of training programs can potentially be profound from both a social and an economic standpoint. One hypothesis is that recidivists commit additional offenses after leaving the corrections facility because they are not adequately trained to earn more than a subsistence living, thus leading to crimes causing varying degrees of misery, ranging from financial loss to loss of life. The economic loss is also significant. Not only is the individual recidivist failing to make an economic contribution, but he/she is costing society an average of \$13,000 (GAO Report, 1979) per year to be maintained in a correctional facility.

The magnitude of this problem is amplified when the handicapped inmate is considered. The lower level of specific abilities which the handicapped possess makes it essential that programming to meet their specific needs be devised within the prison setting to enable them to acquire specific marketable skills.

The responsibility of the various state correction agencies to provide appropriate educational programs for handicapped persons below the age of 21 is clearly stated in Public Law 94-142. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Section 121a of Public Law 94-142) specifies that this law applies to all political subdivisions of the state—including state correctional facilities—that are involved in the education of handicapped children. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 provides for the effective

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and appropriate development and implementation of programs for handicapped persons regardless of their age.

The federal prison system is also legally required to provide appropriate educational and rehabilitative services to handicapped inmates under the Rehabilitation Comprehensive Services, and Developmental Disabilities Amendments of 1978 (Mazock, 1981). The effect of this law was the extension of Section 504 to cover any executive agency, including the federal prison system. Thus the legislation clearly exists for mandating rehabilitative programs in all prisons. Litigation such as *Ruiz v. Estelle* in Texas and *Gutherie v. Evans* in Georgia is a clear sign to corrections officials that not only is the requirement to provide service written in the law, but inmates and inmate advocates intend to insure that this right is provided.

## Estimated Prevalence

Correctional facilities are faced with the problems of developing programs designed to meet the specific need of handicapped inmates. Such an undertaking will have an important effect upon correctional programs due to the estimated size of the handicapped population. The only reported incidence study of Specific Learning Disabilities among incarcerated adults (Heintz and Hertz, 1979) found that 29.5 percent of the inmate population at the Oregon State Penitentiary in Salem were Specific Learning Disabled (SLD). Incidence figures for mental retardation range from eight percent (1973) to 24 percent (1975). Eggertson (1979) estimated from a comprehensive survey of correctional administrators that 40 percent of incarcerated youths may be handicapped.

## Philosophy

Correctional inmates are faced with the stark reality that they have failed in the eyes of society. If they have the capacity to evaluate their personal situations they realize that in order to avoid prison after their release they must either learn to become more proficient criminals or acquire vocational skills that will enable them to be both marketable and competitive.

The philosophy of the U.S. Office of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services-sponsored project, Educational and Vocational Intervention with Incarcerated Handicapped, is to assist educationally handicapped inmates in the acquisition of both vocational and survival skills.

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## DEVELOPING SKILLS

Continued from page 66

Toward this goal individualized programs are developed based upon both educational and vocational evaluation. Academic tasks essential to the vocational area that the inmate is to be trained in are identified, so that these skills may be taught in the academic setting. Vocational training site instruction is modified to accommodate the strengths and weaknesses of the inmate. Essential life functions, or survival skills, are taught in the academic area and in a work adjustment group emphasizing interpersonal skills, career awareness skills, and job seeking and job keeping skills. In both cases the individual's strengths are emphasized.

Although vocational skills are emphasized, academic skills are viewed as essential. It is the goal of the academic curriculum implementers to teach specific academic skills to enhance the vocational training areas as well as develop necessary life function skills. Thus vocational education and special education are utilized to complement one another with the goals of developing functional skills in the inmate. It seems fruitless to continue to emphasize academic skills to individuals who have a prolonged history of failure in academics; rather, academics are secondary to the development of vocational skills. This strategy has the effect of increasing motivation, as the relevance of the curriculum is evident to the inmate. To the corrections education professional such an emphasis should also provide motivation as the relevance of the curriculum becomes apparent.

## Background

The project discussed in this article is located at the Kennedy Center (Federal Correctional Institution) in Morgantown, W.V. The Kennedy Center is an all-male minimum security institution. The subjects involved in the project all qualified for the Adult Basic Education Program (ABE) at the prison. The procedures and philosophy of this program are also applicable to Adult Secondary Education Programs (ASE). An in-service program designed to equip the staff of the institution with the skills necessary to successfully implement the program is currently underway. After com-

pletion of the in-service training, staff will be able to evaluate, develop, and implement individual vocational and educational programs designed to meet the needs of handicapped inmates.

The program consists of the following seven distinctive steps that constitute the treatment program for each inmate.

1. Screening
2. Evaluation (Vocational Placement Counseling)
3. Vocational Training Site Placement
4. Vocational Training Intervention
5. Academic Intervention
6. Work Adjustment Skill Development
7. Follow-up Procedures

Each step will be explained.

## Screening

In order to qualify for special education services an inmate must meet the guidelines established for one of the exceptions outlined in either P.L. 94-142 or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The screening employed in the project is designed to identify handi-

## The goal of academic and vocational programs in correctional institutions is to develop skills that will enable the inmate to function competitively in the job market.

capped learners other than the hearing or visually impaired. Inmates with disabilities which fall in these categories are certainly entitled to special education services. However, the project is currently not equipped to meet their specific needs.

A critical concern in both the screening and evaluation procedures is time and economy of staff personnel. Typically, inmates are subjected to an inordinate amount of testing when they first enter an institution. Testing can have a detrimental effect upon both their attitudes and their attention to the evaluation tasks. Of equal concern is the amount of staff time necessary to administer the test. With an awareness of these possible drawbacks a group testing procedure designed to take no more than one hour was selected. Before implementing the screening procedure, project staff review the federal prison system-mandated Stanford Test of the

total population of inmates. If an inmate had any score below the sixth-grade level in the areas of spelling, math, language, or reading he was deemed appropriate for the screening procedure.

The components of the screening measure are based upon a procedure utilized by Kansas Institute for Research in Learning Disabilities staff (Alley, Deshler, and Warner, 1980) for the identification of learning disabled subjects at a job corps training site. One component of the screening procedure is the Ravens Standard Progressive Matrices (Raven, 1958), an intelligence measure requiring no language skills on the part of the subject. This is a significant advantage in a population composed of inmates for whom English is a second language. Users of the Progressive Matrices should be aware that subjects need intact visual perception to be tested with this instrument.

The Language Cluster subtests of the Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Test Battery consist of two subtests, a dictation subtest, and a proofing subtest. These subtests are administered individually and take a total of fifteen

minutes. The third component of the screening procedure is also administered in a group situation. The Self Report Screening Cluster (SRSC) (Alley, Deshler, and Warner) contains items related to the subject's perception of his ability in word recognition, decoding of words, detection of spelling errors, math algorithms, ability to write themes, test-taking strategies, study skills, and word organization. Results of this instrument are combined with the Woodcock-Johnson to yield a probability of the individual having a learning disability.

The identification of possible mentally retarded subjects can be obtained from a cutoff point of the lower 25 percentile on the Ravens. A score above the 25 percentile would indicate normal intelligence and, in conjunction with the other instruments, possible classification as learning disabled (SLD) may be established.

## Evaluation

The evaluation procedures were developed to provide information that would lead to the identification of a vocational area in which the inmate would have a high probability of successfully acquiring the needed skills to compete in the job market. Toward this goal vocational instruments that would provide an adequate estimate of the individual's vocational aptitude were selected. Educational instruments were chosen with two goals in mind. The first goal was to provide an accurate evaluation of the subjects' strengths and weaknesses both in aptitude and achievement so that appropriate methods may be selected to teach the academic skills which are related to the selected vocational area, as well as selected survival skills, e.g., reading road signs or public signs. The second goal was to provide an inventory of the level of basic skills. This will tell the instructor just how much the individual does know in the area of academics and provide an idea of how much can possibly be taught in the time available.

## It is essential that programming to meet the specific needs of handicapped inmates be devised to enable them to acquire specific marketable skills.

Individuals are often confused as to what area of work would be most appropriate for them to pursue. According to Tolbert (1974), vocational choice is one of the most important decisions an individual needs to make in life. Not only does a job have an impact on how an individual spends his time; it also affects many other facets of life.

One can safely say that work provides an individual with a sense of identity. Loss or lack of work therefore can have many disparaging effects upon an individual's self-concept. Just as lack of work or loss of work can negatively affect an individual, the inappropriateness of work activities can also have debilitating effects on the individual's adjustment to work. In addressing the area of work adjustment, Davies, Lofquist, and Weiss (1968) developed the Minnesota Theory of Work Adjustment. The theory defines work adjustment as a function of job satisfaction (satisfaction with one's ability to do his

job) and job satisfactoriness (external evaluation by the employer in assessing the person's ability and need to perform the job as required). Thus, work adjustment is a function by which individuals seek to achieve and maintain correspondence with their work environment by matching their abilities and ability requirements of the job, and personal needs and job reinforcers. A lack of correspondence results in either a lack of job satisfaction and/or job satisfactoriness. A matching of job satisfaction and job satisfactoriness will result in job tenure.

The ability to effectively evaluate their own needs and abilities as these correspond to jobs is often lacking among inmates. This could be a result of inmates' unrealistic assessment of their own skills, or by inaccurate understanding of specific skills required for a specific job. As a result, the inmate is ill-prepared for the eventual realities that will confront him. Sometimes inmates may overestimate their abilities or underestimate their abilities because of limited self-awareness or expectations. In either situation inmates, via faculty

decision-making, have delayed their vocational development. Addressing this point, Tolbert (1974) summarizes Samler's developmental concepts of vocational behavior by stating that "a decision may be delayed until adequate information is available, or until appropriate development has occurred" (pg. 45). There seems little doubt that many inmates lack appropriate information and/or maturity to effectively make vocational decisions. It is for this reason that we advocate a systematic vocational evaluation approach in working with a correctional population.

What is vocational/work evaluation? The Tenth Institute on Rehabilitation Services (1972) proposed the following definition: "Vocational (work) evaluation is a comprehensive process that systematically uses various forms of work, real or simulated, as a focal point for assessment and vocational exploration."

According to Sandovsky (1970), vo-

catiational evaluation has four major components: assessment, diagnosis leading to treatment, treatment, and outcome phases. For all practical purposes our project utilizes all of these components. During our assessment phase we utilize existing data about the inmate, and obtain the necessary permission to involve the inmate in the vocational process. Inmates are informed as to the purpose of the vocational evaluation and how the results can assist them in making vocational decisions. This phase also includes the actual evaluation of general vocational abilities. We utilize the McCarron Dial Work-Evaluation System (MDWES) (1976) as a means to assess basic ability areas.

The MDWES provides knowledge of whether the individual is capable of community employment and at what potential training level (semi-skilled, skilled, or technical/professional). The Minnesota Importance Questionnaire (MIQ) provides a realistic understanding of how the inmate views some 20 vocational needs. The results of the MIQ can be compared to 148 occupational reinforcement patterns, providing information about an inmate's attitude about the world of work.

The data from the vocational evaluation and the prior educational evaluation are then analyzed. The inmate's strengths and weaknesses are diagnosed and a tentative vocational hypothesis is generated. The results and recommendations are then shared with the inmate via a vocational counseling format (Williamson, 1950). Prior to communicating this to the inmate, the inmate is asked to evaluate his skills by rating them as either high, average, or low. Discrepancies in the inmate's evaluation and the vocational evaluation are openly discussed and verified. The inmate is given a realistic view of his assets and evaluations and how these relate to jobs. These results are also shared with the inmate's "unit team," and some initial planning is cooperatively implemented.

The third phase of the vocational evaluation process involves the treatment component. Based on the prior diagnostic information a vocational training recommendation is then implemented. It is during this phase that specific situational observations are made regarding (1) critical vocational skill behaviors (those behaviors that prevent

## DEVELOPING SKILLS Continued

the individual from being successful, i.e., measurement skills); and (2) critical adjustment skills (those personal/interpersonal characteristics that are impeding vocational success, i.e., taking directions). Both of these critical areas are identified and specific treatment strategies are developed so that the inmates can succeed in their vocational training area. Hence an ongoing evaluation of an inmate's progress is monitored, resulting in systematic reprogramming and in turn improved assessment and treatment procedures.

The outcome phase involves providing the inmate with skills in job seeking and job retention. These skills, frequently referred to as work adjustment skills, are systematically developed utilizing modeling and monitoring activities during group counseling meetings. In order to facilitate the inmates' transition back into their home community, early contact is made with various agencies, i.e., the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, so that inmates have a contact person who can assist with placement activities once the inmates return home.

It is important to note that neither the vocational evaluation or educational evaluation procedures are done in isolation of one another. The results are analyzed and synthesized so that appropriate treatment programs can be developed. The integrated manner of each discipline provides the functional skill development needed by handicapped inmates so that they can be successful. Hence, we advocate a holistic view in working with the incarcerated handicapped by utilizing educational, vocational, and psychosocial information in developing functional vocational programming. By providing a systematic matching of abilities and interests and supplementing these with functional academic support, we propose that the handicapped inmate has a greater likelihood of attaining job satisfaction and job satisfactoriness resulting in a greater chance of job tenure. In turn this could enhance the likelihood that the inmate will develop alternatives to prior socially deviant behavior patterns.

## Educational Evaluation

The education evaluation procedure is designed to provide the correctional educator with information in the following broad areas:

1. General level of academic skill achievement,
2. General academic aptitude, and
3. Possible approaches to utilize in the teaching process.

This information makes a valuable contribution in the vocational area placement decision. From this information it can be determined if the acquisition of academic skills needed to successfully complete a vocational training program can realistically be expected in the amount of instructional time available. The projection of probable academic acquisition could make a vocational

### **Not only is the requirement to provide educational and rehabilitative services to handicapped inmates written in the law, but inmates and inmate advocates intend to insure that this right is provided.**

training area unacceptable and necessitate an alternative. It is equally important to determine what specific academic skills the individual does possess (Wallace and Larsen, 1977), so that the needed basic life function skills can be taught. This approach reinforces the basic philosophy of the program, which is to teach only those skills essential to basic survival and to vocational success.

The best educational approach to utilize in teaching the vocational and life skills curriculum is also an important aspect to ascertain from the evaluation. This cannot be determined solely by formal testing; informal or ongoing instructor evaluations specific to the academic or vocational task are the best means to determine how the student best learns (Smith and Neisworth, 1968). However, an appropriate formal test designed to determine this information will provide a good beginning.

## Educational Tests

The Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Test Battery (Woodcock & Johnson, 1979) consists of 27 subtests. Nineteen of these subtests are used in the evaluation procedure, twelve subtests in the cognitive or aptitude group,

and seven in the achievement battery. The results of both cognitive and achievement batteries are designed to yield cluster scores indicating an individual's ability (cognitive battery) and skill level (achievement battery) on reading, mathematics, and written language. The tester can easily see the discrepancy between ability or potential through the Relative Performance Index (RPI), which compares the achievements of the individual with the projected achievement of individuals with similar cognitive abilities.

The Woodcock-Johnson also provides a profile of the individual's specific strengths and weaknesses. The selected subtests of the Woodcock-Johnson take an hour and a half to administer and can be given by a teacher. An attractive feature of the Woodcock-

Johnson is the computerized scoring service, which frees the educator of tedious scoring procedures and provides a detailed interpretation of test results.

The Brigance Diagnostic Inventory of Essential Skills is a criterion test of critical life function skills. Specific subtests of an individual's ability to survive in society have been identified. After determining which skills the individual does not have, a portion of the inmate's program is designed to teach these specific skills. Of equal importance is the selection of academic tasks crucial to the selected vocational training area.

## Ongoing Assessment

The validity of any formal testing program is determined by how well the information contributes to the development of a successful program. In order to determine the effectiveness of both the evaluation and the subsequent intervention the educator must continually observe the performance of the subject. Bateman (1971) states that teaching doesn't exist without continuous assessment. The skillful teacher is constantly drawing conclusions and generating hypotheses based upon the s-

students' interaction with the assigned tasks; in this manner modifications are planned and executed.

The most valued aspect of informal or functional assessment is that unlike formal testing situations, the skill can be examined in the actual learning situation in which the student is expected to function. This increases the validity of the assessment process.

Smith and Neisworth (1968), White and Haring (1979), and McCougan (1980) provide the following guidelines for informal assessment, to which the described project adheres.

1. Define the specific behaviors you are going to assess. This assures that evaluators are looking at the same behavior.
2. Develop academic materials or work samples to determine the students' proficiency in that behavior or skill. This enables the instructor to determine the components of the skill that the student has and it provides information on the strategy the student utilizes in completing the task.
3. Make sure that the assessment is continuous. This prevents making important conclusions based upon one sample of behavior. This can be accomplished by administering a similar form of the work sample or academic material on another occasion.
4. Observe the student performing his daily assigned tasks in either the vocational or academic area. This way the instructor can draw hypotheses which can be tested through academic or vocational instruction modifications.
5. Utilize situational assessment, a specific form of instructor observation (as discussed in the vocational evaluation). In this procedure, specific attempts are made to change behaviors that are hindering vocational success. Once these behaviors are observed, specific intervention strategies are developed with the goal of assisting the inmate in performing specific tasks required in that vocational area.

## Individualized Education

Both the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Public Law 94-142) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 require that written plans of in-

tervention be developed for each handicapped client. The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is required for all handicapped students between 3 and 21 (and up to 23 in West Virginia and 25 in Michigan) years of age. The Individualized Written Rehabilitation Program (IWRP) is required for each handicapped individual eligible for vocational rehabilitation service. The right of handicapped inmates to receive rehabilitative services has been established. The IEP and IWRP are used as both program planning tools and management devices to expedite the individual's program. The IEP or IWRP for project participants is written so that all mandated topics will be covered. The essential points are:

1. The subject's current level of skills (academic and vocational);
2. Yearly goals including short-term training objectives;
3. The type and content of training that will be provided;
4. The starting date for services and the projected duration;
5. Regularly scheduled evaluation procedures with specific objective criteria; and
6. Projected availability of training or placement services upon completion of the present service.

## Vocational Training Site Placement

The vocational training site placement is determined by the inmate's assessed aptitude, interest in the suggested placement, and the availability of training at the institution. When the specific recommended placement is unavailable, placement is suggested on a site that requires skills needed in the worker trait group of the unavailable preferred placement.

A comprehensive report on the findings of the vocational and educational testing is provided to the inmate's unit staff or team. The contents of this report are read to the inmate and no vocational placement is recommended without the consent of the inmate. The unit staff discusses the recommended placement with the inmate and placement is made.

The unit team provides an important means of support to the inmate. This group is responsible for the well-being of the inmate; therefore, they serve as an important advocate for the inmate in monitoring the quality of programming that the inmate receives.

When a placement is considered, project staff discuss the possibility of the placement with the supervisor or training site instructor. Such topics as the general vocational and learning characteristics of the inmate are reviewed. The instructor is reassured that assistance in making instructional modifications to meet the needs of the learning handicapped inmates will be provided. Possible modifications related to the inmate under discussion are then presented.

The special educator sector works with the vocational instructor in projecting needed modifications for vocational instruction. This cooperative approach is necessary, as the vocational instructor is knowledgeable of the steps needed to complete a specific skill requirement while the special educator has determined the most successful method or methods to teach the individual. A case in point would be that in training a painter, a vocational instructor would be well advised to limit the amount of verbal instruction in teaching an individual with poor language skills the steps in mixing and stirring paint. Direct illustration by instructor demonstration, with a minimum of verbal instructions, would circumvent the language problem. Thus, the inmate is not faced with the frustrating experience of trying to gain information in a mode in which he has demonstrated difficulty, thus increasing the prospect of successful acquisition of the specific vocational skills.

## Academic Intervention

The goal of each component of the project is to develop functional skills in the inmate. This theme is readily apparent in the vocational training component of this project as inmates are assessed, placed, and trained with the goal of future employment that is in keeping with their abilities and potentials.

The academic instruction is designed to develop needed vocational, life sur-

## DEVELOPING SKILLS

Continued

vival, and work adjustment skills that are academic in nature.

An analysis of the critical vocational skills is made when a vocational placement is made. The skills which are academic are identified for teaching in the educational environment. It is the goal of the educator to design the instruction to meet the learning strengths of the individuals. This is accomplished by referring to the IEP or IWRP. Modifications of the inmate's teaching plan are constantly made to assure that the strategy being employed is the best possible for the inmate. Strategies traditionally employed by special educators to teach academic skills are utilized to enhance the prospect of skill attainment.

Traditional academic skill development in the areas of reading and math is secondary to the acquisition of specific functional skills. Of equal importance is the selection of procedures utilized to teach the skills. These procedures are selected to take advantage of the learner's (inmate's) most intact method of acquiring knowledge. This information is gained through both formal and informal testing procedures. Thus the project's philosophy of functionality rather than the development of broad-based academic skills is put into practice. The same procedure is followed for critical life function skills. After the skill is identified, the procedures to use for teaching the skill are decided upon, based on the strengths of the learners, and then carried out.

### Referral to Community

The role of appropriate community placement is an important variable in the program. Placement is seen as holistic. Therefore, appropriate job placement is a result of an integrated approach utilizing vocational and educational intervention resulting in functional skill development so that the individual can be competitively employed. In order to facilitate the placement process, early contact with the state Division of Vocational Rehabilitation is made so that eligibility decisions can be ascertained on a given inmate. Project personnel assist the rehabilitation counselor by providing medical, psy-

chological, educational, and vocational evaluation information needed to determine client eligibility.

Once an individual is found to be eligible a counselor would then be assigned to monitor progress. Hence progress reports are also provided to the rehabilitation counselor on his client's development throughout the client's program. Once the inmate is given a date of release, contact is made with the counselor so that appropriate services can be arranged, i.e., additional training, counseling, placement, etc.

This referral process assists the project in a number of ways:

1. It provides the inmate with a contact person in his home community.
2. It provides the inmate with a person who has been following his case and therefore maintains the inmate's motivation in the ongoing process, and reduces the "down" time between release and community placement.
3. It provides the project with a means to follow the progress inmates have made after institutional release.
4. It provides for interagency cooperation so that correctional, vocational educational, and rehabilitation programs can work together in providing needed services to the handicapped inmate. The ultimate goal of the project and placement process is to provide inmates with functional skills that are vocationally oriented so that they can be competitively employed in the community.

### Summary

The goal of academic and vocational programs in correctional institutions is to develop skills that will enable the inmate to function competitively in the job market and appropriately in life function skill areas. It is the philosophy of the described project to utilize both vocational and academic training to develop work and life function skills in handicapped inmates; indeed, these procedures are appropriate for all.

The essentials of the program are:

1. Screening to determine if individual testing is needed.
2. Individual evaluation and vocational placement counseling.

3. Vocational training site placement.
4. Vocational training intervention.
5. Academic intervention.
6. Work adjustment skill development.
7. Follow-up procedures.

The program is designed to incorporate an individualized plan to meet the specific needs of the inmate in the acquisition of skills, thus increasing his chances of success in the "free world."

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**END**