



Labyrinth at Oak Creek Youth Correctional Facility

By Elaine Jenkins, Salem, OR

It rained yesterday as I drove through rural Linn County and found my way to Oak Creek Correctional Facility. It is the secure treatment program for young women who have committed crimes and have been sentenced to the equivalent of an adult prison. The vast majority have failed in other treatment and intervention programs. Most have significant mental health problems and histories of trauma. They house up to 75 young women, but because of budget issues, their population is now 51 young women between the ages of 12 and 23.

As I drove to a meeting with fellow facilitator, Joan Williamson and the management and mental health staff of the facility, it was raining hard. Oak Creek is not on a main road, but in the middle of farming areas south of Albany. Oak Creek had over flowed it's banks, and the high water sign warned us that the water was over the road. As I drove up the hill and into the parking lot, it seemed as if I was crossing a moat. It seemed to symbolize the distance these young women have been both physically isolated from society because of their crimes and behavior, but also the distance the community has become isolated from their children.

For the last four or five months, LNN members have been meeting with the staff at the request of Lory Humbert, the Superintendent. Lory's prior experience was at the Coffee Creek Correctional Facility and the labyrinth program in that facility. Our half hour meeting with the staff lasted an hour and they are very positive about using the labyrinth to help their residents. The facilities uses Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) as a

treatment modality. DBT teaches skills to help individuals control their emotional responses. They teach relaxation, intentionality and focus as part of the program. Walking a labyrinth is another option to help these young women change their reaction to stress and in doing so, change their lives.

LNN's first activity was a day-long workshop on March 25th. Several LNN facilitators worked with the groups and staff. We saw three groups of young women for two hour sessions. If this workshop was useful to the residents, we are planning two other walks, an indoor walk in May and an outdoor labyrinth and BBQ in June. Planning beyond a June walk is not possible at this time as the facility is unsure of their future as the Oregon Youth Authority is facing a 42% budget cut in the next biennium.

LNN's Prison Labyrinth Opportunities

Labyrinth Network Northwest has two teams of volunteers planning labyrinth activities for inmates at two Oregon State Correctional Facilities. At Coffee Creek, the state women's prison near Wilsonville, we are currently offering labyrinth walks twice a month on Monday evenings. We would welcome new volunteers which would enable us to make the labyrinth available every week. The program at Oak Creek Youth Facility in Albany is still in the planning stages. We have hosted one labyrinth workshop for inmates and have plans for future events.

For more information contact Kay@labyrinthnetworknorthwest.org