

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/dispatches-from-worth/how-young-women-are-building-promise-in-a-connecticut-prison>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

The sound of laughter must have roused the curiosity of the corrections officers.

One by one they popped their heads around the corner, with a slight smirk or quizzical look on their face, as if they felt like they were missing out and wanted to take part in what was going on.

The laughter they heard came from incarcerated women, who were participating in one of multiple trainings that would help them prepare to be part of a new approach to working with young people, ages 18-25, at York Correctional Institution in Connecticut. The women were chosen through a competitive application process to be mentors at the W.O.R.T.H. unit, which stands for Women Overcoming Recidivism Through Hard Work.

That day, there was laughter. There was excitement. There was hope. Hope for what was to come. It was inspiring to witness, and the time these mentors spent together provided a well-needed release as they anxiously anticipated the start of their new jobs. At the end of that training, each person reflected on their daylaughing and talking honestly about the challenges they and the young women they are committed to supporting are facing. It was important that everyone had a chance to shareto know that they have a voice, and that they are unique.

W.O.R.T.H is truly the first-of-its-kind in a womens prison. With support from Veras[Restoring Promise](#)team, the young adult unit was modeled off of its brother, T.R.U.E. our pilot unit at Connecticut's Cheshire Correctional institute, which has operated for over a year without a single act of violence. The mentors and staff at York brought the W.O.R.T.H name to lifeputting in countless hours of hard work in partnership with Veras[Restoring Promise](#)team to ensure that the unit is a success: It prioritizes family engagement, self-expression, peer support, personal growth and development, education, and career readiness.

Every aspect of W.O.R.T.H.s design intentionally embodies the spirit of the human dignity principlethe concept that every human being possesses an intrinsic worth, merely by being human. From its culture to its physical environment to its daily routine, W.O.R.T.H. was re-purposed, designed, and transformed from a vacant, old unit inside the prison to become a space that fosters healing and accountability over punishment.

The hard work of everyone involved paid off, and last month Connecticut Governor Dannel Malloy and First Lady Cathy Malloy presided over a ribbon-cutting ceremony. Though media were in attendance, the day was really about the amazingly dedicated facility leadership, living unit staff, mentors, and the first cohort of mentees. There was this sense of optimism and community in the air at W.O.R.T.H. that is so uncharacteristic of a U.S. prison. When they leave this place, they dont have to settle. They can go forth, said one of the mentors about why shes dedicated herself to guiding the young women there.

Its restorativeboth for the people who live and who work there.

PUBLICATION

NEWS

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