

# Vera Institute of Justice

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/massachusetts-correctional-center-embraces-resocialization-and-rehabilitation>

### Public Facing Advocacy Writing

It was gratifying to read [Vera's recent report](#) concerning the sentencing and incarceration practices in Germany and the Netherlands practices described as organized around the central tenets of resocialization and rehabilitation as they are closely aligned with the practices adopted by the Hampden County Correctional Center (HCCC) in western Massachusetts. HCCC has codified its operational philosophy and practice in [The Hampden County Model: Guiding Principles Best Correctional Practice](#).

Containing 20 guiding principles, this guide intended as a training manual for future staff and a blueprint for a correctional practice that best serves our citizens calls for an atmosphere of respect for the full humanity and potential of any human being within the institution and an effort to maximize that potential. To back up these principles with very real practice, HCCC schedules busy days of positive and productive activities for inmates as soon as possible. HCCC has developed some 300 activities that occupy inmates an average of more than 47 hours per week, and 300 partnerships with community organizations that help make reentry into the community easier for released individuals.

Vera's report says that life in (a European) prison aims to inculcate fundamental skills that offenders will need in the community. HCCC begins that process from day one. For those just arriving at HCCC and after the completion of a 7-to-10 day orientation inmates begin a fundamental program that can best be compared to a basic introductory survey course in college, perhaps appearing in a course catalog as Life Change 101. Core issues addressed in the program include substance abuse education, pre-employment training, vocational skills and career resources, violence prevention, conflict resolution, cognitive thinking skills, and educational orientation. The program is intended to provide a foundation of services and enables inmates to develop the skills necessary to successfully re-enter their community upon release.

We also agree with the Dutch Custodial Institution Agency's (DCIA) attitude toward segregation, as reported by Vera: The [DCIA] trains its staff to understand the collateral consequences of solitary confinement on offenders; this ensures that staff will treat segregated offenders humanely and minimize the impact of isolation. At HCCC, we have reduced dramatically the number of individuals in segregation and the amount of time they spend there, provided access to secure programs, worked against mental deterioration that results from sensory deprivation by the use of MP3 players, and worked to keep the mentally ill out of segregation through the use of mental health triage intervention staff.

And finally, in addition to a similar commitment to education among our correctional workers more than 53 percent of our staff have a degree in higher education, including 87 individuals with Masters Degrees and seven individuals with Doctorates. HCCC believes in giving inmates more freedom and autonomy. HCCC believes that offenders should be classified to the least level of security that is consistent with public safety and is merited by their own behavior. A high percentage of HCCC's inmates serve their time in low security settings like the Day Reporting Center, Correctional Alcohol Center, and Pre-Release Center.

Combined with a continuum of gradual, supervised, and supported community reentry for offenders, HCCC fosters a holistic system to lessen the overall cost per inmate, enabling us to have such an extensive programmatic effort in higher security. All of this is done without lessening public safety, but rather enhancing it by lessening recidivism rates.

*Richard J. McCarthy is the Public Information Director for the Hampden County Correctional Center in Massachusetts.*

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