

We can do it!

Women's influence on the corrections industry

BY ANDRIA WARREN, MPA

New Ideas • Diversity • Transparency

21st Century



“**W**omen are weak; men are strong. Women are the homemakers; men are the breadwinners. Women are bimbos; men are scholars.”

These stereotypes are often associated with women in almost every sector of the job industry. Stereotypes are commonly used as a means to describe or associate a person's feelings or experiences and apply it to their environment. It is no secret that the corrections industry over the centuries has been classified as a male-dominated industry. However, in Louisiana, we are changing the trajectory in the 21st century, forging towards new ideas, diversity and transparency. It is very important to recognize these changes because women are pressing forward and making their mark every step of the way.

Corrections in Louisiana has always carved its own unique path in the correctional industry. We have a total of eight state facilities, housing nearly 15,000 offenders. Many of our facilities are surrounded by swamp land, rich vegetation and inmate labor programs. So, where do women fit in this description? We belong on the front lines of decision making and behind the prison gates in a multiplicity of job areas. There are currently 2,075 women employed with the Louisiana Department of Corrections (DOC). These women are ushering in a new era of leadership and impacting many of the policies and procedures we use today. This has been explored by correctional research, which supports the notion that correctional agencies should be exploring what can be done to increase the number of women professionals entering these workplaces, and implement strategies designed to retain, train and mentor women working in corrections.

Historically, women in corrections were limited to working only as wardens and matrons (prison guards) in female-only facilities. The first female warden in the United States was named Mary Weed; she became the caretaker of Philadelphia's Walnut Street Jail in 1793. It took almost 30 more years for the first female correctional officer to be hired at Sing Sing Correctional Facility in Ossining, New York. Yet, the work of these women became notable, given the active role they took in providing programming and sustainable living conditions for inmates. Elizabeth Fry, noted as one of the first prison reformers, helped to shed light on not only the impact of women's contributions in facilities, but the need to usher in new roles and policies that were suitable for those

incarcerated and women who were employees. Because of the progressive attitudes of these reformers, the future careers for other women will shine bright.

The 1964 Civil Rights Act prohibited sexual discrimination in employment for both state and local governments. Affirmative action would follow in the 1970s, ensuring equal employment to both minorities and women. Women in the 1980s began to infiltrate the various systems of corrections by way of working control rooms or pickets in the Texas Corrections System until 1987. A survey, conducted by the National Institute of Corrections (NIC), revealed that 16 states implemented policies and another four states started practices in the early 1990s. In 1991, the Louisiana DOC used female correctional officers in some capacity in at least one of their male maximum security prisons. These milestones marked the beginning of many accomplishments to come.

“Mentoring our emerging leaders is so critical and doing so needs to go beyond words.”

— Andie Moss, founder and president of the Moss Group

Where are we today?

In the 21st century, we are continuing our efforts to provide the best policies and living conditions for our prisoners. Today, it goes without saying that women are making an impact around the world. Women are kicking down the stereotypical doors that once kept us down, leading by example and offering fresh new perspectives relevant to decision making. So, although many can argue that women are being offered more opportunities, I simply say we know our worth and are determined to display it in all areas. As of a report conducted by the Management & Training Corporation (MTC) Institute, the demographics support that more women will play a larger role in the workplace in the future and stand to earn more professional experience and education than men. →

Women's contribution to the Louisiana Department of Corrections

It is important to recognize that Louisiana has done an exceptional job of integrating their work force. This rising growth in numbers in our population projects for women attaining more college and professional degrees, only proves that women are a force to be reckoned with.

Women are eager to pioneer new and innovative initiatives. Currently, at the Louisiana DOC, we have women in every aspect of our executive level as well as at the facility level. It is important to point out that these women were not given those opportunities, but they earned them by learning and competitively attaining the knowledge needed to be successful in the workplace. Many of those projects include reentry programming, data analytics, transition specialization, policy planning and leadership initiatives. Women attribute a multitude of qualities

that have been recognized as enduring and empathetic, coupled with a “get it done” mentality. My personal experience and short tenure here in the corrections industry has prompted me to excel and achieve at a higher level to the many great role models that I have before me. I often associate it with the highly visible success of other women that drives me.

A bright future

So, why is the Louisiana DOC different from other states in the evolution of women in the workplace? I think what makes Louisiana so significant is that, professionally speaking, we are so eager and motivated to put Louisiana at the forefront of our industry. We are at the center of what is considered to be limited progression and budgetary constraints beyond comprehension, but it's the will to succeed and believe in a better future for our correctional system. Secretary James M. Le Blanc

At the forefront

Leadership Team

Melissa Staub — Deputy Undersecretary of Management and Finance

Angela Whittaker — Executive Management Advisor to the Secretary

Debbie Bennett — Executive Assistant

Natalie Laborde — Deputy Assistant to the Secretary

Stacy Falgout — Chief Nursing Officer

Rochelle Ambeau — Deputy Assistant Secretary of Reentry

Leslie Schmidt — Nursing Consultant

Department Heads

Gail Guerin — Director of Crime Victim Services

Jan Rodrigue — Deputy Director of Probation and Parole

Andrea Butross — Director of Offender Education

Jewel Freeman — Director of the Internal Audit Division

Tanisha Matthews — Director of Human Resources



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“If you find yourself as a corrections employee, find a mentor. Watch those around you who you believe are ‘doing it right’ and learn from their example.”

— Angela Whittaker, executive management advisor to the secretary at the Louisiana Department of Corrections

is committed to this change and has surrounded himself with a leadership team that is capable of making these kinds of changes in the system. In helping make these changes, 40% of Le Blanc’s team members are women who have the leadership skills, experience and drive to prove their worth in a traditional male environment. As we continue to progress in the workplace, we prepare another generation of future female leaders who are not limited to just the social norms of the limited constraints of what we are capable of. Women should be recognized as an asset, not a liability. After coming so far, the question is, where do we go from here? The answer is for constant growth to be a top priority of the organization.

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The featured quotes, provided by Andie Moss, founder and president of the Moss Group in D.C., and Angela Whittaker, executive management advisor to the secretary at the Louisiana Department of Corrections, are excerpts from the article “In sight: Women of corrections on their paths, their jobs and advice” from Corrections Today January/February 2018.

CELEBRATING WOMEN IN CORRECTIONS

The E.R. Cass Award has been presented to men and women who have exhibited the same degree of selflessness and remarkable achievement toward the advancement of ACA, the corrections field and the community. The award has become a tradition of excellence, professional integrity and innovative leadership in a field that is constantly changing and evolving. The E.R. Cass Award is more than just a medallion or a membership — it is a symbol of true dedication and professional achievement, of self-sacrifice and tireless energy. It represents a person who believes in the future possibilities of ACA and of corrections. As we celebrate the future of corrections, we honor the incredible women who have embodied everything the E.R. Cass Award stands for since its inception.

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- 2013 Barbara Inch
- 2011 Lannette Linthicum, M.D.
- 2007 Maryann Saar
- 2006 S. Anne Walker
- 2005 Charlotte A. Nesbitt
- 2004 Betty Adams Green
- 2003 Sister Margaret Graziano
- 2001 Virginia Swanson
- 2000 Anabel P. Mitchell
- 1999 Gwendolyn Chunn; Mary Q. Hawkes
- 1998 Judy C. Anderson; Bobbie L. Huskey
- 1997 Kathleen M. Hawk; T.A. Ryan
- 1994 Victoria C. Myers
- 1993 The Honorable Helen G. Corrothers
- 1991 Diana N. Trivisono
- 1990 Ruth L. Rushen
- 1989 Su Cunningham
- 1988 Linda D’Amario Rossi
- 1985 Joann B. Morton, Ph.D.
- 1984 Lane Murray, Ph.D.
- 1982 Marcella C. Rapp
- 1977 Martha E. Wheeler
- 1974 Catherine Simons Sharp
- 1966 Marion H. Vedder
- 1963 Edna Mahan