

SUNDAY
FEBRUARY 22, 2009

Drug numbers up from September

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A voluntary survey conducted in January left little doubt that drugs were the No. 1 reason for a vast majority of inmates ending up behind bars at the Sullivan County House of Corrections.

The numbers didn't change too much from a similar survey in September, according to HOC Superintendent Ross Cunningham.

Of the 60 male inmates sur-

veyed, 93.33 percent said they were drug users and 82 percent said drugs were involved in their crime.

The severity of drug use by the female population revealed an increase over the September tally. All nine female inmates said they were drug users and 100 percent said drugs were involved in their crime.

Forty-one of the male inmates admitted they used soft drugs such as marijuana while 32 were involved with hard drugs such as heroin. Thirty-nine said they used

both.

All nine female inmates responding said they used both soft and hard drugs.

The numbers from the survey were shared with the Sullivan County Commissioners at their meeting Thursday afternoon by John Gramuglia, director of programs. He said another survey will probably be conducted in the summer.

He also announced statistics that focused on prisoners

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released on electronic monitoring in 2007-08 who ended up re-entering the HOC. Of nine females released, one ended up returning. Five males were released and one also re-entered.

Of the 64 male prisoners who went through the Transitional Housing Unit, 12 eventually returned.

In an effort to deal with the drug problem, ground is expected to be broken in the fall on the new \$5.9 million Community Corrections Center that will have 68 beds. The current HOC will receive a \$1.2 million upgrade and will continue to have 100 beds.

The Community Corrections Center will have a 90-day program for drug rehabilitation that will be gender specific, Cunningham said. There will be a female track and a male

track.

"Breaking it down that way will be more effective for offenders," Cunningham said. "Many of the female inmates are mothers and we will try to unite families and work toward productive relationships," he added.

Inmates will be supervised from booking to release. There will be a victim impact programming curriculum.

"This is a large programming effort we are taking on in Sullivan County and if everything is operating properly we will be far ahead in the future of needing more space for offenders providing all those things are working as national statistics indicate," Cunningham said from his office Friday afternoon.

Keep in mind this will be one of the first counties in the state

to have a supervised drug and alcohol program, the HOC superintendent said. "We will monitor inmates from the day they come in the back door and continue under our supervision until we release them and then we will work in concert with probation and parole."

Cunningham said officials are actively pursuing four different grant sources at both the federal and state levels along with possible stimulus funding to help defray a portion of the project costs. "We hope to pay for some of the staffing and programming space in the new building," he said.

"Our ultimate goal is to return Sullivan County residents back to Sullivan County as productive citizens," Cunningham concluded.