

## Detention facility accredited for GED testing

KINGMAN – Mohave County Juvenile Detention Facility has increased its focus on education by becoming an official GED (General Educational Development) testing center.

A GED certificate is often referred to as a General Equivalency Diploma.

“Last summer we were advised that there were eight juvenile detention centers in this state that were going to apply to become GED testing sites,” Detention Administrator Gloria Dusek said. “Prior to that, GED testing was handled through the Arizona Department of Education. Detention centers from throughout Arizona had to go through the application process to become accredited.”

“Welcome to the GED Testing Program,” Robert MacGillivray, deputy executive director of the American Council on Education, General Educational Development Testing Service, wrote in a letter to Dusek in February. “Karen Liersch, the GED administrator for Arizona, has submitted your request to establish an Official GED Testing Center at Mohave County Detention Testing Center which has been approved, along with your appointment as chief examiner.”

Dusek and Elaine Grissom, assistant chief probation officer, will conduct the testing. Both have master’s degrees, Dusek’s in education with an emphasis in leadership and Grissom’s in organizational management.

Detained juveniles must be at least 16 years old to take the test, Dusek, who also spent 10 years as a probation officer, said. “Even if they are enrolled in a school, they can take the test here. They have to take a pretest and score at a



Photo courtesy Mohave County Juvenile Detention Administrator Gloria Dusek (right) and Marianne Huffer, special education teacher, pose Wednesday at the detention facility in Kingman.

certain level before they are allowed to take the GED test. The test is free to the juveniles. We have anticipated, and budgeted for, up to 30 juveniles to take the test next year from January 1 through December. We also anticipate around 10 juveniles to be tested between July of this year through December.”

The detention facility is “fully accredited through CITA/NCA (Commission on International and Trans-regional Accreditation/ North Central Association) which allows reciprocity public and charter school systems,” she said. “We also offer AIMS (Arizona Instrument of Measure Standards) testing and TerraNova testing

three times a year. The facility is equipped with a full service LEARN (Literacy and Resources Networking) computer lab, which offers fast track math and speed reading to students. English Language Learning (ELL) students are a priority and are given an opportunity to succeed.

“School attendance is a state mandate,” Dusek said. “The juveniles have to be in class at least four hours per day. They receive credit for their time in school.”

The class-work is individualized depending on the juvenile’s ages, she said. “They are instructed in math, reading, social sciences, language and all the same subjects areas as they would deal with in a regular school. Today we have 17 juveniles. That number varies from day to day. We can place as many as 30 kids in a classroom. Class work will be brought to any detainee who is not placed into the general population.”

April 14 through 18 was career week at the facility.

“Members of the community have come to the detention center to speak with the juveniles,” Dusek said. “All juveniles in the facility attend the career presentations.”

Learning life skills and work ethics is a big part of the facility’s educational focus as well as offering the benefits of earning a General Equivalency Diploma.

“If they pass the GED test,” Dusek said, “it will give them an opportunity to find a better job, which will also reduce recidivism and, therefore, reduce our costs.”

The facility’s school has one full-time teacher, a part-time special education teacher and two full-time educational assistants.

The special education category “may be learning disabilities in reading, writing and math combined with emotional disabilities,” Marianne Huffer, special education teacher said. “Right now we have three students (in that category) out of 17. The number may change, but the ratio has held even.”

Huffer has two bachelor’s degrees, one in elementary education and one in special education.

“I think, for a lot of these kids, this (GED) is a way for them to make it,” Huffer, who has been a special education teacher for 30 years, said. “I think the career week has given them some real positives.”

During the week, Mohave County Chief Probation Officer Friend Walker and a probation officer spoke to the juveniles. Also representatives from state Fish and Game, the railroad and Mohave Community College gave presentations.

“Today we have a representative from Mohave County One-Stop Career Centers,” Huffer said. “Yesterday we had a U.S. Navy recruiter. That presentation changed the minds of a couple of the kids. Before the recruiter came, I asked if anyone was interested in going into the military and no hands were raised. Now, some of them are thinking differently. We went on a website about Navy jobs and that was a spark for some of them. They are looking at the military differently than they did previously.”

The facility is interested in having presentations from other career categories and branches of the military, she said. “We try to provide quite a variety of people” to inspire the youths.

“Some of the detention centers started a program called Merging Two Worlds,” Huffer said. “That is an effort toward merging the outside world with social skills, life skills, and to try to provide the tools they will need to take with them when they leave. That has evolved into another program that all of the detention centers are using now. It

has been modified and is benefiting our students. This career week has come out of that program.”

“We changed our curriculum in March,” Dusek said, “and it is working.”

“We really have a school here,” Huffer said. “Most people probably would ask ‘Why bother?’ Because we have to bother. We have to change lives. That’s our goal.”

Most people don’t see the results, but Dusek, Huffer, Grissom and the other personnel who work at the Mohave County Juvenile Detention Facility do see successes.

“We are now offering an opportunity for these youths to receive GEDs,” Dusek said, “and we really are changing lives.”

For more information on offering career presentations, call Dusek at (928) 753-0720.