

First year of WATCH East a success

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WATCH East opened Jan. 31, 2005 with 39 family members who came from the program in Warm Springs. They had all been screened by the local screening committee, program coordinator Deb Dion said. Within the first week an additional person was accepted to the program, bringing the number of family residents to 40, which is capacity for the building. Dion said they've stayed at capacity ever since.

The first preference for the program is for women, then people from eastern Montana and then for people from the rest of the state.

About 20 people from eastern Montana have gone through and completed the program, Dion said. Thirty-five women from all over Montana have completed the program.

Through the end of January 2006, there have been 76 people eligible to participate in the program. Of that number, three have transferred to WATCH West in Warm Springs, two have voluntarily resigned and gone to jail. "The program is hard and it's a lot easier to sit in jail and do your time," Dion said.

Also, there was a disciplinary hearing for a female family member, who was sent to Montana Women's Prison to complete her sentence. Dion said she had violated rules and as result of a hearing with the probation officer was sent to MWP. That incident was when the facility first opened and administration wanted to send a very strong message, Dion said.

There have been 70 people who have completed the program and there is data available on 69 of them. Nine people, or 13 percent of those who have completed the program, are not in compliance with all aspects of their their probation. The type of noncompliance varies, Dion said, from not working and not attending Alcoholics Anonymous, to being caught in a casino or drinking.

Eighty-seven percent, or 59 people, are in compliance with their probation.

Only one person who has completed the program has re-offended and gotten another DUI. That works out to less than 1 percent for the first year, Dion noted.

As part of commemorating the first year for the new facility, Dion said they've redesigned the coin given to family members to commemorate completion of the program. The coin family members graduating in the first year

receive is the same one given to graduates at the WATCH West facility. The new coin will reflect the Phoenix family of the WATCH East program, Dion explained.

A new coin will be sent to everyone who has already graduated and is in compliance with their probation.

There have been some new additions to the program including computers from Dawson Community College which allow family members to work on resumes. It is a requirement to leave the program with a professional resume, so they all learn how to do that, Dion said. Deb Mooer from DCC is teaching life skills classes at the facility which highlight healthy lifestyles and activities that don't involve drinking. "The college has been great," Dion said. DCC also sends an instructor so family members can work on their GEDs.

"We also make sure that they have social security cards and identification," Dion said. Family members are required to find work very quickly after graduation and without the documents they could get out of compliance right away.

The Dawson County Healthy Communities Coalition received a grant and held a class, taught by Ken Corpi, for family members on nurturing parents.

Family members are still making quilts to donate. Right now, they're making smaller quilts to give to a shelter for domestic violence victims.