

La Opinion (Original Source)

<http://www.laopinion.com/los-angeles/Reclusas-graduacion-educacion-carcel>

English Translation:

Female Inmates Celebrate Graduation Behind Bars

Female Inmates from Century Regional Detention Center in Lynwood, finalize their studies and look toward a brighter future

Under maximum security, and without the presence of relatives or friends, 85 inmates from the Century Regional Detention Center yesterday lived a very special moment in their lives: graduated from MERIT educational program. Most of them are in prison for crimes related to drug addiction and yesterday enjoyed a moment of joy and very special pride, they received certificates that credit them with learning techniques such as baking, sewing, painting, computer specialties, and other personal skills such as parenting and anger management. One of the more satisfied with her achievement was Adriana Montiel, who is serving a sentence of 13 years in prison. She, along with Helen Salmeron, were the only ones who earned their GED high school diploma. "This achievement is dedicated to my father because he always dreamed of me getting an education. He is a teacher, and I know he would be proud of me", said Montiel, 25-years-old, who despite completing just one year of her sentence, sees things with optimism because she had initially been sentenced to life in prison, since her crime was drug-related. "When I came here, my life was nothing more than a living hell, I felt helpless. But now my life has changed. I'm going to leave here with a degree," said the young woman, mother of a 4-year-old little girl, who now lives with her grandparents in Veracruz, Mexico. "I'm alone here. I made mistakes, but I'm going to move forward. This program has changed my life", she said. The spirit of recovery could be felt during the ceremony attended by prominent authorities of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, such as Lee Baca.

"Here they are taught basic skills such as how to value themselves and have a good relationship with their families and their children", explained Deputy Reynoso, who has worked at the detention center in the program for two years. "I didn't know how to communicate with other people. Now I appreciate my family, my children and I know when I leave here I can be useful to the community," said Laura Uribe, a woman age 32, who was jailed on charges of drug trafficking. "One makes mistakes in life. But that doesn't mean you're a bad person and that you can have a new beginning," said Uribe, who hopes to leave the prison in September of next year. Karla Galindo, Director of LA Works, the Organization leading the program Education Based Incarceration (EBI) in this detention center, said that this program gives these women, "a new chance of life".