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Jail visit policies continue to evolve

Face-to-face interactions have gone to virtual visits

By Kaitlyn Scoville
OSHKOSH HERALD

Since Aug. 1, loved ones and inmates have not been allowed to visit in person as part of the Winnebago County Jail's efforts to keep up with current trends and combat staffing shortages.

Some people with family and friends in the facility have been concerned about

their well-being without these face-to-face interactions.

Tina Fuhrman's son Grant has been at the jail since December 2019, through waves of the pandemic where virtual visitations weren't an option for either family members or professionals.

The jail has seen five outbreaks over the course of two years but has been free of the virus inside the jail's walls since mid-September, according to lead jail administrator Capt. Dave Mack.

Fuhrman said not allowing in-person

visiting limits what they can talk about.

"Now you have no way of talking to your inmate privately. I haven't seen my son in person for nearly two months," she said. "It doesn't make sense why they would do away with it now."

In November, the Sheriff's Department signed a contract with the vendor ICSolutions, which gave the jail 220 tablets for inmates to use for messaging, phone calls, reading books or accessing the law library.

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Schneider excels in pool for Oshkosh West
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Photo by Michael Cooney

How their garden grows

Julia Chybowski, Jason Mills and daughter Meredith tend to their home garden at 1025 Merritt Ave. on a large enclosed lot overflowing with vegetable plants and fruit trees. Chybowski said it was a strong growing season that contrasted with last year's midseason flooding. They have seeds to give away via their Oshkosh Seed Savers program at oshkoshseedsavers@gmail.com.

Care facilities use resource team for refugee hiring

By Cheryl Hentz
HERALD CONTRIBUTOR

We hear a lot about inclusion and diversity in today's workplace, including hiring refugees who come to the United States from a multitude of other countries. According to the Fiscal Policy Institute, studies show that companies that hire refugees find success on many levels.

Those benefits include being known for having a diversity and inclusion policy in their hiring process; higher rates of recruitment and retention; potentially developing a solid recruitment resource; strong employee performance and increased productivity.

As more refugees move to the Fox Valley region, several long-term care, assisted living and retirement living facilities and communities – known collectively as the Refugee and Long-Term Care Workforce Collaborative – have banded together on successful Afghan refugee resettlement by providing housing

and support for their transition into the area. Some are offering training and employment for many of the refugees.

The collaborative is being guided in its efforts by LeadingAge Wisconsin, a leader in senior advocacy and education. LeadingAge also serves as a resource for these facilities, assisting them in problem resolution, and providing services and programs to meet their needs.

"LeadingAge Wisconsin is the convener of the discussions to create a multi-organizational partnership program which would support not only the workforce crisis long-term care organizations are facing, but would allow our mission-driven providers to support (our) community's refugee resettlement efforts," said Theresa Bertram, president and chief executive of Miravida Living.

Formerly Lutheran Homes of Oshkosh, Miravida Living includes Bethel Home, Simeanna Apartments and other



Photo from Miravida Living

Two of Bethel's new employees include Nyirarukundo Devotha (left) and Maria Maunon (right) from the Republic of Congo, with environmental services supervisor Tiffany Schultz.

SEE **Refugee jobs** ON PAGE 20

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Culver Family Welcome Center
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- Have a retirement account (IRA, 401k).
- Want to learn how current laws affect your estate plan.
- Are concerned that Nursing Home or long term care costs will deplete your life savings.
- Want to protect the family inheritance you leave behind for your family's use only.
- Wish to learn more about Probate and how to avoid it.
- Have a Will that is more than 3 years old or it was created in another state.

WE WILL DISCUSS:

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- ▶ Why you shouldn't add a child to your bank account and how beneficiary designations might ruin your will.
- ▶ How you can protect your children's inheritances from predators, greedy non-family members, and bad marriages.
- ▶ How veterans or their spouses can receive money to help pay for medical expenses.
- ▶ Why signing your home over to your kids might be a huge mistake.
- ▶ How planning in advance can help you and your spouse afford quality care.



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Jail visits

FROM PAGE 1

Fuhrman, whose son is awaiting trial for assault on a police officer at West High School, said money has to be put on an account for both inmates and visitors to message or call one another and for these additional services to be accessed.

Video visits are still free at the level inmates were allotted when in-person was active. For example, a minimum-security inmate is allowed an hour of time over two days each week.

"For their mental health, they need to see people they love. To get to break away for just an hour to see his family is probably more helpful than I can even imagine," Fuhrman said. "People have basic needs as a human, and I think it's vitally important for their mental health to see your family in person."

Mack said the jail population has been hovering around 220-225 lately, with an average stay of 16 days.

Laura Scudiero's daughter was in the county jail for about a month since the exclusively virtual visits were in place, and they had difficulty getting ahold of each other. Scudiero kept calling the jail and messaging through ICSolutions, but her daughter wasn't told she could use the tablets to see what her mother was sending.

After little luck in the first part of her daughter's stay at the jail, Scudiero resorted to sending messages intended for back-end screeners rather than the inmate.

"All this time while she's thinking that we're out here not caring, that wasn't the case at all," Scudiero said. "The people on the inside need to have that connection to know people care. You can't just shut somebody out like that, like they don't exist in the world."



Oshkosh Herald

The process for visiting inmates has changed over time at the Winnebago County Jail.

One person, who wished to remain anonymous, said there have also been several user interaction errors within the ICSolutions app with its payments that sometimes limit what services can be accessed.

"We should not have to pay a fortune to communicate with our loved ones," the person said.

According to Fuhrman, video calls, in addition to what the jail allows its inmates for free, are \$15. Text messages, photos or a 30-second video message is 25 cents each. She said she has spent about \$1,000 talking with her son and allowing him access to other services on a tablet.

Mack and Winnebago County Sheriff John Matz said the contract with ICSolutions was beneficial during the pandemic in that it still allowed inmates to visit with loved ones.

On the other hand, Mack said the jail has been struggling with a crisis of recruitment and retention similar to many other jails in the nation.

"In 2021, we were downsized by nine jail deputies," Mack said. "Even today, between jail and civilian staff, we're down 12 positions."

The Oshkosh Correctional Institution

has been struggling with staffing even before the pandemic, as reported by the Herald earlier this year.

"After remaining mostly stable and even improving at some facilities in 2020, vacancy rates in (Department of Corrections) began climbing in 2021," Wisconsin DOC director of communications John Beard said. "As we have seen, this is not an issue unique to DOC. As a result, many companies and agencies are increasing wages for qualified workers, further increasing competition."

Beard said the DOC was able to get some federal money for certain expenses related to the pandemic such as reimbursing counties for holding people while they awaited transfer from jails to correctional facilities. Otherwise the focus has been on enhanced recruitment ideas and bonus programs.

With the tablets in place now at the Winnebago County Jail, the visitation window doesn't have to be staffed by civilian employees outside of business hours and allows for greater efficiency.

For inmates, the 220 tablets are located in cell blocks where they have access to them for various services. But it doesn't have video call capabilities when it's in the pod itself. Video visitations are done in a separate area on docking ports where in-person visits usually would be.

"It's not a huge change outside of the prior way we've done visitations, other than it's not in person," Matz said.

And for visitors who wouldn't usually have access to the technology required for video visitations, there are three iPads available in the vestibule area of the Sheriff's Office to accommodate them and will eventually be replaced by ICSolutions kiosks, Mack said.

"I think this is just a sign of keeping up with current trends by using video visitation," Matz said. "I see this as an avenue to evolve and use technology to replace people. When we say in-person visitations, there's a thick pane of glass between the inmate and the person visiting. So rather than it being thick glass, it's a tablet – there really isn't any difference."

Mack said he doesn't know if in-person visits will come back in the same way they've been in the past. If there are individuals who don't have the ability to understand technology, there may be some exceptions to that "but it would be rare," he said.

"I think this is just a trend of the future."

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