



John & Helen Eddings
Women with Dignity Founders & Co-Directors

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The *Women with Dignity* Program @ Homestead Correctional Institution
Women with Dignity: Act Justly, Love Mercy, and Walk Humbly

EXCERPTS FROM HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT DESCRIBING
WOMEN WITH DIGNITY

- 1. CL:** My whole life I have struggled with self-esteem, self-confidence, and many other things because of my upbringing. Not believing in myself, having confidence, or even loving myself is all because of how my parents treated me. I have been doing my best to improve all these years but felt like I wasn't getting anywhere. When ***Women with Dignity*** was introduced to me, I felt a sense of hope, a reason to believe again, another chance at life. I have never been more willing to better myself and do whatever it takes to become a better woman.
I not only want this program, but I need this program.
- 2. SB:** What do I get from the ***Women with Dignity*** program? I have been in this program since it first started, and in that time my most valuable takeaway is that I once again have hope. After serving 26 years in prison, I had lost sight of a light at the end. This program gives me so much hope that I believe it makes me a better person all the way around. When someone believes in you and your freedom it makes you want to do your best at everything.
- 3. JP:** All of our classes are facilitated by one of the ***Women with Dignity*** participants. John and Helen Eddings lead the classes to build some of the finest facilitators ever. Respected and full of integrity.

4. **TC:** I am the only person on this compound who has come from 15.5 years in confinement on Death Row. In all those years of confinement, I was not allowed to work, go to school, or take classes in a program. When I first got here (at Homestead), there were only two programs I could get into with the sentence I have and **Women with Dignity** (which accepted the responsibility of the former Lifers program) took me in. When the Eddings's first came here for that purpose, they chose 15 of the 80 women we had in Lifers to train to be facilitators. I was one of the 15 they chose. They saw something in me. I'd never facilitated a class or even stood up and spoke in front of a big or small crowd to teach anything ever in my life. Because they saw something in me, it inspired me and gave me confidence. Following this, they assigned Ms. Irene Garrett and me the first Servant Leadership class to teach and that was so humbling. This class was the class you had to take to become a facilitator so that was even more humbling.

5. **MDG:** I have been a participating member of the **Women with Dignity** program since its inception. Through this program, I have seen the ladies become engaged in something positive, growing and blooming and discovering things about themselves and others. I have observed raised confidence levels, a clearer focus on goals, and a genuine desire to better themselves and their surroundings. In my experience, the classes have been engaging, informative, and relevant to our situation and personal needs.

Speaking for myself, I am a better person because of it.

6. **PG:** Being a part of **Women with Dignity** has given me the opportunity to participate in positive, character building classes with other women who understand the unique struggle of having a life sentence. I have had the pleasure of meeting and getting to know women who I might not have met had it not been for **Women with Dignity**.

As a Jewish inmate, I do not belong at Jack Brewer, Prison Fellowship, or most of the other chapel-based programs and classes built on a Christian foundation. For me, **Women with Dignity** is the only non-denominational program for self-betterment.

7. **JH:** As part of the **Women with Dignity** program, I have been afforded opportunities to participate not only as a facilitator, but also a member of classes. Camaraderie with others who have similar sentences as well as more confidence in myself, a sense of accomplishment I would not have been able to find elsewhere and the knowledge to encourage others to do the same.

In the almost 20 years I have been incarcerated, I have not found anywhere else where I can get the assistance I have received from the **Women with Dignity** program.

8. **GH:** There is nowhere else that offers any type of program that is tailor-made for people with longer sentences. This is not a 6-12 week program. As long as you don't quit, this program doesn't either!

9. **CH:** Where else can I (a long-term sentenced person) go to get the assistance that the **Women with Dignity** program provides for me? Nowhere.

10. **SB:** Through the, we now have advocates to guide us and help us to return home to our families and communities.
11. **CB:** Before I took the *Women with Dignity* classes, I did not really deal with feelings or talking to many people, but since I took these classes, now I'm open minded and I listen to people and give them personal feedback. A lot of people have told me I have changed and some say they look up to me now. I thank *Women with Dignity* for helping me open up and start talking in my classes.
12. **SM:** When I first started the *Women with Dignity* program, I was not the person I am today...I have learned so much more bout myself and becoming a better individual.
13. **KL:** These women [in the *Women with Dignity* program] keep me accountable for my actions and remind me that life isn't barbed wire and a blue uniform in the DOC, but a community of women who have all been hurt, abused, and traumatized from relationships and family. I am grateful for the support and encouragement from the sisterhood in this program I have developed.
14. **CW:** Mr. and Mrs. Eddings, you both saw something in us that indicated change. The way we think, speak, act, and respond...new positive radiant beings rising from the dust and ashes of our past. Thank you for believing in us!
15. **MA:** What do I from of the *Women with Dignity* program? A sense of belonging. All my life I never felt like I belonged. Coming to the to prison was a real eye opener for me. The program name alone stands out, a woman with dignity.
16. **EB:** What do I get from the *Women with Dignity* program? A community. People who can relate to what I am feeling and who I can talk to about my feelings. We help each other when someone is in need. Where else can I—a long-term sentenced person—go to get the assistance that the *Women with Dignity* program provides for me? I have yet to find another program that helps longtimers like me.
17. **JC:** There is no other program that offers women with parole and long sentences what we need. They have given us a sense of community, fellowship, accountability, and hope. *Women with Dignity* offers numerous classes ranging from Wellness to Financial Planning, and more. We are able to earn much needed certificates for parole and clemency considerations, and a sense of achievement. There is nowhere else where I can gain the knowledge I have gained. *Women with Dignity* is an asset to Homestead CI.
18. **VD:** The *Women with Dignity* program is very important to me because it brings me hope. At this point this is the only program for the long timers, we have no other program for long timers.

19. MC: What do I get from the ***Women with Dignity*** program? A community of women who have a program where they are not turned away because they have too much time or a life sentence. A sense of belonging. Helping other women face their fears, [the only program] teaching them how to put together a parole package, teaching healing and forgiveness.

It is important for the ***Women with Dignity*** program to continue because of the help it offers to grow, learn, and improve *how* you do your time and how to *do* your time.

It helps you to be a productive member of our “sisterhood” and our community here at Homestead.

20. DD: We are treated as human beings, and we want to attend the classes provided, both for those eligible for parole and for those who are not. I am grateful for this program and all of our students are respectable women who stay away from trouble and the chaos and drama on the compound.

21. JE: It is very important to me because I need to learn more about myself so that when I am released one day I am prepared to reenter society and be a success.

22. DG: I learned in Servant Leadership (taught in ***Women with Dignity***) how important giving to this community is. I would not have found my passion for teaching if not for the ***Women with Dignity*** program.

23. SGT: ***Women with Dignity*** is not an option, it is a necessity.

24. WMH: We need this program here. Not just lifers, but any woman who wants to know her purpose and work toward being a better person.

25. LJ: ***Women with Dignity*** is more helpful for long term sentence people who are eligible for parole, however they allowed the classes that they offer to non-eligible for parole long-term sentence people [like me] that are usually offered to short-term sentence people/reentry. I am very grateful!

26. SK: ***Women with Dignity*** has been a long-awaited answer to prayer. ***Women with Dignity*** offers what I cannot get anywhere else. It provides great assistance toward helping for a successful transition into society. We need this program and the assistance it offers. Since being here more women have been released than ever before. It helps to prepare us for life outside of these walls and I am forever grateful.

27. JM: Since participating in these classes, I have gained knowledge in new areas, gained a support system, and grown as a person.

28. KM: This program doesn't just help us live in this community, it also prepares us to live and succeed in the one out there. I've waited over 40 years for this program!

- 29. JP:** What do I get from the *Women with Dignity* program? I grow more as a woman with strength, confidence, self-worth, and I handle tough situations better. It 's a very positive program for women that's been incarcerated for decades, and through the classes we get healing through all the hurts, traumas, and abuses [we have experienced in over our lives].
- 30. MS:** This program is absolutely critical to people with long sentences, as we are often barred from participating in programs due to the length of our sentences. It is a place where people with a common bond can help each other.
This program gives hope to people who only a short time ago never believed they would go home someday.
- 31. JS:** I have grown a lot since joining *Women with Dignity*. I have gotten a chance to heal myself and have helped my family heal with the things I have learned and have shared with my children.
- 32. SS:** So far what I have gotten out of *Women with Dignity* is a strong sense of community, one which I have not had before.
There is no other place I can get this from.
It helps me keep focused and goal oriented towards self-betterment, when it would otherwise be so easy to fall into the same dumb "pass time" habits of those who are going nowhere.
- 33. MT:** What do I get from the *Women with Dignity* program? Knowledge and proper tools to make better decisions.
- 34. JV:** I was welcomed as a sister, not as a new person who just came to prison. I've met a lot of ladies in *Women with Dignity* who have a long [time to serve in prison] like me. This makes it easier.
- 35. MV:** *Women with Dignity* is the only definitive organization at Homestead CI that has guaranteed support to individuals with long-term sentences.
- 36. CW:** In this sisterhood, we extend to others what we have learned in this program to apply it to our community.
- 37. SJ:** To see a program for long timers is great because that let us know that we are not forgotten.
- 38. NW:** *Women with Dignity* gives us a sense of accomplishment as we learn, grow, help others, and be productive while doing time.
This program has given me hope and has inspired me to dream and also focus on goals that I can reach.

39. CB: One of the biggest things I got out of ***Women with Dignity*** was community. Us with long sentences were able to come together on one accord. To push each other to be better. Community was definitely gained within ***Women with Dignity***.

40. KB: What do I get from the ***Women with Dignity*** program? Confidence, a sense of community, and the optimism of having a serious future outside the prison walls someday along with the tools I need to reintegrate back into society.

Where else can I (a long-term sentenced person) go to get the assistance that the ***Women with Dignity*** program provides for me? Nowhere.

Why is it important that the ***Women with Dignity*** program continues? To give the long-term sentenced women inmates the motivation to do right and achieve a goal to become a self-sustaining law-abiding citizen back in society.