
Facility Report



Monitoring Visit to Murphysboro Life Skills Reentry Center 2022

JHA August 17, 2022 Visit to Murphysboro: Key Observations and Updates on the Life Skills Reentry Center and the DuQuoin Structured Impact Program

Murphysboro Life Skills Reentry Center (LSRC) is a minimum-security male prison focused on providing incarcerated people who are within five years of release with reentry-focused programming. When JHA visited Murphysboro on August 17, 2022, the population was 78. This was down from the facility's average population of about 200 prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, but was an increase from the population in 2021 and early 2022. Incarcerated people must have between 18 months and five years left to serve, be from southern Illinois, be classified as minimum-security, and not be an escape risk or a parole violator to transfer to Murphysboro LSRC. At the time of the visit, Murphysboro also housed a boot camp population in addition to people in the LSRC.



Murphysboro is a converted youth facility. The LSRC is different than most other minimum-security IDOC prisons in that people incarcerated there are free to move throughout the prison without an escort and can reportedly shop through commissary every day with a high spending limit of \$200 daily. The prison is also fully air conditioned, unusual for an Illinois Department of Corrections facility. The LSRC portion of the facility has four housing units, all of which were occupied at the time of the visit. The housing units connect directly to the yard. Incarcerated people reportedly had free access to the yard for most of the day. They were also able to call healthcare using a phone outside the housing units to schedule appointments with healthcare instead of filing sick call slips, as at Kewanee LSRC. People incarcerated at Murphysboro generally reported to JHA that they had enough access to mental health and spoke very highly of the mental health staff. At the time of the visit, administrators reported that there were staffing vacancies in education, security, and counseling, but that these did not impede day-to-day functioning.

Murphysboro focuses on [behavioral, educational, and vocational programming](#). JHA spoke to incarcerated people who discussed taking classes on financial literacy, anger management, interpersonal communication, keyboarding, substance use, and brain trauma. People incarcerated at Murphysboro generally reported to JHA that they found the programming helpful but that there were not enough vocational programs. At the time of our visit, Murphysboro offered horticulture and welding programs. However, the construction and manufacturing programs—both offered through Lake Land College—were not running due to teacher vacancies. This left some incarcerated people feeling that the programming focused too much on mental health and not enough on vocational skills. Several people incarcerated at Murphysboro reported that staff there were dedicated to the prison’s mission of rehabilitation and that they were more respectful than staff at other IDOC prisons.

At the time of the visit, Murphysboro LSRC shared its grounds with the [DuQuoin Structured Impact Program](#), or boot camp. At the time of the visit, DuQuoin’s population was 26. It was made up of two housing units, only one of which was populated. The program was once a four- to six-month paramilitary program that incarcerated people with no prior convictions could participate in, and upon successful completion, earn earlier release. However, the program was converted in early 2022 to a longer program without the paramilitary element. Administrators explained that the physical fitness aspect now focused on wellness. Those incarcerated at DuQuoin similarly reported to JHA visitors liking the program, which includes education, work

assignments, and twice daily physical training. People incarcerated at DuQuoin used the same yard and dietary area as those incarcerated at Murphysboro, but used them at different times so the two populations did not mix in those settings. However, staff reported that when Murphysboro programs were not filled, DuQuoin's population was able to take the extra seats. Several people JHA interviewed in the DuQuoin program stated they had been under the impression that the Structured Impact Program was still four to six months long and that they did not find out that the length had been increased to twelve to eighteen months until they arrived. Some of these individuals told visitors that if they had gone to a regular prison where they were able to earn sentence credits, they would have served less time. The change to the length of the program means that it will no longer necessarily be the quickest way to earn time off a sentence, eliminating a major incentive to participate and potentially routing more people towards incarceration in a minimum-security correctional center, where they will not be guaranteed the same programming opportunities.



This report was written by JHA staff. Media inquiries should be directed to JHA's Executive Director Jennifer Vollen-Katz at (312) 291-9555 x205 or jvollen@thejha.org

Incarcerated individuals can send privileged mail to report concerns and issues to the John Howard Association, P.O. Box 10042, Chicago, IL 60610-0042. JHA staff are reading every letter and tracking this information to monitor what is occurring behind prison walls and to advocate for humane policies and practices. Family and friends can contact JHA via our website www.thejha.org or by leaving us a voicemail at (312) 291-9183.

Since 1901, JHA has provided public oversight of Illinois' juvenile and adult correctional facilities. Every year, JHA staff and trained volunteers inspect prisons, jails, and detention centers throughout the state. Based on these inspections, JHA regularly issues reports that are instrumental in improving prison conditions. JHA humbly thanks all the persons who agreed to be interviewed for this report and who graciously shared their experiences and insights with us.



The John Howard Association was the proud recipient of the 2015 MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions