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Families Of Crime Victims Visit Supermax



BALTIMORE (WJZ) — Families of crime victims visit the state's toughest prison to see how the most violent inmates in Maryland live.

Suzanne Collins reports the tour of Supermax was a rare one.

Reporting **Suzanne Collins**

The father of 17-year-old Shen Poehlman visited Supermax. Shen was murdered by a man who hired her to babysit in 1998.

"They probably got it good because what they do to all the victims is way worse than what they're experiencing here," said Chuck Poehlman.

During the tour of the maximum security prison, where the state's most violent inmates are housed, victims' families came upon some of the inmates exercising. It's the one hour a day they are not confined. The other 23 hours they spend in cells.

The families were crowded into a series of containment areas where metal doors slammed shut and others opened. They saw the small segregation cells where the violent inmates live.

Mildred Samy, whose son was murdered, is surprised by the austere conditions but accepting.

"My son will never have one hour to come out. My son is in a grave now, 365 days a year, 24 hours a day," said Samy.

The warden of Supermax told victims' families the only people housed at the prison are those on death row or those who acted violently in other prisons.

"They have very few freedoms here, very few privileges here, but we treat them in a human manner. They have all the rights any other person has within a prison," said John Wolfe, Supermax warden.

Word spread among the inmates about the nature of the tour, and one inmate told **Eyewitness News** across a recreation court yard he didn't have knowledge of right and wrong when he was younger and that he was sorry.

When an inmate has to come out of his cell, one of the security procedures is that he must back up to a food slot and be handcuffed first before the door will be opened.

The families also got a rare look at death row.

There are only five inmates currently residing there. Those inmates get to socialize during their free hour and use the phone for approved taped calls. That's more than most inmates at Supermax.

"I was curious to see what living facilities he is under, what luxuries he's afforded such as air...that's a luxury," said Poehlman.

John Booth killed Phyllis Bricker's parents 25 years ago. He remains on death row after 25 years of appeals.

"They were bound and gagged, and they were each stabbed 12 times. Then the house was ransacked," said Bricker.

The tour of Supermax didn't bring any closure to Bricker.

"It looks like a very well-run, secure place. But as far as making me happy, no way," said Bricker.

The victim's tour is part of several events to help victims and inmates come to terms. Another has the victim meet with the inmate one-on-one.

"I went in there really, really angry. I came out so peaceful. He cried with me. He didn't

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realize the path of destruction he left behind," said Sharon Thompson, whose brother was murdered.

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Organizers say the tour helps victims see that inmates are not living in the lap of luxury or being coddled.

Only two inmates have escaped from Supermax since it opened in 1988. The warden says improvements to windows will prevent future escapes.
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