

**Inmate Program Aims to Show Someone CARES | [View Clip](#)**  
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**Carroll Eagle**

Jovan Watkins, 45, can never let go what his daughter told him, as he awaits release from the Central Maryland Correctional Facility, in Sykesville.

"She said, 'Daddy, if you love me, why are you locked up?' " he recalled.

"I felt that small," said the Baltimore resident, choking up. Then he raised his hands high. "Now that they have this program, I feel this big."

Watkins is enrolled in the Maryland Correctional Enterprise's Continuing Allocation of Re-entry Services (CARES). The program marked its one year anniversary last month when 18 inmates graduated from the program — while still at the prison.

CARES acts as a step between working in prison shops and moving to the pre-release program where inmates get a chance to work outside the fence, said Danielle Lueking, spokeswoman for the state Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services.

Inmates who are 12 to 24 months from release — and have remained infraction-free in prison for 90 days before the program — are eligible to participate.

CARES includes a class called "Thinking for a Change," where residents are trained to improve their behavior. Other aspects of the program provide drug abuse treatment, money management skills and help with job search information.

A study by the state showed that on average, inmates who participate in MCE programs are 60 percent less likely to be re-incarcerated compared to the rest of the prison population.

Watkins said he hasn't been in another program like this in prison — and that it's helped him tremendously finding out about career centers and other places that can help him get a job. Watkins is due for release in about 18 months.

Watkins proudly explained how he can sew and hem just about anything and can make any shirt or uniform you hand him. His eyes light up talking about the pride that went into making uniforms. That work will translate into money he can send to his daughter so his family can get by, he said.

It's a long way from his past life.

He sold and used drugs in his 30s, and then he committed an armed robbery that incarcerated him for 10 years.

"I messed up, man," he said. "You cannot make mistakes with people's lives."

At the graduation ceremony, Patricia Taylor, correctional program specialist with the National Institute of Corrections, encouraged the men at the graduation ceremony to take control of their lives by acting like a smart shopper.

"Be an educated consumer," she said in a fiery, preacher-style speech. "Start shopping for your lives. Let the case managers and social workers know you by your first name, last name and your nickname ... Make sure they have all that information because they are there to help you."

Marvin Cantine, 46, of New York, worked in the print shop at the Maryland Correctional Institute, in Hagerstown, before being transferred to Sykesville.

"This is a real help," he said. He said he wants to start a transition house for MCE workers who are homeless after released from prison, calling it a "first step center."

"It's not only going to help me, but it's going to help everybody behind me, too," he said.

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