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Female Inmates at Elmwood Receive Generous Donation from County Residents

*County of Santa Clara Commission on the Status of Women Delivers
over 7,000 Books Collected from Eight Week Drive*

San Jose, CALIF.— Thanks to an overwhelming response from Santa Clara County residents, today the Commission on the Status of Women delivered over 7,000 books to hundreds of inmates serving time at the Elmwood Women's Facility in Milpitas. The books were collected during the first Holiday Book Drive coordinated by the Commission, in partnership with the Office of Women's Policy, the Department of Correction, and local individuals and organizations.

“The tremendous number of books collected by the County during the Holiday Book Drive exemplifies the compassion our residents have for others in need,” said Supervisor Pete McHugh, Chair of the County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors. “These books and the subjects they cover will inspire our female inmate population to improve their lives, reunite with their children and become contributing members of the community.”

The number collected, over 7,500 books, far exceeded the 2,000 anticipated by the book drive coordinators. These books will help provide information to women on important topics like parenting, prenatal care, women's health and many others.

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“Between 500 and 600 female inmates spend, on average, 109 days at the Elmwood Complex Women’s Facility,” said Rebecca Urrutia-Lopez, Book Drive coordinator and member of the Commission of the Status of Women. “These books will be very useful to many of the inmates who are mothers of young children, or are expecting a child while serving time in jail.”

At the official presentation of the donation, County Supervisors, representatives of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Office of Women’s Policy and the Department of Correction, expressed gratitude to the individuals and organizations who volunteered by either donating books or offering locations as drop-off sites during the eight week drive.

“Most of those in custody at the Elmwood Complex Women’s Facility are mothers, and at any given time five percent of the female inmate population are expecting a baby” said Supervisor Liz Kniss, who commended the collaborative effort supporting the development and rehabilitation of female inmates. “The book donors are making a difference in these women’s lives by giving books they can enjoy, be inspired by, and learn from.”

Many individuals and organizations from across the county contributed to the success of this book drive. The YWCA, Foothill College, De Anza College, the Milpitas Post and EMQ Children and Family Services served as drop sites. Through all of these collective efforts, women at Elmwood now have full access to reading materials.

“The wonderful response sends a positive, strong message,” said Esther Peralez-Dieckmann, Director of the county’s Office of Women’s Policy. “It demonstrates that our community supports female inmates and wants them to be successful in their efforts to make substantial changes in their lives so that when they complete their sentences, they can leave the jail and never come back.”

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The Book Drive and several other continuing efforts to improve services at County correctional facilities, are allowing the Commission and the Office of Women's Policy to partner with the Department of Correction and look more closely at the specific needs of women in custody.

“As we continue to maintain public safety by providing a safe and secure environment, we also want to ensure that individuals in our care leave our custody as better people,” said Department of Correction Chief, Edward Flores. “Books are a valuable resource and support our inmates in their efforts to improve their lives and succeed when they leave our custody.”

On the Commission on the Status of Women

For over 30 years the county of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors has relied on the Commission on the Status of Women to be its eyes and ears in the community and to help take action to eliminate the practice of discrimination and prejudice based on gender in areas of housing, employment, education and related fields.

Among many areas of concern, the commission has turned its attention to the county's female inmate population. They have worked tirelessly to improve their condition for these women and their opportunities for rehabilitation.

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