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Vt. Prison Program Wins National Attention

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Inmates from the Southeast State Correctional Facility take time out of their routine days to proudly show off a new home they have been building at the prison. It's part of a program sponsored by the nonprofit Vermont Works for Women.



"To watch it in the beginning when it first starts and then to see the finished product, it's like wow, I actually did that. And I can do it again," inmate Melissa Patterson says.

On Monday, the group had a special guest-- Shinae Chun. She runs the Women's Bureau for the U.S. Department of Labor.



Shinae Chun

"It's not training women for a minimum wage job. It gives women real serious construction trade skill," Chun explains.

Chun says this prison program is a model other facilities should follow and she plans to spread the concept overseas, as well.

"Everyone like myself, our responsibility is to take this story and share it with women leaders in the international community," Chun says.

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Women have been building homes at the prison since 2005. Government agencies like the Department of Labor and private donations make it possible. But officials say that rarely is there extra money to spread news of the good things happening inside these walls.

"When you are a nonprofit organization, you don't focus on your marketing. And that is evident. That is why Director Chun said we are in the seventh inning of a nine-inning game," says Tiffany Bluemle, of Vermont Works for Women.

...A game with real-life stakes that these women can attest to.

"This program has been a light in a very dark part of my life. You feel like you are part of a community, and also, I feel like I am giving back to the community," inmate Suzanne Bevins says.

Organizers of the program say that securing funds is a constant battle, but they also say that with this endorsement, the goal is now not only to raise money to keep the program going, but also to spread the model to other facilities across the country.

[Adam Sullivan](#) - WCAX News



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