

THE BUREAU OF PRISONS SKILLS PROGRAM

By Maureen Baird

This article is authored by Maureen Baird, a consultant to the Law Offices of Alan Ellis and to other lawyers, who is a former official with the Federal Bureau of Prisons who served as warden at FCI Danbury, Connecticut, MCC New York, New York and, USP Marion, Illinois. She was a member of the Joint Terrorist Task Force and active in joint training that involved local, state, and federal law enforcement entities. The article is reprinted from the current 2020-21 edition of Alan Ellis' Federal Prison Guidebook.

The Skills Program offered at FCI Coleman, FL (Medium) and FCI Danbury, CT (Low-Males), is a Residential Treatment Program which is focused on inmates with intellectual/cognitive disabilities and social deficiencies. The Program is designed to assist inmates with improving their institutional adjustment, so they may positively program and function in a general population setting. The Program follows an integrative model inclusive of cognitive-behavioral therapies and skills training in modified therapeutic community. The housing units where the programs are offered are ordinarily solely occupied by inmates who are active participants in the Skills Program. While the Program normally is completed within 12-18 months, it is not uncommon for some inmates, when warranted to remain in the Program longer.

It is recommended inmates who qualify for the Program, commence participation at the onset of their term of incarceration. Actual formalized programming consists of half-days, five days per week, with the remaining day occupied with a work assignment or educational participation.

Participation in the Program is strictly done on a voluntary basis and participants need to qualify for placement at a low or medium security facility. Emphasis in the treatment approach is focused on teaching basic educational and social skills. The overall goal is to improve inmates' institutional adjustment and provide them with necessary skills/tools for successful reentry to the community at completion of their sentence.

The Skills Program can be very beneficial to persons with Autism. It is unlikely that an inmate diagnosed on the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), to be housed within a Mental Health Unit, at a Federal Medical Center. The Skills Program offers a viable alternative for those who qualify and can provide those inmates with an eventual opportunity for successful placement at an appropriate institution near to their legal residence.

Depending on the severity of ASD, an inmate may display poor communication skills, inability to read/interpret non-verbal cues, anxiety, social phobias, obsessive compulsive tendencies, problems dealing with certain social stimuli, aversions to smells, tastes, textures and inability to decipher unwritten rules. The multi-discipline team whom administers the Program will assist inmates in properly addressing/dealing with these characteristics in a prison setting in order to successfully complete his term of incarceration.

More information about the program can be found at [Bureau of Prisons Program Statement 5330.11](#).