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HILAND MOUNTAIN WOMEN'S ORCHESTRA RECEIVES 'BRIGHT IDEA' AWARD FROM HARVARD/KENNEDY SCHOOL

JUNEAU – The Hiland Mountain Correctional Center women's string orchestra today was honored nationally as an innovative government program by the Ash Center for Democratic Government and Innovation, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.



The Bright Idea award is being given to 173 government programs nationwide. The purpose of the award is to recognize creative government initiatives around the nation and to share these programs with interested public sector, nonprofit and academic communities. The women's string orchestra is only program in Alaska cited.

The Hiland Mountain Correctional Center Orchestra is an Alaskan string orchestra comprised entirely of female prison inmates. It is currently the only prison string orchestra in the United States. The orchestra is sponsored by Arts on the Edge, a local non-profit group. Volunteer Pati Crofut, Executive Director of Arts on the Edge, and Janice Weiss, Executive Director of the YWCA, began the orchestra in 2003. Initially, the orchestra included only eight inmates, none of whom had any prior musical experience. At present, the orchestra includes 28 female inmates: eight advanced, five intermediate, and fifteen beginners. Each winter, the public is invited to attend the annual winter concert, held inside the correctional center.

Gabrielle Willis, an Anchorage public school orchestra teacher, has instructed the beginning and advanced orchestra members for the past six years. Joy Sharpe teaches the intermediate class while Mary Schallert and Suzanne Little teach fiddling. Dean Marshall is Superintendent of Hiland Mountain Correctional Center.

LINK: <http://www.innovations.harvard.edu/>

