"Slave labor"?! Not here at the CCCF OCE Shop! Those of us who are blessed to have one of the coveted, and too few, positions in the OCE Sewing Shop, know that we're found the best place to work, learn and blossom in prison. We wish that the Shop was larger, so that all of the women who are qualified and interested could join us. We actually look forward to going to work and willingly volunteer to put in extra hours when there is a project deadline to be met.

Twelve years ago I was told, by my then husband, that I'd "never done anything of value in (my) life." It wasn't true, but he had emotionally and mentally beaten me down, so far, that I almost believed him. Today I can say, without the opportunities I've been given since working for OCE, I wouldn't be the woman I am now.

When I first came out to the OCE Shop, in 2016, it was to take a much needed break. I'd been working and/or raising my 12 children for 35 years. I love to sew and OCE was offering a four month long Textile Certification program where participants learned about the commercial embroidery industry and sewed quilts during class time.

The first quilt we made was allowed to be sent home, or to anyone we chose. Any others we made were donated to local charities or auctioned for worthy fundraisers. It felt wonderful to be able to give back to the community, and, not only were all of the supplies free to us, we got paid while we earned our certification!

At the end of that class, much to my surprise, I was hired to be the Tutor for future classes. That position later led to me being given the opportunity to help put together a new, more comprehensive, certification program, and also step into several other roles in the shop.

None of this would have been possible in a "slave labor" atmosphere. Our bosses here at OCE inspire us to grow and learn and step into new responsibilities, that many of us would never have tried, by displaying pride in our accomplishments, with the confidence they place in us by involving us in the vision and implementation of the projects we work on, and with their own dedication to making our shop successful. They provide us with a safe and respectful atmosphere, without excessive

security staff, making it feel like a "regular" job and preparing us to succeed both here and outside of prison. The higher wages paid for work in the OCE shops, allows us to not only be self-supporting, rather than dependent on friends and family for the basic necessities that aren't provided by ODOC, we often are able to assist our families and/or put money into savings to ensure our success after release.

Do I love <u>every</u>thing that happens <u>every</u> day at work? Of course not! But I'll say, "The worst day of work at OCE is <u>better</u> than the best day of work I've had anywhere else in prison!

Thank you for listening!

Robert