



An employee publication of the
Texas Department of Criminal Justice

March/April 2015

Volume 22 Issue 4

Feature

TDCJ's Roadway to Freedom helps women escape sex trade

For the women housed in F Dorm of TDCJ's Plane State Jail, daily life on the outside was a struggle to survive. Today, they show the physical and emotional scars left by drug addiction, prostitution and theft. Many were runaways from abusive homes where they had to deal with alcoholic or drug-addicted parents. Some were sold by a parent into the sex trade; others saw it as their only way to earn a living. For most, the first missteps down this road were taken when they were young girls.

"Our Roadway to Freedom is a trauma-informed intervention and recovery initiative for women in the sex trade industry," states Madeline M. Ortiz, director of the Rehabilitation Programs Division. Introduced in 2014, the program targets female offenders with a current or past conviction for prostitution or a history of prostitution without conviction. Participants include women who self-report their involvement in the sex trade or those who have been victims of sex trafficking. With a capacity of 114 participants, the program accepts volunteers with 90 to 180 days remaining on their sentence at time of enrollment.

Our Roadway to Freedom is designed to help female offenders abandon prostitution and

reintegrate them into a safe and healthy community environment, with the goal of ending the self-perpetuating cycle which leads back to drug abuse and prostitution. The program's goals are to identify the offender's addictions and their underlying causes, and to improve their life skills through cognitive restructuring. These goals are supported by intensive case management, and life coaching and counseling during recovery.



Our Roadway to Freedom Case Manager Chance Lanyon, left, meets with an offender to discuss her post-release plans.

The program helps rebuild an offender's self-esteem and teaches them that they can improve themselves by making better life decisions. One program participant explains, "Through this program I'm learning more about myself than I ever realized I could. I'm learning how my past affects my future and how to overcome everything to be able to succeed and not go back to the street life that

I've always known." The curriculum addresses emotional and social triggers, such as co-dependency and drug addiction, which can lead them back to the prostitution lifestyle. Rehabilitation Programs Division Program Monitor Wanda Redding explains, "We help them recognize the influence family dynamics may have had on their current situation."

For five days a week, two hours are spent in direct classroom work covering topics such as cognitive intervention, victimization and trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, conflict resolution and anger management. Another two hours of indirect programming focuses on journal writing, completing work assignments and discussion. A case manager and a health specialist are available to meet individually with participants to provide advice. For many, this one-on-one counseling is most beneficial, as explained by Case Manager Chance Lanyon, "When they come here, they can see that we genuinely care about their well-being. We aren't here for any other reason but to help them and that's what they've been missing in their life; someone to sit down with them, listen to them, hear them out and help them get out of this situation they've been in."

Throughout the week the women participate in peer-led group discussion to expand on

Continued on page 2

Continued from page 1

class topics and share personal histories. Re-counting their personal stories in a safe and supportive environment allows for a better understanding of the circumstances which brought them to prison, and helps many begin the journey to recovery. Lanyon continues, “Many of these women have never shared the emotional traumas that brought them to this program. They feel safe to open up and do some soul-searching because everyone has had similar experiences.”

All participants are encouraged to enroll in Windham School District classes, and members of F Dorm attend weekly sessions with Life Coach Kathryn Griffin-Townsend, a former sex trade worker and recovering drug addict, who comes in once a week to serve as

a mentor. Having spent years involved with prostitution and making 21 failed attempts in drug rehab before succeeding, Griffin-Townsend brings first-hand knowledge of the tough lives these women have led and she is living proof that, despite their past, they can turn themselves into a success. She teaches them that it is important to forgive themselves for their past in order to create a better future. Kathryn encourages program participants, telling them, “I’ve been an addict for 20 years, and I’ve been in the sex trade far longer. I am an example to these women that one can rise above that.”

Family reunification counseling is also available and participants are referred to the

Reentry and Integration or Health Services divisions as needed. Ultimately, rehabilitation relies on the offender understanding that there are alternatives to living by the sex trade, and a better life can be had by making better life choices. Program Monitor Redding elaborates, “Is it going to be hard? Yes. Are you going to have difficulties? Yes. But this program will give you the steps to change. Just follow the recipe.”

For more information, go to the Our Roadway to Freedom Web page or call TDCJ’s Rehabilitation Programs Division at 936-437-2180. ●