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Jail rehab taking hold

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LARRY HENDRICKS Assistant City Editor | Posted: Tuesday, June 15, 2010 5:30 am | (0)
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Kendra Enriquez The County Jail's Exodus program for alcohol and drug treatment has weekly sessions to discuss topics in behavior and treatment. The program is 3 years old and statistics show that it reduces recidivism. (Kendra Enriquez/Arizona Daily Sun)

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Flagstaff's Street Alcoholics, a three-day series

Sunday: Revolving door still spinning

Monday: Park neighbors want action

Today: Jail rehab program shows promise

Three graduates speak

Mark, 44, graduated from the jail's Exodus program a year ago.

"It's a wonderful program," he said. "It gives you something to do in jail and the program works."

Mark said he had been in Alcoholics Anonymous before, but he relapsed. He also had trouble with methamphetamine, considering himself a "poly user."

After jail, he moved into the Foundation House, a halfway house for men in Flagstaff. In December, he moved out and got a place with two sober roommates.

"Exod...

Full Story

Steven, 27, was homeless and addicted to alcohol and drugs. He called himself a "gutter punk," and claimed to like the lifestyle.

Then, he was picked up on drug charges and jailed in the Coconino County Detention Facility in Flagstaff. While there, he saw a flier for the in-custody Exodus drug and alcohol treatment program.

"At first, it was mainly a, 'I'm going to look good for the judge. I'll occupy my time' kind of idea," Steven said, not using his last name to protect his anonymity.

Then he went through the intake process to get into the program.

"I realized my true nature -- that I was a 25-year-old, homeless drunk," Steven said. "It never really dawned on me before."

Steven is one of 412 men and 146 women who have graduated from the program since its beginning three years ago. And of all the graduates, only 38 percent have been rearrested since graduation.

That is about half the national average of 70 percent recidivism within three years of release from custody -- suggesting the program is experiencing success in helping alcoholics and drug addicts regain their lives.

"We had been consistently at 35 percent ... until the recession," said Margot Julian, coordinator of

the program.

She added that most of the rearrests were for technical charges stemming from violating probation for not paying fines because of economic hardship, not because the graduates had committed a new crime.

PARTICIPATION VOLUNTARY

The Exodus program calls for heavy doses of structured activities that will help inmates "come to the realization they have a substance abuse or addiction problem, involve inmates in their own problem-solving and development, and educate them about the physical and mental effects of substance abuse and addiction," according to information from the Coconino County Sheriff's Office.

Topics of discussion in classes include addiction, recovery, relapse and anger. Inmates in the program fill out worksheets and do homework. Every morning starts out with prayers and meditations.

The inmates are also taught how to determine how their beliefs and life skills work or don't work for sobriety. Five days out of the week, Sunday through Thursday, the inmates attend meetings of Alcoholics, Narcotics, Crystal Meth or Cocaine Anonymous.

Inmates must volunteer to participate. The length of stay varies with sentences and the court process -- from a few weeks to a year.

Another reason for the low recidivism rate, Julian said, is the cooperation among agencies to prevent relapse in the graduates.

"We clearly want to back them up with as many services as possible," Julian said.

MORE REHAB, LESS CRIME

Flagstaff Police Department and sheriff's office officials have lauded the program -- citing Exodus as contributing, at least in part, to a declining crime rate.

Coconino County Attorney David Rozema said, "We're convinced the Exodus program is having a major positive impact. It provides an excellent opportunity for jail inmates to address their substance abuse issues while in custody."

Coconino County Superior Court Judge Charles Adams said, "The Exodus program is a win-win program. It teaches tools for maintaining sobriety, reduces recidivism and thereby serves the individual, the family and the community."

After graduating and being released from jail, the inmates are set up at a halfway house in the city with the help of a grant that pays for the first month's rent, Julian said.

'I REALIZED I COULD DO THIS'

Steven said that when he was admitted to the program and followed the requirements, he began to notice a change.

He saw that he could be a responsible, accountable adult in recovery, he said.

"I realized I could do this," Steven said. "I could actually change my life."

The Exodus program for the men was made possible with the September 2006 passage of a 2/10-cent hike in the jail district sales tax. The tax increase brings in an additional \$4.3 million annually to fund the jail's operations. Out of that comes the program's funding of \$200,000 a year.

Steven has a good job now and his life is back on track. He credits the Exodus program.

"The Exodus program saved my life," he said.

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QUICK FACTS: Exodus Program participants	Men	Women
Average age	34.4	34.9
Race		
Native American	54.6%	59.6%
White	34.5%	27.4%
Other	7.0%	10.3%
Substance abused		
Alcohol	45.9%	44.5%
Drugs	18.2%	24.7%
Both	35.9%	30.8%
History of treatment		
Had prior alcohol treatment	0.8%	0.8%
Had prior drug treatment	0.5%	0.6%
Have employment problems	85.9%	84.9%
Have skills or trade	80.1%	49.3%
Number of days working in last 30 days	4.3	3.5

-- Source: Coconino County Detention Facility Exodus program

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