

Transition often hard

'Sponsors' help ex-convicts adjust

By MARIAN GREEN
Of the Emerald

For many prisoners in Oregon correctional institutions, the world beyond the barbed wire fences is known as the "outside," a cold, confusing and uninviting place for released inmates.

Sponsors Inc., a Lane County-based prisoner rehabilitation organization, wants to make that world more hospitable to ex-offenders, says Ed Coleman, a University English professor and one of the organization's sponsors.

"For some of these guys, all they have is \$100, and they're expected to return to society, find a job, find a place to live and re-establish family relationships," Coleman says.

"It's an impossible task."

Sponsors acts as a bridge from prison to civilian life, by helping prisoners find jobs, re-enroll in school and re-establish family relationships, Coleman says. The organization also offers drug and alcoholism counseling, job develop-

ment, community education, prisoner visits and other services.

"That's why we have such a low recidivism rate," he says. The recidivism rate is the number of ex-prisoners returned to prison for subsequent crimes.

Most of the ex-prisoners involved in Sponsors come from the Oregon State Correctional Institution. Those ex-prisoners have had only a 9.9 percent recidivism rate in Sponsors' eight-year existence. Overall, the correctional facility's ex-prisoners have had a recidivism rate of 31.9 percent in the last three-year period.

Of the 220 individuals Sponsors served in the 1980-81 fiscal year, 146 were prisoners and parolees. For Sponsors' services, the daily cost per prisoner or parolee was 51 cents. Comparatively, maintaining a prisoner at the state prison cost \$34.44 and \$1.81 for each parolee.

"Given all the things that Sponsors is trying to do, the bottom line is we're not only saving lives, but we're saving the state money," Coleman says.

"The state insists on building new jails rather than supporting organizations like Sponsors," Coleman says, adding that Sponsors and other organizations are called "bleeding hearts."

Coleman says he'd like to see the present system move toward supporting alternative rehabilitation organizations instead of building new jails.

"Granted, there are some real thugs out there, but there are some real talented — and sometimes innocent people — who, for whatever reason, get sent to prison," he says.

Once or twice a term, Coleman takes a group of University students to the state institution to perform songs, dances and poetry readings.

The prisoners' response is tremendous, he says.

"They just love them. They're all very courteous, and there's no hostility. Everything you do is so appreciated."

The students also feel a "spiritual uplifting" after participating in Sponsors, he says.

But along with the satisfaction of working in the program comes the headaches of funding the organization after recent federal cuts.

"Given the political situation that's coming down, we don't have the resources that we did before — like CETA — so we're relying on grants or just plain donations," he says.

However, Coleman says Sponsors has been "lucky."

"Something's always come through."

And something came through once again for the program that is picking members' brains for new fund-raising methods, Coleman says.

Saturday, Richie Cole, a nationally-known alto saxophone player, will perform two benefit concerts for Sponsors. The 9 and 11 p.m. performances will be held at Perry's on Pearl Street. Tickets are \$6.50 and are available at Everybody's Records, EMU Main Desk and Sponsor's main office, 690 Tyler St. For more information, call Sponsors at 485-8341.

Profs seek student help

Physical education professors Michael Ellis and Dan Tripps implored students to give their input on the possible cut of University physical education requirements during a Student University Affairs Board meeting Thursday.

Currently, all undergraduate students are required to complete five one-credit activity courses to graduate.

Ellis said he doesn't want to proceed with the proposal to cut the requirements until students can give their ideas, asserting that the changes would "dramatically impact your lives."

If the proposal is passed, winter and spring terms would be test periods to see how many students would continue to enroll in optional classes, Tripp explained. Administrators would then make more definite plans.

The department has started two programs — SHAPE and Project Enterprise — to increase income and keep non-paying people out of the P.E. areas, Tripps said.

The programs will help "keep the college afloat, retain faculty members, and increase clientele," he said.

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