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Parolee program provides rent

By Daralyn Trappe
Emerald Associate Editor

A Lane County assistance program aimed at helping prison parolees stay on the straight and narrow is off to a successful start, program coordinators said Wednesday.

The Winners Program, which helps provide parolees with rent money for up to six months, is funded by the Oregon State Housing and Community Services Agency.

The agency agreed last year to provide \$25,000 to Lane County Health and Human Services to fund the pilot project, the first of its kind in the state. The program began in November 1992 and will run through this June.

The program is designed to help parolees make a new start by providing them stable housing, said Ron Chase, executive director of Eugene's Sponsors Inc., which administers the program. Sponsors, Inc. has assisted former inmates in Lane County for 20 years.

Rey Ramsey, director of the Oregon Housing and Community Services Department, said one of the leading causes of recidivism for former inmates is the inability to find adequate housing.

Ramsey said the state Legislature put aside \$25 million during the last biennium into the Oregon Housing Trust Fund to help people get affordable housing. Five-million dollars of that was for emergency housing for people who were at risk for homelessness.

"Obviously, those who are leaving prison are at risk for homelessness, and not only that, they are at risk for going back into the criminal justice system," Ramsey said. "Housing is such a crucial part of the success quotient for someone who has come

out of the criminal justice system."
The program provides up to \$300 per person for rent deposits and up to \$200 a month for rent subsidies. Chase said the money will also allow people to avoid going back into housing situations that may have exacerbated their previous problems. Other services include help with health care and employment.

Fourteen people are already participating in the Lane County program, Chase said, and many others are expected to be helped. Those 14 have all stayed out of trouble, he said.

Parolees who have completed one of the county's treatment programs are considered for the Winners Program, Chase said. As part of the agreement, they must check in with Sponsors, Inc. once a week and take a drug test twice a week.

"Twenty-five thousand dollars is what it costs to keep one person in prison for a year, so if we can keep one person out, financially we're coming out ahead," Chase said.

Ramsey agreed the program is an investment for the state and county.

"If we can have any impact on the recidivism rate, we've saved the state and the county considerable amounts of dollars, and that's what we're trying to do with this," he said.

Ramsey said two similar projects are operating in Multnomah County (for veterans) and in Linn and Benton counties (for people in the jobs program with Adult and Family Services). The Lane County program is being evaluated by the Department of Corrections.

"Our objective is to show that this is a better way to invest our dollars," Ramsey said. "And the legislature and the governor will look at this and maybe we will change some of our priorities about how our money is spent."

ET ALS

MEETINGS

OSPIRG Hunger & Homeless group will meet tonight at 7 in EMU Cedar Room B. For more information, call 346-4377.

Alpha Phi Omega will meet tonight at 7 in EMU Cedar Room F.

Club Francais (French Interest Group) will meet tonight at 7:30 at the Glenwood (upstairs). For more information, call 345-0914.

Circle K International will meet tonight at 7:30 in EMU Cedar Room A. For more information, call 484-0989.

Circle K will have a membership meeting tonight in EMU Cedar Room A. For more information, call 345-7154.

Global Friends will meet today from 2 to 4 p.m. in EMU Century Room E. For more information, call 343-8036.

Incidental Fee Committee will meet for budget hearings tonight at 6:30 p.m. in EMU Board Room. The following groups will be discussed: Big Brothers/Big Sisters, CSA, Disabled Student Service and Forensics. The IPC will also consider a special request from the club sports sailing team. For more information, call 346-3749.

Outdoor Program will sponsor "Arctic Light: Ellesmere Island Expedition" tonight at 7 in Room 100 Willametta. For more information, call 346-4365.

MISCELLANEOUS

Rubicon Society will sponsor a discussion by Lane Education Service District Board Position 6 candidates Jerry Miller and Dan Mulholland on campaign issues today at noon at DePrisco's in the Atrium, 99 West 10th Ave. For more information, call 485-4809.

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