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Our New Beginnings' Carole Pope

In too many instances, Pope says, the lesbian community shuns ex-cons.

BY CELIA FLOREN

One of the dilemmas some women face coming out of prison is figuring out if they are gay or not. In prison, women may turn to each other for support, emotional or sexual. But this doesn't mean they are gay. At Our New Beginnings, they can get counseling to help them sort it out. Similarly, women who became couples in the joint have the opportunity at Our New Beginnings for relationship counseling. "If they are gay," Carole insists, "teach them to be gay in a responsible way so that they can contribute to the community."

One of the toughest obstacles is finding jobs for the women referred to Our New Beginnings. Ex-cons with few job skills or sketchy job histories crowd the bottom of almost everyone's hiring lists. This is one way Carole thinks that the lesbian community can begin to take care of its own. There are plenty of lesbians in business or non-traditional jobs that could hire an ex-con. "They are excellent workers," Carole points out, "because their freedom depends on it."

With a full house and a lengthy waiting list, Our New Beginnings has to rely on all the resources it can find. Until recently, the response from the gay community has been a resounding NO. At the urging of Katharine English, Carole Pope agreed to

run for a position on the Board of LCP and give the gay community another chance to reach out. With her election to the Board, Carole expects to be very vocal and insistent that the lesbian community welcome all of its sisters.

There are different ways the community can respond to the needs of its ex-con sisters. As mentioned above, the employers in the lesbian community have a unique opportunity to give these women work, showing faith in their worth and giving them a chance to believe in themselves. Our New Beginnings also needs volunteer counselors. An open mind and a listening ear are always welcome. Or you could be a big sister and expose these women to the joys of the zoo or the circus. Donations of household items and clothing, especially baby clothing, are always needed. And, of course, financial donations from the community are enthusiastically accepted.

Perhaps the most essential contribution the lesbian community can make to the ex-cons is acceptance. Carole cites too many instances where her clients are shunned in gay groups when they identify themselves as ex-cons. As a community committed to the strength and diversity of our sisterhood, we must hold open wide the doors for all lesbians.

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Federal Reserve Bank adopts non-discrimination policy

National Gay Rights Advocates has been instrumental in changing the Equal Opportunity policies of the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco to specifically include sexual orientation in its list of protected classes. The action began when Mark Tanaka, an employee of the Federal Reserve Bank, proposed that "sexual orientation" be included in the list of protected classes in the Federal Reserve's personnel policy manual. Attorneys for the bank initially argued that the changes were unnecessary, saying that it was impossible to include everyone who might be a potential target of discrimination. However, NGRA identified several court decisions and statutes prohibiting such

discrimination, and convinced the Federal Reserve to add "sexual orientation" to its non-discrimination policy.

"The Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco has taken an important step in recognizing the need for a clear and strong stand against anti-gay discrimination," said NGRA Legal Director, Leonard Graff.

The new policy reads as follows: "The Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco is committed to a policy of equal employment opportunity for all persons, regardless of race, religion, national origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, or handicap. This commitment encompasses all aspects of our employment and personnel policies and practices including, but not limited to: hiring, termination, promotion, transfer, compensation, benefits, educational assistance, working conditions, and Bank-sponsored training and recreational programs."

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