

# White makes right

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One of the best days of his life was when he went to be resentenced. The district attorney, in an effort to provide substantial and compelling evidence to the judge that White should be released, stood up and said the co-defendants had lied to get a plea bargain.

Finally, his name was cleared. "It was the best for my mom to hear that because she had always been so supportive of me, but I always felt that she felt inside that I had done it," he says.

White knows going to prison doesn't automatically change a person. But for him, it finally gave him the opportunity to turn his life around.

He learned about an HIV prevention program at work within the penitentiary, so he became involved—and not just a little bit. He made phone calls, wrote letters, wrote grants. He got the support of the American Red Cross and the Oregon Health Division. He recruited a team of prisoners with impressive skills for the endeavor: a pharmacist with 30 years of experience, a computer programming

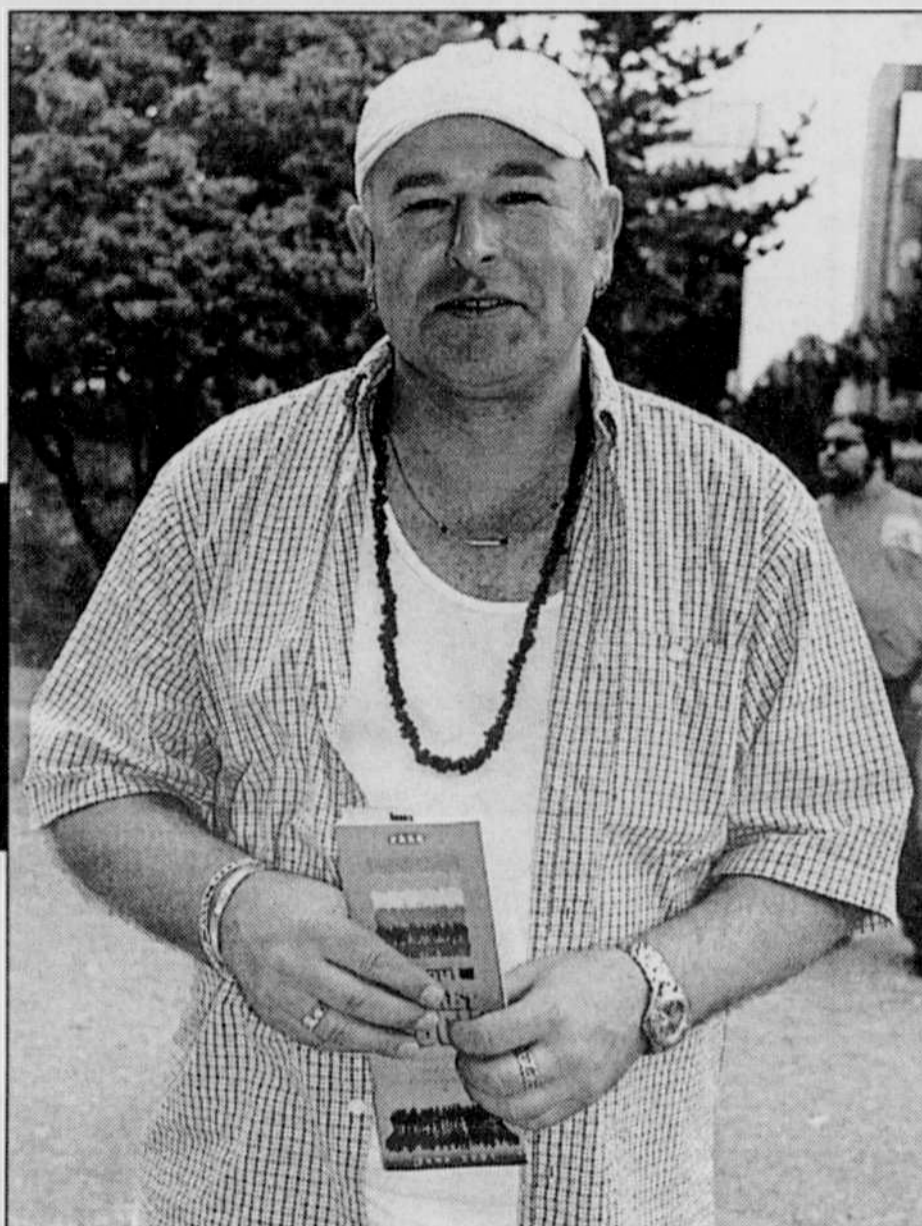


PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS

Charles White overcame a number of barriers in developing the HIV/AIDS Awareness Program at the Oregon State Penitentiary

the work," White says. "All my life I knew people who were affected, but I never got involved. Here all we have is education, and there's no one to educate us but ourselves."

The barriers—the stigma of HIV/AIDS as a gay disease, the homophobia of inmates and guards alike, having to accomplish a lot in a few spare hours each day—were overcome.

tis C. When he got out, he was tested. It came back positive.

"The doctor knew I had hepatitis C and should have told me I needed to be tested for it, but they don't want to spend money on tests and treatment," he says. "That brought the issue home."

After the torrent of life in prison, White keeps a swift and steady pace. He says he has a lot of motivation to stay off drugs.

"I had a lot of people that supported me and gave me an opportunity," he says. "I would never

want to do anything to show these people they did not make the right decision to support me."

White works as prevention and education director for Lifeline AIDS Project in Salem. In addition to that

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—Charles White

White had taken what was in existence and built upon it, developed it and implemented it. He then incorporated the HIV/AIDS Awareness Program as a nonprofit organization run by and for prisoners in Salem.

Still, White had no sign of calm water. While getting blood work done at the infirmary, the doctor told him his liver enzymes were elevated but refused to explain what that meant.

White conducted some research on his own and learned this was a sign of hepati-

job, he's a facilitator for Rainbow Youth.

He also is an instructor/trainer for the American Red Cross. He has all kinds of certifications—to teach cardiopulmonary resuscitation, first aid and preventing disease transmission.

White travels to conferences and is a paid speaker. He's an advocate for prison reform and prisoner rights. And for the HIV/AIDS Awareness Program, he provides good PR—a prisoner who made good. **J**

HEATHER HYBARGER is no longer a teen-ager, a student or a slacker but still finds time to lie around and do nothing. Some things never change.

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