

# Program Teaches Inmates Alternatives To Crime

Growing up a child of alcoholic parents, Sandra Hamrick says she was often told she would "turn out just like them." It was a behavior pattern she began to follow at an early age. By 10, she had tried pot. At 12, she was using alcohol and drugs. Now, at 33, after several years in and out of county jails and state prisons, Sandra Hamrick, says she has had enough.

According to Hamrick, an inmate at Oregon's Columbia River Correctional Institution (CRCI) in northeast Portland, she is finally ready to change her behavior and start a new life thanks to an innovative program called Lifeskills, developed and administered by the national nonprofit organization Women in Community Service (WICS). Hamrick says the

skills learned in this program and the continued support of WICS staff and volunteers will help her find employment, stay drug-free and avoid resuming criminal behavior after she is released this month.

"WICS has helped me see that there are many options and that I have to work to take advantage of them," says Hamrick. "I've learned that I have to take baby steps. In the past, I always wanted the end result right away or I'd just give up. I'm not willing to give up this time."

In addition to the addictions she developed early in her life, Hamrick was involved in a variety of abusive relationships through the years, suffering both emotional and physical abuse. Even though she was able to stop abusing drugs and alcohol at

times, she lived in unstable and destructive environments and continued the behaviors that eventually caused her to end up in CRCI.

"People all around me were using drugs," says Hamrick. "There wasn't a day that went by that I wasn't gambling, smoking and drinking."

Hamrick is one of more than 200 women at the CRCI who have participated in WICS' Portland Lifeskills program since it began in 1992. Like Hamrick, all of the women participating in Lifeskills are within three months of release from prison when they begin the program. They attend classes from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., four days a week. Lifeskills consists of four basic elements: job skills evaluation, life skills training, volunteerism and mentorship.

Hamrick says Lifeskills appealed to her because of its holistic approach to personal development, the diversity of class topics, and post-program support. Classes include topics such as personal health, self-advocacy, budgeting, anger management, job search techniques, and more. Hamrick credits the in-depth skills assessment test, which all Lifeskills participants take, with opening her eyes to new employment opportunities.

"I knew I could do restaurant work, but these tests showed that I would be good at higher paying jobs," explains Hamrick. "I know I need more training for some of these jobs, but WICS has taught me how to look into that. I thought I'd have to work in fast food my whole life. These tests said I had

skills that would allow me to work as a supervisor—something I'd never considered before."

Hamrick plans to take full advantage of other community resources that she learned about through WICS, including an outpatient rehabilitation program. "I'm not required to be in rehab this time," says Hamrick, "but I'm requiring it of myself. I don't want to come back here (prison). I have a completely different perspective this time because of Lifeskills. I'm not lying to myself this time. No one is forcing me to change—I'm doing it for myself."

Originally funded through a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, WICS' Lifeskills program in Portland is currently funded by the Oregon Department of Corrections.

WICS Lifeskills is a unique collaboration between government, private organizations and the local community working together to help women who are at-risk become self-sufficient. By serving as mentors or providing support services, volunteers from the local community have a direct role in empowering at-risk women.

Hamrick and 12 other female inmates graduated from Lifeskills on July 13. The ceremony was held at the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 4837 NE Couch in Portland, Oregon. Graduates had on caps and gowns and receive diplomas at the ceremony, which drew more than 130 friends, family and supporters from the community.

## Well, If There Are No Jobs, What About Starting A Business?

BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

On the one hand, I was surprised at the number of readers who said they had never heard of "structural unemployment" (the permanent assignment of certain population groups to that economic disability).

But, on the other hand, a goodly number responded that they may not have known what to call it, though they certainly knew the problem was "built-in" and was closely connected with race. That reminds me of the Supreme Court justice who said, "I may not be able to describe pornography but I sure know it when I see it." Well, in the one case it would seem to hurt, and in the other, give a titillation, or pleasurable excitement. Whatever!

It was reassuring to be informed that one small group had formally organized around an economic self-help plan after reading my July 7, 1993 Portland Observer article, "Economic Turmoil Abroad In Our Land". After detailing the bad news of escalating job layoffs—and what workers might look for as a tip-off—I gave a tongue-in-cheek report on the other side of the coin.

The Tootsie Roll Candy company of Chicago is doubling its payroll of several hundred—and the market for dinosaurs and other Jurassic-age products is very good. However, in speaking of Chicago, a great city for

thousands upon thousands of successful small manufacturing businesses (large ones too), I pointed out in a follow-up article that over 90% of those "successful" enterprises were started up by craftsmen or others who had gained on-the-job experience—then had spun off to establish a competitive operation in a familiar field and, more often than not, with adequate financing from banks, relatives, friends or venture capitalists.

And I recited a number of other relevant facts that hold just as true today—whatever the accounts of media, governmental agencies or pundits-at-large. I knew (know) from all those years of accounting experience and hands-on operations that, while in some parts of the country African Americans have on-the-job opportunities to acquire very competitive skills and industrial techniques, they have never had available to them that second stage of economic empowerment cited in the preceding paragraph. And good leaseholds are essential.

Some readers may remember when I told of the NBC television program which interviewed Americans "who had made it big". This particular Sunday, the founder of "Holiday Inns" and "Famous Amos" of cookie fame were given the spotlight. The hotel tycoon rattled off his typical "Horatio Alger" saga, and allowed how America was

truly the land of opportunity for anybody who jumped off a boat and worked hard; nothing to it.

But with brother Amos, it was a different story. It seemed like when he went to the banks for a given amount of money for production equipment for a going business the answer was "no". But when he went down the street to a consumer-finance company with a request for the same sum, the answer was a resounding "yes"—at triple the interest.

We say all this simply to forewarn that in the current frenetic atmosphere of economic hysteria one must as surely be on guard as ever despite the assurances from a hundred television spots that for any price from

\$39.95 to \$159.50 you can get the golden key to a comfortable six-figure income or retirement nest egg; loose-leaf text or CD-ROM, take your choice (These boys have 'their' key, alright).

Of course, a lot of folks are still trying to figure out how sensible business people could be "opposed to raising the minimum wage, when they're going to get it cell back through their cash registers anyway." One reader would remind us of several well-known Albina to businessmen who grew rich during the 1960's and 1970's servicing model cities residents and organizations. At their downtown or Beaverton watering holes they would deplore the welfare

recipients and the poor who were "draining America".

Reminds me of a doctor I had during the same period, a mouthy person with the same attitude. I did gain the satisfaction of reminding

him that he got his medical education courtesy of the U.S. government. And then, of course, there is corporate-welfare and fat book contracts for conservative politicians. What's a poor man to do?

### National Minority Association Selects Irving



National Minority Association Selects Irving

Cynthia Irving, Administrative Specialist and Assistant to the Dean for Student Affairs in the School of Medicine, was elected Western Regional Director for the National Association of Medical Minority Educators. Irving has served as the association's Regional Treasurer and Regional Conference Program Chairwoman. Irving will also serve as 1996 Conference Chairwoman for NAMME's annual meeting to be held in Portland in September.

NAMME facilitates the entry of underrepresented ethnic/racial minorities into the health professions and addresses the diverse needs of this group.

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