

# Transitioning Futures

continued **▲** from front

Although several women who have been in and out of the system want to find jobs, housing and begin a healthy life, Wedge said there are not enough resources available throughout the city to support them.

"We have seen a lot of women who want to change their lives, but have to put it on hold because they have no place to live," she said.

The organization, which provides peer mentoring and counseling for individuals during times of transition, said the shortage of housing comes at a time when the number of women going to prison is at an all time high.

"There is a serious need for housing for women," said Felton Howard Jr., a navigator at Mercy Corps Northwest's Reentry Transition Center. "We've noticed a great increase in just the last two years."

By working with a network of public and private organizations, HARRP has served over 30 formerly incarcerated people since July 2010 on a mission to better the client's chances of success outside of prison, increase public safety, and strengthen family and community.

More than often those who have been to prison have an increased level of challenges to find a healthy safe place to stay, said Wedge. "And they don't always have any one they can talk to about their struggles."



PHOTO BY MINDY COOPER/  
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Louise Wedge is a licensed drug and alcohol counselor and peer mentor for the Highland Access Recovery and Reentry Program.

Gunnar Browning, correctional rehabilitation manager at the Coffee Creek Correctional Facility, who supervises the counselors who work with female intakes, said one of the main goals is to reduce the number of inmates who return to prison.

"So we teach them the skills they need to make them more successful so they can stay out of prison," he said. "We do case management and assessments to see where their area of needs are, and then match them up with the appropriate programs in the facility."

According to Browning, Coffee Creek was created in 2001 to provide women inmates several programs and services, including correctional programs, alcohol and drug counseling, work-based education programs, and basic cognitive programs. A wide-range of transition programs are aimed to help inmates find employment, have financial responsibility, find housing once they are released, and begin their transition back into society.

"From my knowledge of working with females and counselors, we don't have enough transitional type housing for the need that is out there," he said. "So what we want to do is teach them skills so they won't have to come back to prison."

Although solid programming exists to help inmates eliminate their old habits and behaviors while within the correctional facility, Wedge explained how women on the outside still need a community that supports them.

He said the need for more resources and facilities for women cannot be ignored.

"Women are suffering," said Wedge.

Even with all the preparation for life on the outside, if you have been in prison, it is hard to find a place to stay, she said.

Waynette Dodson, a certified counselor and also a mentor for HARRP, said she couldn't agree more, calling HARRP's tran-

sitional housing unit "long overdue."

Wedge recalled the story of one of her clients who attended meetings everyday, but couldn't find a home to live in after she was released from prison.

"She clearly didn't want to get back into the drug and alcohol life," said Wedge, who added that the woman signed herself into a second treatment program just to get housing.

"She had to, and that is said," said Wedge. "In order to stay clean, this is what she had to do, when she should be starting her life over."

According to Browning, a successful life after serving time really depends on the offender's willingness to change.

"It all depends on how well they are prepared in regards to old habits and old behaviors," he said. "That is really the key."

Browning said with solid programming, the work of parole officers and a good working relationship with county services, the support for the inmate and their transition is the main priority.

Wedge agrees, and she is determined to help as many women as possible, like others helped her, by providing individuals space to begin their lives anew.

"We'll have 12-step meetings, Highland's Counseling Center and church all within a few steps of the residence," said HARRP director Larry Johnson. "HARRP will be an asset to the community, and a place of peace for women who have a desire to change."

Wedge said she has seen too many women who want to change their lives and put it on hold because they had no where to begin.

"People have a tendency to think that people on the streets want to be there. That may be true for some, but some are trapped," she said. "We want to touch the women who are trapped, and help reunite them with their loved ones."

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## Week in The Review

### Jackson's Doctor Sentenced

Dr. Conrad Murray, the physician found guilty of involuntary manslaughter in the 2009 death of Michael Jackson, was sentenced Tuesday to four-years in prison, the maximum he was facing for manslaughter. A jury found Murray guilty three weeks ago.

### Prison Guard Killed

A Pendleton prison guard driving to work in Eastern Oregon was killed after he stopped to help a man stranded by a car crash. Authorities said the suspect Joshua Charles Weeks, 22, of Multnomah County is being held on one count of murder.

### Egypt Votes Begin

After unexpectedly large crowds turned out on Monday to cast their votes in Egypt's first parliamentary election since the reign of Hosni Mubarak, polls opened for a second day on Tuesday. The success of the initial voting came as a surprise to even voters themselves, many of whom said they cast their ballots out of a sense of duty and defiance.

### Northeast Market Robbed

Portland Police Bureau responded to a robbery call on Saturday, Nov. 26 from Yongs Market, located in the 2600 block of Northeast Dekum, where a customer found an injured clerk. The entire cash register was gone once police arrived on the scene.

### Portland Child Kidnapped

A 2-year-old was taken into protective custody Sunday after police found the child in the arms of a woman who suffers from mental and drug issues. Lisa Lee Kemper, 30, is charged with kidnapping the young boy from his North Mississippi Neighborhood yard.

### Cain Reassesses Role

Herman Cain is "reassessing" his Republican presidential campaign in the wake of a woman's claim that she and Cain had engaged in a 13-year relationship, a senior staffer to the campaign told CBS News and the National Journal Tuesday.

### Archeologists Find Pits

An international archaeological survey team has discovered two new pits at Stonehenge, where evidence suggests they were once used as a place of sun worship before the stones were erected. The team is using geophysical imaging techniques to investigate the site.