

Agency History

The PROGRAM for Female Offenders, Inc. of the Greater Harrisburg Area was established in 1979 at the request of then Attorney General LeRoy Zimmerman. The PROGRAM is independently incorporated and funded and was an affiliate of The PROGRAM agency in Pittsburgh, which opened its office in 1974. Over the years, additional affiliate agencies have been implemented throughout the state and internationally in Israel.

The original goal of The PROGRAM in Harrisburg was to help women in the criminal justice system secure job training and/or employment. In the 1980s the staff noted, due to early substance abuse and the effect of mandatory sentencing laws, women in prison were younger and less likely to possess the daily living and coping skills essential for survival. A life skills training course was developed to habilitate clients and provide them with these basic skills.

The staff provides supportive counseling in Dauphin and Cumberland County Prisons and community-based job search and placement assistance at the agency's Community Center with continued support from the United Way of the Capital Region and the United Way of Carlisle and Cumberland County. Each year over 175 women are placed into employment positions, networking with over 160 employers.

As the number of women in the criminal justice system has grown, so have the services offered by The PROGRAM. The menu of services today not only includes the original supportive counseling and employment services, but also includes HIV/AIDS education, life skills training, substance abuse case management services, academic remediation/GED tutoring, and alternatives to prison, including day programming, work release, transitional residential services, and children's programming.

In the past few years the staff has counseled two and sometimes three generations of women in the criminal justice system in order to proactively intervene in the intergenerational nature of crime, and, as a result, three programs were designed to impact children of women offenders.

Life Is Nurturing Kids (L.I.N.K.) is a mentoring program which matches an adult community volunteer who serves as a mentor for a child whose mother is incarcerated. The PROGRAM was the first agency in Dauphin County to receive a Children's Trust Fund grant to implement this project.

With its immediate success, the agency developed a second program titled **KIDS ARE THE KEY** which creates a positive, supportive atmosphere for the growth of children referred by Children and Youth Services in need of social skills development and self-esteem. These children receive homework and tutoring assistance, creative expression through arts and crafts, and cultural field trips. The curriculum teaches a violence prevention message, communication, and coping skills. This program began in 1995 and now has an average of 10 to 12 pre-adolescents participating on a daily basis after school.

The third children's program, which was developed by the Pittsburgh PROGRAM office in September 1996 and is currently funded by the United Way of the Capital Region, is **Saturday Sessions**. Children and their mothers visit at the Community Center on Saturdays and participate in educational activities utilizing the computer, field trips, and group activities. Mothers are encouraged to advocate for their children within the school system and become more involved in their children's academic development.

From January 1996 through March 1997, The PROGRAM staffed **House of Hope**, a new therapeutic community located on site at the State Correctional Institution (SCI) in Muncy, Pennsylvania. Women inmates who were victims of sexual assault or domestic violence received therapy and counseling by The PROGRAM and prison staffs while residing in this therapeutic community. This innovative and exciting project was initially funded for one year by the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections for implementation by The PROGRAM. The Muncy SCI staff continues to operate this successful and essential program for women inmates today.

In an effort to alleviate prison overcrowding in Dauphin County, The PROGRAM was awarded a contract by the

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"It's About Change"

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Dauphin County Prison Board to operate a work release program for women and their children. **The Woodside Family Center** opened its doors in July 1996 and offers an alternative to incarceration to eligible selected women from the Dauphin County Prison who are approved for transfer to participate in programming. More than 1,100 women and 137 children have been served to date. Women residents are employed, attend school or training programs, receive life skills, and volunteer in the community.

Located in a 9,000 square-foot, one-story, brick building at 451 Mall Road in Swatara Township, the Woodside Family Center's immediate neighbors are the Dauphin County Prison and the Harrisburg Mall. Formerly the Woodside Juvenile Detention Center, the Woodside Family Center accommodates up to 45 women and several of their pre-school-age children.

Capital Area Head Start operated an on-site day care center for the pre-school-age children of the women residents from 1996 to 2004 and continues to provide services to the residents' children at their own site, which they transitioned to in December 2004. In addition they continue to provide on-site parenting training to all residents of the facility. **Parent Works, Inc.**, formerly known as the Children's Play Room, Inc., provided parenting education and training both on and off site to all residents and their children residing at the Woodside Family Center from 1996 to 2003.

In 1999 the **Escape Center** began providing parenting training to women residents who are mothers in need of one-on-one support.

Since the latter part of 1996, The PROGRAM had been involved in informal merger discussions with **Promise Place**, a non-profit organization that had operated a half-way house since 1994 for women released from prison.

After formal merger discussions relative to sharing similar missions of breaking the cycle of crime involving women and their children, The PROGRAM and Promise Place envisioned the importance of collaboration in order to reduce duplication of services and competition for the same program dollars and merged together. Effective October 1, 1997, The PROGRAM assumed the responsibility of

operating Promise Place, and now provides a continuum of care service for women offenders released from incarceration and/or for rehabilitation.

Located in Steelton, Pennsylvania, Promise Place provides transitional living services in a residential setting for up to 12 women in need of structure and a safe haven to remain crime and drug free. Women residents become employed and are able to participate in optional spiritual development while rebuilding their lives. One aspect that has been determined to contribute to the continued success of Promise Place residents is the foundation of a positive support network that is developed during programming through services provided by various community agencies and volunteers.

During 1998 The PROGRAM was awarded a competitive grant contract through the Department of Public Welfare's **Community Solutions Program** (a welfare-to-work initiative) to serve women who are receiving cash assistance. The PROGRAM provided academic remediation, GED tutoring, life skills, vocational training, and job placement. Agency staff was excited and challenged to have been a part of the new re-enacted welfare system and looked forward to helping women welfare recipients become self-sufficient. The PROGRAM's Community Solutions Program ended in 1999.

The PROGRAM continues to administer the **Special Transitional Actions to Restore Talents (START)** project with foundation funding to assist women who are beginning new jobs or need assistance to maintain employment with financial assistance to secure housing, child care, medical emergencies, and job-related expenses. The START project has been an excellent avenue in empowering women to become responsible, family-oriented, independent, and productive members of society.

During November 1998 The PROGRAM secured a contract with Dauphin County Juvenile Probation to provide an **Intensive In-Home Program** for up to 20 female juvenile probationers.

A juvenile case manager coordinator insures that each child's individual program reflects the principles of Pennsylvania's new juvenile justice philosophy, "Balanced and Restorative

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Justice Approach," relative to community protection, accountability, and competency development.

In June 1999 The PROGRAM completed a real estate acquisition and purchased its own building located at 1515 Derry Street in the South Allison Hill District in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The building, referred to as the Community Center, was purchased from H.B. McClure Company. It is an 8,000 square-foot, three-story building with three parking lots. It provides ample office space and houses the administrative offices, training center, and other client-related services for women, as well as a children's program area.

In October 2000 The PROGRAM received additional funding from the United Way of the Capital Region's Venture Grant and the Foundation of Drug Abuse to begin **Step Out/Step Up Mentoring Program** in initial collaboration with the YWCA of Greater Harrisburg. The objective of the program was to empower women offenders and women in recovery from drug/alcohol abuse. Each woman (protégé) was matched with a network of professional women referred to as a Success Team. The Success Teams mentored women in areas of careers, employment, training, and creation of a positive self-image, and were further provided with other tools necessary to live lifestyles free of criminal behavior and substance abuse. Since its ending after the funding period, mentoring initiatives are now provided on an informal after-care level.

During 2001 an anonymous donor presented The PROGRAM with \$5,000, which assisted the agency in establishing an Endowment Fund with the Greater Harrisburg Foundation. The PROGRAM must contribute to the fund in order to reach \$10,000 by 2007.

After securing a \$20,000 grant during 2001 from the Whitaker Foundation, The PROGRAM has purchased state-of-the-art computers, software, and other relevant training equipment and materials for its new and modern **computer lab**.

Agency participants receive computer skills training with open enrollment and open classroom training opportunities. Computer literacy and proficiency are increasingly the

"keys" to obtaining and maintaining long-term gainful employment in today's job market. The PROGRAM was very fortunate to find an agency volunteer with technical expertise relative to computers, internet, and web page design.

In addition, agency clients now utilize the internet to apply for employment opportunities. The formalized skills training will increase the employability of the clients by enhancing their skill levels, and prepare them for employment positions in the "technical offices of businesses" in the employment sector. GED software programs are also available for clients studying to attain their GED. Harrisburg Area Community College (HACC) and Tri-County Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC) provide certified instructors to assist agency clients with their educational instruction.

This project will ultimately enable women offenders to end the cycle of crime and become economically self-sufficient and live productive, alternative lifestyles, thus abandoning criminal and welfare-dependent lifestyles.

The PROGRAM received a three-year grant, beginning July 1, 2002, from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) in conjunction with Dauphin County Mental Health/Mental Retardation to provide **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)** education and training to counseling and human service professionals in Dauphin County who are serving women at risk.

Beginning January 2003 The PROGRAM has been approved by the Dauphin County Juvenile Probation Department to submit a new project proposal to provide **Detention Alternative Programming (DAP)** for male and female juveniles in addition to the current in-home project for female probationers.

This additional component, a detention alternative, will be available for youth (male and female) who are not yet adjudicated delinquent but have a pending court disposition. This detention alternative will enable The PROGRAM to provide extensive and multiple levels of services to males and females, with one-to-one case management in the home, curfew checks, and home visits for up to 90 days. DAP provides a detention alternative level of service to

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juveniles involved in delinquent offenses, thus enabling them to remain in the community under supervision.

Effective January 1, 2003, The PROGRAM has been approved to become a subcontractor of the Pennsylvania Department of Health to administer voluntary **HIV/AIDS Testing and Counseling** on site for any agency clients. Such clients will be administered the Ora-sure Test and subsequently will receive counseling with the results. Clients testing positive for HIV/AIDS will then be offered Education/Risk Reduction activities to decrease the likelihood that they will infect future partners or become re-infected themselves. Testing goals include expanding the number of female women and adolescents who voluntarily participate in testing through the provision of expanded HIV/AIDS Preventive Case Management activities.

During the latter part of 2004, The PROGRAM received funding from the United Way of the Capital Region to provide Frank Talk sessions to male adolescents receiving case management services through the DAP in conjunction with the Dauphin County Juvenile Probation Department.

Adult males are recruited from the community to meet with these young males to participate in frank discussion issues relative to fatherhood, criminal justice issues, drug abuse, career planning, health, and other related topics. The objective of **Frank Talk** is to promote communication between these male youths and adults to share their experiences and learn from each other.

The PROGRAM is funded by the United Way of the Capital Region, the United Way of Carlisle and Cumberland County, Human Services Development Funds of Dauphin and Cumberland Counties, grants, local/county/state contracts, foundations, churches, civic clubs, organizations, private donors and benefactors, and The Foundation for Enhancing Communities.

The PROGRAM's staff has grown from a two-person office to more than 20 dedicated and compassionate employees and an additional corps of caring community volunteers.

The PROGRAM and its staff have been recognized and hailed as leaders in the field of rehabilitation and unique programming for women and children at risk.