



STEPPING FORWARD

The Newsletter of Forward Step: The Learning Coalition

Teach Them to Fish

An old Chinese proverb tells us "Give a man a fish and he'll eat for a day; teach him to fish and he'll eat for a lifetime." A 16-minute documentary titled "*Teach Them to Fish*" shows the impact of the COMPASS program at Walden House in Los Angeles, a therapeutic community for parolees with histories of substance abuse.



Directed and produced by Bibi Caspari, Executive Director of Forward Step and creator of the COMPASS program, the film was edited by students from Hollywood High School New Media Academy. A 4-minute trailer will soon be available to watch on the Forward Step website, www.forwardstep.org.

I went through twenty years in and out of jail without never hearing of recovery, never hearing of another way to live. You know, the extent of my different way to live was a better way to do the crimes that I was committing.

I like [COMPASS] because it is directing us back inside... It's taking all those signs and arrows and pointing them where they need to be pointing at, back here [points to self] where all the answers are for all of us.

A couple of weeks ago, we did a collage on our goals and our dreams...I got that thing in my room, and every morning when I wake up, I look at it. [It says to me:] Pursue my dream, pursue my goals, no matter if they seem impossible. It's not impossible. It's all up to you the individual ...Looking at it every morning makes me strive to stay sober another day, to think about how I want my future to be. Get myself back in school, pursue my education a little bit more, to where I can make all my dreams come true...It's a daily reminder of what I should have been, but what I can still be.

Grass Roots Blossom at Prison

The Incarcerated Father Parenting Program, a support group for inmates at Ironwood State Prison, thought so much of COMPASS that they raised funds to purchase three additional program kits to use on other yards as well as \$1,000 to donate to Forward Step to continue our work. After experiencing the personal growth gained in a COMPASS program started on a grass roots level at the Los Angeles Men's Central Jail, an inmate who was transferred to the Ironwood prison brought COMPASS materials with him, which found their way to the warden. The warden was impressed and asked his staff to look into purchasing the program, which was then used for the Incarcerated Father Parenting Program.

The combination of an interactive program and lessons which related to their own life experiences helped inmates learn important life lessons.

Inmate responses included: "It dealt with trust issues, and feelings of hopelessness. It made me want to put people's feelings first." The most important lesson was "to think more of others before I act on a situation." "Integrity and honesty [are] important and when you lose those values, it can lead to many situations that may cause you and others lots of harm."

Inmates experienced better communications amongst themselves and with their families, breakdown of racial barriers, and other life-changing experiences.

"I believe that the positive learning experiences prompted by the program will help [the inmates] become the better person and parent that the Incarcerated Father Parenting Program holds as its goal."

*Krystal Davis
Peace Officer and
Correctional Counselor*

Implementing Forward Step's COMPASS program in prisons throughout the state may be one of the best investments in the future our society can make. Through COMPASS, former offenders are empowered to become citizens with goals and skills to live productive lives.

FORWARD STEP: THE LEARNING COALITION "PASSPORT TO CHANGE"

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Forward Step Partners with Alpha Re-Entry Program

Forward Step has arranged to partner with The Alpha Re-Entry Program at the California Institute for Women, Corona State Prison. The Alpha Re-Entry Program is a collaboration between faith-based and community organizations with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to provide pre and post release services for incarcerated felons in an effort to increase public safety.

Alpha is an innovative, faith-based rehabilitation program designed to reduce recidivism. Inmate participants are segregated from the general prison population in a separate living unit in order to create a safe community in which to learn and practice important life skills related to living a socially acceptable life, minimizing the peer pressure that increases the likelihood of returning to old destructive behavior patterns. Any inmate may be eligible regardless of her religious beliefs. All inmates who volunteer to be part of the program must participate in every program activity, with curricula dealing with topics such as anger management, parenting and substance abuse.

COMPASS's focus on personal responsibility and empowerment will complement and further Alpha's goals

"Commitment to Change" An Event to Make a Difference

On May 6, 2006, Forward Step co-produced "Commitment to Change" with the LA Bandits Project, a group that advocates and promotes healthier living among at-risk populations. The focus was the commitment to creating positive change in our society. To manifest such change requires supporting at-risk populations to gain the holistic education that can empower them. This need was recognized by key speaker and honoree Jackie Goldberg as well as teacher Adam DeFrance. Mr. DeFrance has used Forward Step's COMPASS life skills program with his students at Jack London High School, a continuation school in Valley Glen, CA. Himself a graduate of Jack London, Mr. De France further highlighted the topic by sharing his experiences, illuminating the sub-topic of "Preventing High-Risk Behaviors in Youth, Innovative Educational Alternatives".

Thanks firstly to Sergio Avina, our consultant who spearheaded much of the work. Thanks as well to Holly Harrington, our intern from USC, who made this event her project. And thanks to all involved who helped make this event a success, including the various sponsors: John Applegate Consulting, Ernesto Villarreal Realtor, JWCH Institute, Whittier Rio Hondo

Aids Project, Permanent Productions, Fred Reimer, City of Los Angeles, First Federal Bank, Allen Post, Karina Martinez, Jack London High School, MAALES Project, Washington Mutual Bank, FOCIS, Colleen Mirassou, Lee Boek, Cheryl Davis, Aids Assistance Program, Friends of Eric Garcetti, and AXA Foundation.

Thanks, too, to those who donated items for the silent auction: LA Dodgers, Magic Mountain, San Antonio Winery, LA Athletic Club, Charlotte Hotzerman/Watsu Massage, Kathleen Gildred/Goddess Wear, Elissa Kerhulas/What Works Yoga & Fitness, Dali Sadhana/Computer Tutoring, Denise Neumark-Reimer/Hope Walking Enterprises/Acupuncture & Reiki, Westside Workout/Pilates, Tam O'Shanter Restaurant, Griffith Park Farms/Horseback Riding, Direct Auto Service Center, Trader Joes, Cash Oshman, Roman Navarrette/Fox Network, Say Cheese Restaurant, Teresitas Family Restaurant, Pantages Theatre, Magianno's Little Italy Restaurant, Nickelodeon Studios, Jose Hurrado, Ariel Flowers, On Time PC.

Many more have helped support Forward Step's work. Thanks to all.

Bibi Caspari
Executive Director

in the areas of daily living, parenting, anger management, substance abuse and spirituality. COMPASS meets the most important needs expressed by inmates for counseling and life skills training that assist in building self-esteem, confidence and the ability to develop healthy interpersonal relationships. Though initially the COMPASS facilitators will be a team from outside the prison, the goal is to use inmates who will be trained as co-facilitators, as the peer counseling element can help participants relate the skills being taught to their own lives more effectively.

The value of COMPASS for an inmate population has been demon-

strated anecdotally. As an inmate from Men's Central Jail in Los Angeles commented, "I only wish I would have had knowledge of this program prior to my arrival here and just maybe I would have gained the insight to correct my life. I endorse this program highly and hope to continue in the blessings it has brought to my life." The partnership with the Alpha Re-Entry Program opens up the possibility of case studies and evaluations in conjunction with UC Riverside.

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