



Winter 2002

Published by

OPEN, INC.

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INSIGHTS

Offender Preparation & Education Network, Inc.

New Directions Education Project

by Evelyn Hanks, Teacher
Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution

The Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution in Pendleton, Oregon nestles in a valley formed by the Umatilla River in the rural eastern part of the state. Here the inmate/students who participated in the New Directions Education Project worked toward their Associate Degrees. They encouraged one another to continue studying; talked to their children about their studies; decided which college to attend after their release; and emotionally connected with the people in the community who gave support to their efforts.

Prior to 1994 this was a common occurrence at EOCI. A full educational program was offered, with men studying for a GED, a high school diploma or an Associate Degree, all under the leadership of Blue Mountain Community College, under contract with the Oregon Department of Corrections. During an eight year period, 24 inmates received their

Associate Degrees. But, when the federal Crime Bill of 1994 was passed Pell Grants could no longer be given to prison inmates and, that same year, voters in the state of Oregon passed an initiative, Measure 17, which the Oregon Department of Corrections interpreted to mean that education for inmates was provided only up to the GED certificate.

The atmosphere at EOCI changed overnight. No longer did those studying for their GED certificate have an extended goal. Some did not even want to pass their last GED tests because it meant the end to their formal education.

A few years later, at a national meeting of the Correctional Education Association, two EOCI instructors met an instructor from Jefferson Community College in Louisville, Kentucky. At Jefferson they had built a college-transfer program using funds

from individuals, churches, and civic organizations. Motivated by the example, on returning to Pendleton the two gathered together a

few others with the same vision and, in the fall of 1999, formed a committee to raise local funds in order to provide college-transfer classes at EOCI. Thus the *New Directions Education Project* was born.

(continued on page 2)

**“We have been very encouraged
by the response of our students
in their evaluations and in
personal letters sent to us.”**

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“These last four courses have been my first college experience. I did not do well in high school and assumed I would do less well in college. I am no longer intimidated by college . . . I am looking forward to next October when classes start again. Once again thank you.”

Inmate/Student

The New Directions Education Project Committee was made up of the two instructors, a counselor, a religious volunteer, and a retired businessman. They wrote letters to churches and civic groups offering to come to their gatherings to tell about the program. Newspaper articles appeared, detailing the program. As individuals and groups gave donations, a core of supporters was developed and enough money was collected to fund the first class, *Intercultural Communications*, in the spring of 2000. Fifteen inmates enrolled and over sixty inmates applied for the scholarships.

During the 2000-2001 academic year we offered one class for the fall term and then expanded to two classes for winter and spring terms. This academic year we have planned two classes each term with a lab science class included as one of them (a first for us!).

Our board does fund-raising, decides on criteria for applicants, selects scholarship recipients, makes arrangements for the college-transfer classes through Blue Mountain Community College, pays tuition, buys textbooks and supplies, and evaluates the program. The criteria for selection into the program are: a qualifying ASSET score (college entrance exam), a good conduct record at the prison, a good job record in prison, previous participation in character-changing programs, a valid GED or high school diploma but not yet holding an Associate Degree, a recommendation from the applicant's EOCI counselor, and an essay by the applicant telling why a college education is important to him. Members of the board have contributed over 500 hours of volunteer time in the past fiscal year.

The donor group consists of 60 individuals, three churches, and four civic groups. We have received one

grant from the Paul G. Allen Foundation and have applied for additional grants this year. One local donor has given several significant gifts and all of the donors have been very enthusiastic in their response. Most of the individual donors have given \$100 to provide tuition for one inmate/student for a three-credit class. The inmate pays \$20 so that he has a personal commitment to the program. Our program picks up the remainder of the \$126 fee plus the cost of textbooks.

The committee has been in contact with our local state senator and our state representative, to enlist their help in encouraging the Oregon Department of Corrections to apply for the federal “Specter” grants (Grants to States for Workplace and Community Transition Training for Incarcerated Youth Offenders Program CFDA 84.331). This program gives funds to the states which apply, to be used for training and/or college-level classes for young offenders. The grants would make it possible to offer college classes although at the present time the Oregon Department of Corrections has said that if the funds were received, it would not be a high priority to use them for college classes. Oregon is one of only five states that have not applied for the grants.

“I want to take a moment to let you know that I truly appreciate, more than I can express, this opportunity. I am 35 years old and I spent 6 years in the U. S. Navy. I never thought I would attempt college, especially as I got older. Well, now, I want nothing more than my degree. I now look forward to each Wednesday (the day of class) with eager anticipation. This is all due to a group of wonderful people in this community of Pendleton that have made me feel like I matter. Your donations have in a sense given me part of my life back.”

Inmate/Student

Fidelity Bonds: Unique Job Placement Tool

Ron Rubbin, Director, Federal Bond Program

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