

Promising Practices *and* Innovations in Corrections

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Shasta County is stepping up

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- SHASTA COUNTY PROBATION

Shasta County took on the challenge of the growing jail population and developed an education program called STEP-UP. The Shasta Technical Education Program - Unified Partnership (STEP-UP) was created in 2013 by Shasta County Sheriff Tom Bosenko and Shasta College's Associate Vice President Eva Jimenez. As many of us are aware, California counties were impacted in October 2011 with the release of hundreds of offenders due to realignment under AB109. With California state prisons housing fewer offenders, and the changes in the sentencing laws, county jails were flooded with inmates. These counties looked for alternatives to custody and to find rehabilitation programs for offenders to assist them in making changes in their lives. STEP-UP does just that.

The initial conversation regarding STEP-UP was merely to provide culinary classes to inmates in county jail. Ultimately, offenders were released from jail, fitted with a GPS device, and placed into Shasta College classes. There were many concerns surrounding this program and allowing those with criminal

charges to attend classes. Since anyone, even those with a criminal past, can attend college, administration saw this as an opportunity for those students to have more support. The program requires offenders to have a high school diploma or GED, and students need to have the mindset and readiness to change. Individuals



who have convictions for domestic violence, battery, or are registered sex offenders are not eligible to participate in the STEP-UP grant.

Since inception in 2013, STEP-UP has doubled in the number of students participating and continues to grow. In the first year, twenty students enrolled and fourteen stu-



dents completed the program. At that time, there were three certificate programs available. Today, STEP-UP has 50 students enrolled and 34 students completed the Fall 2016 semester with an average GPA of 3.4. There are now six certificate programs available that include; welding, firefighting, heavy equipment operation, office administration, and automotive technology. Students are encouraged to continue to pursue an associate's degree after completion of the certificate program.

With the support of faculty member James Crockett, the students created an on-campus club called Begin Again. Begin Again is a club for those who have experienced a challenging past and are ready to start over. President and Founder of Begin Again, Diane Fisher, stated, "I wanted a way to stay together and support one another when life gets scary and tough." Diane is in her third semester at Shasta College and will finish college in May with a certificate in heavy equipment operation. The students in the program have the desire, will, and drive to be here and they are

proving it each day. Samuel Gibson lived out of his car for his first semester at Shasta College and after sticking with the program, even during difficulties, he will finish with his heavy equipment operation certificate in December 2017. Carson Dykes was referred to STEP-UP from the Good News Rescue Mission. In May, Carson will graduate with his Associate degree in Business for transfer to CSU, Chico. Carson stated, "The support of STEP-UP allowed me to be successful at Shasta College, which in turn aided me in gaining admission to Chico State where I will pursue my Bachelor's in Accounting."

Shasta County is working to directly reduce recidivism rates by placing an emphasis on education. The Nation's website* reported education playing a positive role in reducing recidivism rates of over 40%. The US Bureau of Justice reported an average prison sentence is 55 months, while the New York Times reported the cost for one year in prison is about \$31,000 per inmate. If these numbers reflect a nationwide average, we are paying approxi-

mately \$139,500 per year/per inmate. The estimated cost for an associate's degree at Shasta College is \$3,000 and a certificate ranges from \$300 to \$2,000. This investment in people seems well worth the cost if we can assist people in making positive change and reduce the percentage of victims within the community.

In 2015, Opportunity Institute (OI) released, *Degrees of Freedom: Expanding College Opportunities for Currently and Formerly Incarcerated Californians*, published by the Stanford Criminal Justice Center at Stanford Law School and the Chief Justice Earl Warren Institute on Law and Social Policy at UC Berkeley School of Law. This report allowed California colleges the opportunity to apply for funding to assist those students with a criminal history. In 2015, Shasta College applied for a grant through the Renewing Communities (RC) incentive program. Shasta College's program STEP-UP was awarded a 3-year grant; only seven California State University's and California Community Colleges' were selected in this process. Renewing Communities, hosted

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at Stanford University, is providing funding to assist with the many challenges our students face while trying to adjust from a jail/prison cell to a college campus. The RC Grant provides the funding STEP-UP presently utilizes to provide financial and academic support to our students. This grant also provides funding for Program Director, Robert Bowman and Probation Assistant, Samantha Klein to assist in the managing of STEP-UP.

There are five collaborative partners with STEP-UP; the Shasta County Sheriff's Office, Shasta College, the Shasta County Probation Department, the Good News Rescue Mission, and the California Heritage YouthBuild Academy (CHYBA). Each partner plays a key role in the success of this program and the students who participate. Mrs. Jimenez stated:

"The success of our STEP-UP program over the past four years is attributed to a collection of individuals who share the same passion for our students. Collectively, our partners provide resources and support systems to ensure our students have any potential roadblocks dismantled. The most difficult work is then performed by the many students who have entered our program, completed the program, and/or continue to take courses in programs which will ultimately allow them to gain employment. We continue to see success stories and we are excited to have committed partners who provide hope and more importantly students who are serious about second chances."

Shasta College staff works with students on campus and to ensure their needs are met. STEP-UP Program Director Robert Bowman works with the administration to provide resources for the students which include lunch

vouchers, bus passes, tutoring, financial aid, and extra support as needed. Some students come to the program without having attended school in over 20 years. In Fall 2016, Mr. Bowman met with Bud Handcock, a lead with Providence Garden of Hope. This program provides paid internships to students in STEP-UP. The interning students are responsible for cutting wood, caring for animals, aquaponics, and gardening. Through this co-op these students are trained and provided the tools necessary to be successful.

Currently Correctional Sergeant Nick Abernathy and Correctional Deputy Jason Coulombe are representing the Sheriff's Office to manage their portion of the program. They would like to see more offenders take the opportunity to participate. The Alternative Custody Program, through the Shasta County Sheriff's Office, utilizes STEP-UP as one part of a larger umbrella of offender programing. STEP-UP not only gives the offender the opportunity to get assistance with a college education, but it also allows the offender to receive custody credits while attending college. STEP-UP is considered the most successful offender program offered by the Shasta County Sheriff's Office.

With the support of the renewing communities grant, Shasta County Probation hired Probation Assistant, Samantha Klein who works with students who are enrolling in college classes. Chief Probation Officer Tracie Neal stated, "The Probation Department started our portion of the program from scratch and the grant really allows us the opportunity to grow and improve the program and reach more of the population." Along with enrolling participants into college, Mrs. Klein also helps those who need a General Education Development (GED) certificate or a High School Diploma. Students are required to

meet with Mrs. Klein at least once a month. Mrs. Klein stated, "Often I will have five or six students sitting at a table in the college cafeteria. I hope to provide a relaxed environment for conversation so all students feel welcomed to the program." There is a high demand of probationers who want to be in STEP-UP. Mrs. Klein works promptly to engage probationers in conversation and connect them to resources on campus. The Probation Department provides mental health services, assistance with finding stable housing, and enrolls probationers into evidence based programs to combat drug or alcohol addictions or other areas that need in-





intervention. Chief Probation Officer Tracie Neal stated, "We value this program. Education and career development play an important role in the rehabilitative process and benefits both the individual and the community."

The Good News Rescue Mission (GNRM) provides drug rehabilitation services, academic services, intensive residential treatment, along with referrals and support to STEP-UP. The GNRM offers residence tutoring for GED classes or resources to obtain a High School Diploma. The GNRM currently has seven students enrolled in STEP-UP. The California Heritage YouthBuild Academy (CHYBA) gives students between the ages 16-24 the opportunity to earn their GED or high school diploma. CHYBA really helps bridge the gap between high school and college. As the younger adults complete their GED or High School Diploma they transition into college with extra support through STEP-UP. CHYBA has the ability to enroll students in high school and college classes concurrently. Jose Sanchez, 24 was referred to CHYBA from the Probation Department so he can finish his High School Diploma. Jose stated, "I came to the point of my life where I had to make a decision either stay in the same circle, or get out and make a differ-

ence, and STEP-UP is getting me there. No matter how many times I feel like quitting Samantha [from Probation] says no and pushes me." Jose is excited to graduate with his high school diploma and start college classes in Fall 2017.

With California working to reduce the growing population in state prisons there are challenges local communities must face. Shasta County has chosen to work alongside the offenders assisting them to make change in their lives. Education and career development is an integral part of the rehabilitative process. Sheriff Tom Bosenko stated, "I'm very pleased to have started the program and to see its growth. Not only has the program grown in the number of participants, but in the curriculum that is offered. While some have been unable to complete the program, many have obtained jobs and have not returned to criminal behavior. This program has changed lives and developed productive citizens." The collaborative efforts utilized by STEP-UP are a key reason for the success of this program. STEP-UP has directly impacted



the lives of these students, reduced their recidivism rate, and created successful community members of Shasta County. ✨

*Chen (August 17, 2015). *Prison Education Reduces Recidivism by Over 40 Percent. Why Aren't We Funding More of It.* Retrieved from <http://www.thenation.com/>