

Christian Men's Job Corps helps ex-offenders start new lives

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TYLER—As a volunteer chaplain's assistant in a prison, Charles Smith saw offenders released, only to return to prison again. He heard tales of offenders wanting to start their lives again but running into obstacle after obstacle.

Many of their stories were disturbingly similar. No one was there to encourage them outside prison or offer help they desperately sought. They couldn't find a job. And they couldn't attain job skills that would make them more attractive in this economic environment.

Eight Christian Men's Job Corps sites operate across Texas.

"It's just this huge mountain for these guys to climb when they get out of prison," Smith said.

So, Smith put on his metaphorical climbing gear and started helping people to the summit. This year, Smith launched the first [Christian Men's Job Corps](#) site in Tyler.

Christian Men's Job Corps is a Woman's Missionary Union personal, spiritual and job-skills development effort that teaches topics such as money management, resume writing, interview coaching and computer training.

Eight Christian Men's Job Corps sites operate across Texas, and more than 50 Christian Women's Job Corps sites—including one in Tyler—help people around the state.

The first class started with seven students. By the end of the course, two men graduated, and four other men found jobs during the class. The second class was scheduled to graduate May 22.

Students are finding employment and growing in their skills, Smith said. They are learning from local volunteers who are experts in their fields, having helped numerous people become better money managers, deal with conflict resolution and prepare for job interviews.

One graduate of the first course is enrolling in college as a pre-law student. The other is caring for his terminally ill mother while searching for a job.

Students from the first graduating class continue to call Smith for assistance, and he helps as much as possible. State and federal parole departments have approached Smith to see how they can help more ex-offenders restart their lives on the right foot.

“It’s effective,” Smith said of the ministry. “They take these skills with them forever. What they do with them is up to them. But it’s a long-term solution.”

The Tyler Christian Men’s Job Corps site is supported by area churches, private donations and gifts made to the [Mary Hill Davis Offering for Texas Missions](#). Recently, the Tyler site received a \$5,000 Texas Hope 2010 Care Grant made possible by donations through the [Texas Baptist Offering for World Hunger](#).

Through Christian Men’s Job Corps, Smith and the ministry’s volunteers build relationships with ex-offenders and become a source of encouragement and assistance for them, Smith said. Drawing on biblical teachings, the site’s leaders help the men find hope for a better life. In many ways, the site’s leaders become like family—loved ones who help them climb steep mountains.

"I just have a heart for the underdog for the guys that have been prison and made mistakes," Smith said. "I just have a heart for them."

For more information about the Christian Men's Job Corps in Tyler, call Smith at (903) 593-8827 or visit www.cmjc-tyler.org.