

Former gang member now ministering, thanks to Christian Menâs Job Corps

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KERRVILLE—For former gang member D.J. Miller, life has come full circle. Growing up in a Christian family, he was taught about Christ but chose to follow his own desires and pleasures. Now he is a godly father and husband, ministering to men at the Kerr County jail, all because of an encounter with the Christian Men's Job Corps.



Tom Jones serves as site coordinator for Christian Men's Job Corps in Kerrville. Since its beginning three years ago, the Kerr County Christian Men's Job Corps has graduated 43 men from the program.

“Ever since I completed the program, my life has done a 360,” Miller said, describing the ministry that offers a Christian atmosphere where men are

equipped for employment while rebuilding their personal and spiritual lives.

“The Lord has helped reinstate everything. It’s not just back in line, but it is so much more plentiful than before.”

Steered by loyalty to the Banditos gang and controlled by drugs, Miller was about to lose everything—his family, house, cars and marriage—and realized he had to change his lifestyle before it was too late. After seeing an Internet ad for the program, he came to the Christian Men’s Job Corps seeking help and hope after a 20-year stretch of following his own ways.

“I grew up Southern Baptist in California, and I was saved and baptized as a kid,” Miller said. “I even was a minister for awhile when I was 20, but I walked away from that. The influences just overtook me, and I walked away. Then the Lord put on my heart one day that I needed to change my life and get away from this.”

At the job corps, Miller took part in a 12-week class that met three nights a week. The program included personal mentoring, Bible study, computer training, mock interviews and life skills. But the most important lesson Miller learned while he was there was his identity in Christ.



Unemployed or underemployed men learn computer skills during a class offered at the Christian Men’s Job Corps site in San Angelo.

"Part of (the change) is that you have to find yourself," Miller said. "You have to find God and then find yourself."

After graduating from the program, Miller immediately stepped into a volunteer role and began coordinating the alumni outreach. He started his own home-repair business and also became involved with ministry at the Kerr County jail. Through the jail ministry, Miller has seen 100 men become Christians or rededicate their lives to Christ and 11 men baptized.

To further his ministry, Miller is participating in an online chaplaincy program. He continues to assist the director at the job corps and encourages the other men enrolled in the class as he shares his story of redemption and change.

"I tell them if God can reinstate me, being who I was and with what I did, he can do that for them," said Miller. "I've done things just like them and probably worse, but God reinstated me. So he can do it for them, too."

Since its beginning three years ago, the Kerr County Christian Men's Job Corps has graduated 43 men from the program and keeps in contact with most graduates through a weekly alumni Bible study.

"The major success is the transformation in their personal life, whether it is through learning discipline so they can set a goal and achieve it or becoming a Christian," said Christine Hockin-Boyd, Texas Women's Missionary Union missions consultant. The program not only teaches job skills, but also nurtures accountability, respect, confidence and self-esteem in every participant, she said.

Christian Men's Job Corps is a ministry of the Texas WMU. Texas Baptists support it through gifts to the Mary Hill Davis Offering for Texas Missions.

"When they walk out the door, I want them to learn they don't need me or anyone else to achieve their goals," said Tom Jones, director of the Kerr

County program. "They need to be empowered to deal with (life issues). They just need to take things to God and let him lead them."

The Kerr County ministry works with about 40 volunteers from various churches and with Partners in Ministry, a nonprofit agency that helps ministries in the Kerrville area. The class, which accepts 12 men each semester, meets at a YMCA in a low-income part of Kerrville in order to be accessible to those who are taking the class.

Other models of the program are also in use. In San Angelo, the first Christian Men's Job Corps in the nation, classes follow a one-on-one model to better meet the needs of participants, said Jean Law, director of the program. They still incorporate a mentor and Bible study but also work closely with the Texas Workforce Solutions in order to form an independent employment plan for each participant.

Since its beginning in 2004, the Christian Men's Job Corps expanded to eight locations in Texas. Kerrville and San Angelo offer classes, while the other six sites still are in the planning stages and will begin classes by January 2009.

Christian Men's Job Corps grew out of an already successful program exclusively for women, Hockin-Boyd noted.

"Women were wanting it for their husbands. Pastors and directors of missions wanted it for the men—basically because of interest and need," she said.