



SCOTT NATHAN/THE DAILY TIMES

Sylvonnia Stratton is a client of the The Way Home program and an employee at Sedona in Bethany Beach. The Way Home helps inmates transition following their release from prison. Stratton makes honey butter during prep at the eatery Tuesday.

'I thank God for them; I really do'

The Way Home offers support, services for those newly released from prison

By Kelsey Miller
Staff Writer

GEORGETOWN — Offering support, confidence and hope, The Way Home program helps those newly released from prison transition back into society and take a positive step toward the future.

Founded in 1998, the private nonprofit organization grew out of a prison Bible study group when volunteers realized the need to support ex-offenders re-entering society, especially those without anywhere to go.

"We are the family that does not close the door," said Barbara Del Mastro, director of The Way Home.

The traditionally three-year program offers intensive case management for clients, helping with food, clothing and transportation to jobs and parole meetings. The group operates a

small transitional house in Millsboro and connects clients with various support groups.

"This is the only program of its kind in the state of Delaware," said Rick Chamberlain, associate director. "We provide personal service that fits the needs of the clients."

Most are referred to the organization before leaving prison. There are about 65-70 full-time clients and roughly 100 additional participants per month, Chamberlain said. The program also takes walk-ins seeking assistance on their own.

One of the main goals is to help ex-offenders find jobs in the struggling market.

"The economy's tough all over but it's especially tough on people getting out of prison," Chamberlain said.

Program workers help participants return to school and manage their finances. They

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BARBARA DEL MASTRO,
director of The Way Home

hope to introduce even more career resources in the future, especially for those who lack certain skills, Chamberlain said.

The Way Home is accessible, whether it's a late-night pick-up or a personal meeting. Workers always have their cellphones on.

"We encourage them to call us when they feel shaky," Del Mastro said.

Sylvonnia Stratton started the program in 2009. When the Millsboro resident felt she was slipping back into destructive habits, she turned to The Way Home. The program now transports her to her job in Bethany Beach.

"I've never really been helped in that way before," she said. "They are a blessing."

Stratton thinks of program workers as family members and

is grateful for their presence.

"I've gained a close relationship with them," she said. "I thank God for them; I really do."

Recidivism rates are halved by programs such as these, according to a 2006 study by the University of Delaware. Taxpayer money is conserved, with one year in a transitional program costing only \$5,000 versus the \$38,000 it would cost for the same amount of time in jail, Chamberlain said.

"Our work greatly enhances community safety and supports the family system," Del Mastro said. "There are a lot of hidden ways the program helps."

The organization receives some state money but relies mainly on grants and donations from individuals or churches, Chamberlain said.

Participants like Stratton have seen a positive change and are truly thankful for those at The Way Home.

"They're just wonderful, we need more people like them," Stratton said.

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