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Agency Gives Hand

SAN BERNARDINO – Breaking a 16-year habit is no easy task, especially if that habit is drug abuse.

For Michelle Freeman, it has taken more than two years of support and assistance from San Bernardino-based Time for Change Foundation.

Last week, she moved from the foundation's transitional living facility into her own apartment, something she said wouldn't have happened if not for her experience with the foundation.

The foundation provides housing and rehabilitation services to women who are parolees, recovering from addiction or mental health problems, or have been victims of domestic violence.

Freeman says her addiction began when she was 28 and lasted 16 years before she was convicted and incarcerated for drug charges in 2005.

Upon release, Freeman said she thought she would travel to Los Angeles to enroll in a recovery program. But when she walked out of prison, she was told that under the conditions of her parole she must return to San Bernardino, where she last lived.

Freeman was frantic. She didn't know she'd be traveling to San Bernardino. She said she had no job, no family and no place to go.

But she remembered a card she had gotten from Kim Carter, executive director of Time for Change, in a pre-release class at California Institution for Women in Chino and decided to give her a call.

Carter arranged for her to be brought to the foundation's home in the north end.

Since then, Carter says

Freeman has been committed to recovery.

"She just took off," Carter said. "She went to all the classes and did all she was asked of."

Freeman, who is still on parole, now works with the foundation as a program coordinator, is a member of the foundation's board of directors and is a member of the Women's Foundation of California. She uses her position with the Women's Foundation to lobby for state policy changes to help parolees when they're released from prison.

"I'm so grateful to Kim," Freeman said. "Her patience and endurance, you can't match that. Had I been left to the system, I don't even want to think about where I'd be today."