

Time for Change expanding nationally recognized program

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Six years ago, Time for Change Foundation, a San Bernardino County nonprofit assisting disenfranchised, low-income women and children, launched a three-year pilot project connecting incarcerated, soon-to-be-released women with resources for employment, housing and behavioral health.

Funded, in part, by the U.S. Department of Health Care Services, the Positive Futures project helped 135 women reacclimate into society, according to the nonprofit.

Next month, thanks to \$2.1 million from the federal agency's Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Time for Change is expanding its nationally recognized program.

"Our staff is dedicated to this project," Time for Change Director Vanessa Perez said. "Everyone works collectively as a team to make sure the project is successful."

Launched in 2012, Positive Futures sought to prevent crime, reduce recidivism and address substance abuse and mental health disorders for incarcerated women. Case managers met with women four months before their release and 12 months post-release to get them on the path to self-sufficiency.

According to Perez, the pilot project eliminated recidivism among its targeted females and saw a 98-percent increase in housing, employment, family connectedness and behavioral health treatment.

"We realized these women needed access to housing, mentoring, life skills

and someone to talk to and support them," Perez said. "Someone to make sure they're successful, make sure they believe in themselves. ... Sometimes, when they get out, their families aren't the most supportive. They need that mentoring and support. ... And we're happy to be able to be a part of their lives."

Positive Futures, which concluded in 2015, was deemed a national success model by UCLA.

"The participants describe the staff as caring, loving and welcoming," Dr. Nena Messina, with UCLA's Integrated Substance Abuse Program, wrote in her 2015 evaluation of the program. "They report feeling that they were not judged at Positive Futures, which is unusual for them and therefore very meaningful."

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Positive Futures II project will enroll 220 women, or 44 per year, from San Bernardino, Rialto, Redlands, Victorville and Colton.

Area leaders gathered in San Bernardino last week to celebrate the program's October launch.

"The model we did last time around worked so successfully, we're keeping it," Perez said. "Because it became a national model, we'll keep going with what works. If it's not broken, don't fix it."



PHOTO COURTESY OF TIME FOR CHANGE FOUNDATION

San Bernardino County leaders gather to celebrate the expansion of Time for Change's Positive Futures project. Time for Change is a county nonprofit that helps disenfranchised, low-income women and children regain their self-sufficiency.