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ADAPTing to Healthy Thinking and Sober Living

In 2016, Changed Choices received life-changing news. The Mecklenburg County ABC Board had awarded a two-year Community Health and Wellness Grant to pilot a correspondence program called ADAPT. ADAPT was conceived from (1) the frustration that many Changed Choices clients serve their time without receiving the substance abuse treatment they desperately need. Upon release, the demands of life and need for income, childcare, transportation make it doubly difficult for women to receive the services they need, and (2) the knowledge that Changed Choices' client-graduates have valuable experience they are eager to use for the benefit of others.

Five such women served as coaches to the fourteen incarcerated clients who successfully completed the program in its first year. One ADAPT graduate wrote a thank you letter to the ABC Board, explaining, "I know drugs and alcohol will never be a part of my life again, but this program helped me to see the dangers of becoming complacent. My mind gets stuck on unrealistic expectations, which can lead me right back to resentments, blaming, making excuses, and criminal thinking.

This program is a powerful treasure trove of tools that has and will help me to overcome the challenges I face every day – here and when I am released."



Four of this year's ADAPT coaches, ready with their facilitator guides.

In August, seven coaches received training to launch the second year of this pilot program. A graduate from last year put it best: "This program helped me tremendously, and I pray that it can continue and other ladies take advantage of what this program can do for them."

ADAP^Ting

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“There was a time when drugs and crime controlled every aspect of my life. I can’t count the number of times I was incarcerated; my record will show for that. I admit that it took me a long time to accept myself and trust God, but now my story has changed and continues to do so.

“Because of God, my support network here in NC, and Changed Choices, I am currently working as an intern at a treatment center in Charlotte. I will be graduating from college very soon with a degree in Human Services along with a number of certificates which happen to include a certificate in Criminal Justice.”

-Excerpt from an ADAPT coach’s introduction letter, sent to her assigned ADAPT students.



Congratulations Brittany (pictured here with Stephanie, Changed Choices Inmate Care Manager)! Brittany is the first ADAPT graduate to complete her sentence and return to Charlotte.

Looking to Connect!

Changed Choices has welcomed Gayle Eason as our Spiritual Care and Outreach Manager. She is pictured here modeling some of the postage stamps donated during this year’s SummerSHARE campaign.

Gayle’s dual role is in tending to the spiritual needs of our clients and in cultivating relationships with the local churches whose generous interest in our mission has provided so many of our needed volunteers and resources.

If you have a small group or Sunday school that might be interested in learning more about Changed Choices, Gayle would love to talk with you!



To reach Gayle, call: 704-332-6388
or email her at: eason@changedchoices.org

Thank you to everyone who participated in SummerSHARE 2017! Your generous giving resulted in contributions valued at more than \$2,000, including everything from flatware for the Ruth Snyder reentry home to toner for the Changed Choices office and the LCD projector we prayed for to enhance our volunteer orientations and training sessions. You can shop our wish list all year round on our website. Thank you for giving our needs a vacation!



Microgrants Spark Bright Futures

For the past two years, Changed Choices has offered small grants to clients to further their educations or start their own businesses. Because so many clients are single parents or live paycheck to paycheck, flexible grant funds can be applied toward utility bills or other unmet expenses due to wages lost during training. As a result, these grants have been a highly successful means to help our clients to reach a liveable wage and ultimately become financially self-sufficient.

Shonika's first job after prison was at a high-volume call center. The work was stressful, demoralizing and only paid \$9 an hour. Shonika took advantage of a Changed Choices microgrant to attend training to become a certified Peer Support Specialist. In her new role, Shonika works with people with mental health and substance abuse issues: listening to them, helping them connect with community resources, and providing support and encouragement.

"Some people don't have anybody to help them at all. It feels good to be able to help people," Shonika says. The work is emotionally rewarding and Shonika now earns a liveable wage of \$16 per hour. Of those who donated to the Changed Choices microgrant fund, Shonika says, "I want them to know that they not only helped me, but they helped all the people I help now."

The trouble with minimum wage

Minimum wage income:
\$7.25 per hour
= \$1,256 per month

Median rent for a
2 bedroom apartment
in Charlotte:
= \$1100 per month

Nicole Thompson graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Sociology while in prison, but her education didn't translate to earning power when she was released. For many months, Nicole worked at a restaurant where she was underpaid and disrespected. Several months ago, Nicole decided that it was time to manifest her long-held dream of becoming an entrepreneur. She determined that she would open her own cleaning business. Nicole said "In two years I didn't want to have to look for a job that pays a liveable wage."



Retired CPA Randy Whitt and Changed Choices' Advocacy and Resource Manager Melissa Mummert are coaching Nicole to realize her vision. Randy created income projections allowing Nicole to determine her pricing structure and see that her dream was achievable. A \$1200 microgrant from Changed Choices is helping to pay for start-up costs like insurance, bonding, supplies and marketing materials. Nicole says of the assistance Changed Choices has offered, "It has been a great help to get the encouragement I needed. Melissa and Randy mentoring with me inspired my passion to see I could really do this."

Nicole named her business Goldie's Cleaning Service in honor of her mother, who passed away while she was in prison. Nicole is booking jobs now and hopes to employ others in the not too distant future. To schedule a free cleaning consultation with Nicole, call (980) 505-3961.

Through Changed Choices' microgrants and networking, 15 of 17 women served have increased their wages with an average wage increase of 46%.

C.O.O.O.L.

Changing Our Outlook On Life

C.O.O.O.L., Changed Choices' mentoring program in the Mecklenburg County Jail, has served 80 women in the past twelve months. Volunteer mentors meet with their assigned mentee for one hour each week at Jail North. Many of the mentors and mentees develop a special bond during their time together.

After they are released or transferred from the jail, they often lose touch. But the program plants seeds! Upon her transfer from the Jail to a prison, one mentee wrote back to her mentor, "I wanted to tell you how much I appreciated you... while I was in Charlotte. You always encourage me and it's priceless to meet someone so special as you." And recently, one mentor had the pleasure of catching up with a mentee released earlier this year. This woman has been attending AA and recovery meetings, secured a job and with a referral from Changed Choices, obtained a beautiful business wardrobe from Dress for Success. She is growing spiritually and has a healthy relationship with her immediate family members. She says, "If I hadn't have gone to jail, I would not have found Changed Choices."

Changed Choices thanks faithful volunteers who are willing to meet with a mentee and help her "change her outlook on life." If you are interested in learning more about C.O.O.O.L and possibly becoming a mentor, please call Challise at 704-332-6388.

Pictured to the right:

Friends from Altrusa International of Charlotte, NC and Matthews United Methodist Church helped Changed Choices families kick off the new school year. Angie, a barber, gave haircuts, while Lisa, (a reentry home resident), and Gayle (our Spiritual Care & Outreach Manager) offered face painting. All who attended enjoyed food, dancing and yard games, and every student student went home with school supplies.



Designer Handbag BINGO

On October 5th you are invited to Changed Choices' third annual Designer Handbag Bingo at the South Charlotte Banquet Center. Partner ministry Fashion & Compassion will host an on-site trunk show, along with several other local businesses with wares including handmade soaps, scarves, and aromatherapy items. A portion of all sales will benefit Changed Choices. Shop the Women's Marketplace starting at 6 pm; Bingo starts promptly at 7 pm. Tickets and more information available at changedchoices.org.

Hotdogs & Haircuts

