



Why Does A New Way of Life Work?



A qualitative ethnographic study of A New Way of Life's reentry model by University of Texas doctoral candidate Melissa Burch in 2012 provides insights into our program's success. The ideas below have been adapted from the study and are published with permission of the author.

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A New Way of Life's model was built on founder Susan Burton's understanding that women released from prison faced two enormous challenges:

1. They must grapple with the immediate challenges of reentry and overcome the state-imposed barriers in education, employment, housing, welfare and health that severely inhibit re-integration *after* prison.
2. They must overcome the constricted life options characteristic of poor women of color, which negatively defined their lives *before* incarceration, an aspect of the reentry process often overlooked by existing programs.

According to a University of Texas study, A New Way of Life's approach produces "empowerment, critical self-awareness and increased agency" through a holistic approach that attends simultaneously to the physical, mental and social needs of formerly incarcerated residents.

Four key factors contribute to these outcomes:

### **1. A New Way of Life provides a supportive sanctuary.**

A New Way of Life is a *home* -- a safe supportive environment from which residents can build a new relationship with home, one which emphasizes mutual accountability, respect and open communication.

Staff *support* residents, they don't *supervise* them. ANWOL staff provide non-judgmental understanding, helping each resident see herself as a person with value and potential, rather than simply someone who made mistakes.

In addition, A New Way of Life has no pre-established limit on how long residents may stay, providing a rare sense of safety and security.

### **2. A New Way of Life provides extensive services and resources, creating a foundation upon which residents can build.**

Armed with more than 20 years' experience and a very knowledgeable staff, A New Way of Life's network of services and resources is extensive, providing residents with transportation from prison, assistance obtaining government ID, help applying for public assistance and affordable housing, support to reunite with children, access to free vocational training, and help to clean up a criminal record, find a job, and challenge criminal history-based employment discrimination.

### **3. A New Way of Life offers sober living that respects residents' autonomy.**

ANWOL provides tremendous support for sobriety, and the houses are drug-free, but residents are treated as autonomous adults, and there is an absence of punitive enforcement typical in other programs. The program takes seriously residents' individual agency. After an initial 30-day period, residents begin to attend school, look for employment and move forward toward meeting their self-identified goals.

### **4. A New Way of Life is "aimed simultaneously at personal transformation and transformation of the relations of power in which imprisonment is rooted."**

ANWOL actively challenges the discriminatory policies that impact formerly incarcerated people and provides opportunities for intellectual growth and political action. Residents participate in various campaigns and initiatives -- from testifying at the Board of Supervisors to participating in leadership training. The program fosters individual responsibility while facilitating analysis of a broader social context within which to understand their circumstances.