

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Media Contact: Rhonda Bannard

(602) 370-3560/Rhonda@inspiredconnections.net

**AWEE'S PATHS TO LIVING FREE PRISONER REENTRY PROGRAM RECEIVES  
THIRD YEAR OF FUNDING FROM U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR**

*Innovative Program Achieves Nine Percent Recidivism Rate for  
Ex-Offenders in Maricopa County*

**PHOENIX, Ariz. (June 19, 2008)** -- Arizona Women's Education & Employment (AWEE), Arizona's premier workforce development organization, is pleased to announce that its *Paths to Living Free* (PLF) prisoner reentry program has received its third year of funding thanks to a renewed U.S. Department of Labor Prisoner Reentry Initiative (PRI) grant for fiscal year 2008. AWEE's innovative program is currently exceeding enrollment goals and has achieved a documented recidivism rate of nine percent, about one-seventh of the 67.5 percent national average recently announced by the U.S. Department of Justice.

"We are grateful to our colleagues at the Department of Labor for supporting this program for another year and recognizing its importance to our community," said Marie Sullivan, president and CEO of AWEE. "*Paths to Living Free* is among the most successful and efficient programs for reducing recidivism and providing hope for ex-offenders, their families and the communities in which they live. We look forward to working with our service partners, area employers and our dedicated cadre of volunteers to help change the lives of growing numbers of ex-offenders in the months ahead."

PLF offers ex-offenders throughout Maricopa County a broad range of pre- and post-release services, including intensive work readiness training and placement classes. PLF participants can earn credits from local community colleges and receive GED preparation and testing services. AWEE also provides access to transitional employment, career development, substance abuse counseling, emergency and housing assistance, health care services, family reunification services and mentoring to help ex-offenders transition from prison to the workplace.

The program currently boasts employment rates of more than 70 percent and employment retention rates of about 60 percent. In 2007, the average six-month post-program earnings for an ex-offender participating in an AWEE re-entry program exceeded \$9 an hour.

**Dedicated Reentry Programs for Women, Men and Young Adult Offenders**

For almost three decades, AWEE's workforce development programs have benefited a broad spectrum of participants in Maricopa and Yavapai Counties, including a significant number of ex-

offenders. However, it is only in recent years that AWEE has begun developing programs specifically focused on the unique needs of ex-offenders and their families. These include AWEE's recently concluded *Women Living Free* (WLF) program and its new *Choices for Changes Lives* (CCL) program for male and female ex-offenders aged 18-29. All of these programs share a comprehensive approach that leverages AWEE's extensive network of partners and decades of workforce development expertise to prepare participants to reenter the workplace.

AWEE has garnered widespread acclaim for its outstanding record of accomplishment working with ex-offenders and is increasingly recognized as defining best practices for re-entry programs nationwide. Today, more than 500 released inmates are thriving in their lives after prison as a result of help from AWEE and its extended family of patrons, volunteers and community and business partners.

### **About AWEE**

Arizona Women's Education & Employment has been successfully investing in women, families and this community through life and career success planning, training and support for more than 27 years. To date, they have served and supported nearly 50,000 individuals in their quest to attain quality jobs that create positive changes and successful beginnings for themselves and their families. For more information, contact AWEE at (602) 223-4333 or visit [AWEE.org](http://AWEE.org).

# # #