

Media Contact: Rhonda Bannard  
(602) 370-3560/Rhonda@inspiredconnections.net

## **AWEE RECEIVES GRANTS FROM U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND MARICOPA COUNTY FOR NEW 'CAREER PATHS' AND 'PASSAGES' PROGRAMS**

*New Funding for Workforce Development Leader Underscores Essential Role of Prisoner Reentry Programs in Helping Ex-Offenders Survive the Economic Crisis and Rebuild Their Lives*

**PHOENIX, Ariz. (February 27, 2009)** -- Arizona Women's Education & Employment (AWEE), Arizona's premier workforce development organization, is pleased to announce that it has been recognized for the effectiveness of its prisoner reentry program with grants from the U.S. Department of Labor and Maricopa County totaling \$304,117 and up to \$500,000 respectively. The funds will be used to launch two new reentry programs, *PASSAGES* (Pathways to Success, Security and Gainful Employment Solutions) and *CAREER* (*Career Access for Successful Reentry, Employment and Reintegration*) Paths.

Both of these innovative programs are designed to reduce recidivism by helping adult ex-offenders find new jobs and renewed hope after they are released from prison and return to their communities. The recidivism problem is particularly acute in Maricopa County, which maintains the fifth largest jail jurisdiction in the nation and houses about 65 percent of the 38,905 Arizonans currently incarcerated in state prison facilities.

"The economic crisis has sharply curtailed spending by the government agencies and private foundations that have traditionally played a major role in supporting our workforce development programs," said Marie Sullivan, President and CEO of AWEE. "The funds that are made available come with stringent requirements concerning program performance and outcomes. Fortunately, AWEE is uniquely equipped to meet these requirements, thanks to our proven track-record of closely tracking the results of our workforce development programs to achieve meaningful and sustained measures of success. We intend to bring the same rigor and focus to our new *CAREER Paths* and *PASSAGES* programs."

### **About the PASSAGES Program Grant**

The grant from Maricopa County, which could total up to \$500,000, will fund a new reentry program called *PASSAGES*, which aims to provide 100 qualified ex-offenders aged 18 years and older with the mentoring, job training and comprehensive transitional services they need to find sustainable work when they return to their communities. Participants will be required to meet a variety of qualification criteria and to reside in one of the designated South Phoenix neighborhoods that have been identified through crime-mapping as having particularly high rates of crime and incarceration.

Because the grant is "performance-based," the amount of funding AWEE receives will vary based on the agency's success in meeting a series of well-defined program performance benchmarks. The *PASSAGES* program, which kicks off in mid-February, 2009, may be extended up to four additional years depending upon AWEE's success in meeting the County's performance objectives.

### **About the CAREER Paths Program Grant**

The new *CAREER Paths* program is funded through a U.S. Department of Labor grant that awarded a total of nearly \$5.5 million to faith-based and community organizations in 18 areas nationwide. The \$304,117 grant to AWEE targets 100 non-violent offenders aged 18 years and over who have successfully completed a

prior pre-release program funded by the U.S. Department of Justice. The new "post-release" program is designed to provide participants with the skills they need to prepare for, secure and retain gainful employment in high-growth occupations.

The "outcomes-based" grant requires AWEE to conduct quarterly reviews of its progress in job placement, retention and recidivism reduction. Based on these outcomes, the grant may be extended for two additional years. AWEE will manage the program and deliver services both directly and by leveraging the community outreach efforts of its two services partner, Childhelp/KEYS Community Center and My Brothers Keeper Lifeline. The grant was made under the auspices of the President's Prisoner Re-entry Initiative, a federal program intended to reduce recidivism by harnessing the combined resources of both secular and faith-based community organizations.

### **Dedicated Reentry Programs for Men, Women and Youthful 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 its highly successful *Paths to Living Free* (PLF) and *Choices for Changing Lives* (CCL) programs. 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 reentry program nationwide. The organization's evidence-based programs have a documented recidivism rate of only 13 percent (one year post-release), employment rates of 70 percent and employment retention rates of more than 60 percent (measured quarterly). Today, more than 800 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 28 years. To date, AWEE has served and supported nearly 60,000 women, men and young adults in their quest to attain quality jobs that create positive changes and successful beginnings for themselves and their families. The organization is currently placing almost 80 percent of its participants into new and better jobs paying an average of almost \$11 per hour, with an average wage increase of 125 percent after four months of work. For more information, contact AWEE at (602) 223-4333 or visit [AWEE.org](http://AWEE.org).

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