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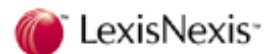
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## Vermont Program Puts Inmates to Work Building Affordable Housing

Dan Bustard  
 Eagle Times (Claremont, New Hampshire)  
 November 15, 2007

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Nov. 15--They pointed around the inside of 21 Summit Ave. to spots where they made their first cuts, put up their first cabinets and put in their first windows.

It is their modular home, built by inmates at the Southeast State Correctional Facility in Windsor. Now it is Nicole Gordon's home for her and her eight-year-old daughter, and the builders were justifiably proud.

"Everyday, they put their sweat and tears into it," said Robin Burton, an inmate involved in the home building program through Vermont Works For Women, during a ceremony honoring the second home built through the program held in Springfield Tuesday afternoon. "This is the greatest program in the world."


Dignitaries from across the state came to celebrate the unique partnership that allows the program to exist and thrive, helping to boost affordable housing on the one hand and provide valuable work and life skills for inmates on the other.

No one exhibited more pride in the accomplishment than those who pulled it off, and perhaps the only person as excited was Nicole Gordon, a Walpole native who lives in Brattleboro and works in Walpole but will have a much shorter commute once her purchase is completed by early next month.

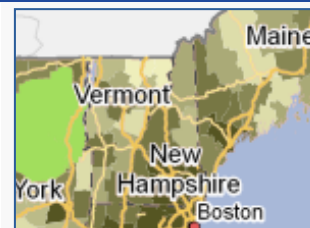
The ceremony was filled with humor, even as former inmates described how the program gave them new skills and new learning experiences. Patiance Johnson said it showed her she needs to take advantage of opportunities, though she described working with a group of women as taking "a lot of patience."

Johnson credited the program with helping her cope with the loss of parental rights, and Genevieve Hodgeman said, "It helped me out a lot

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DataPlace map: Pct. housing units in structures with 20 or more units in **New Hampshire** (dark=high)

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when I was there." Hodgeman found a job in construction when she finished serving her sentence.

Burton said she feels far more positive about her chances at finding a new job, saying she couldn't remember the last time she felt so confident.

The homebuilding program represents a partnership between Vermont Works for Women, the Rockingham Area Community Land Trust, Springfield Housing Authority, the Vermont Department of Corrections, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, the Vermont Department of Labor and the Vermont Housing Finance Agency.

The new three-bedroom, 1,000 square foot or so home is the third on Summit Avenue land the Springfield Housing Authority owns. Along with the two homes built by inmates in Windsor, the Springfield chapter of Habitat for Humanity built a house, and a fourth spot remains to be filled by a home being built by the carpentry program at the River Valley Technical Center in Springfield.

Frank Hatch, former chairman of the John Merck Fund that helped support Vermont Works For Women, said the partnership behind the program can save Vermont money by cutting down on recidivism, former inmates committing crimes, and can go along side with the state's well known cheese and syrup contributions.

"Vermont can also be known for damn good ideas," Hatch said.

Speakers also touched on the rising number of women within prisons in Vermont, a trend Corrections Commissioner Rob Hofmann said has turned the other way this year. Rep. Alice Emmons, D-Springfield, and a long time member of the House Institutions Committee, thanked the homebuilders for putting a "face on what it is inside our correctional facilities. We cannot forget you. You will be returning to our community. You have returned to our community. You are a vital piece of Vermont. We need you."

Jaxon Morgan, carpentry instructor for the modular home program, described the women as pioneers. Labor Commissioner Patricia Moulton Powden used stronger words.

"It's hearing your story that helps the me's of the world get out of bed in the morning," she said.

The project was funded through several public and private sources including the Vermont labor, corrections and children and families departments, Chittenden Bank, Agnes Lindsay Trust, Lydia B. Stokes Foundation, Key Bank and from the sale of the house.

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