

In U.S. Prisons And Jails

America Has 21,000 Forgotten Women

Special To The Post

"America has 21,000 'Forgotten Women.' They are the female prisoners in U.S. prisons and jails," charges Bernice Powell, long-time women's rights activist and director of a Project on Women in Prison supported by the Commission for Racial Justice of the 1.7 million member United Church of Christ.

"Once they are locked up, they become isolated from their families and communities. This makes rehabilitation extremely difficult," Ms. Powell says.

Separation of women offenders from their children is a major problem. Seventy percent of women prisoners are mothers, most single mothers. The Bureau of Justice Statistics estimates that 33,351 children have mothers who were incarcerated in 1984. More than half the female offenders do not get visits from their children while imprisoned.

To address this problem the National Black Child Development Institute, Washington, D.C., and Trinity United Church of Christ, Chicago, two of the groups working with the Women in Prison project, are developing a parenting curriculum for women prisoners and ex-offenders.

"Stereotypes of women prisoners have created negative images of them for many people," Ms. Powell explains. The project's purpose is to design ways to get local churches and community groups involved with women in prison. "We're working to let them know it is both acceptable and rewarding to work with women prisoners." Strategies to bring about legislative and legal reform as well as resources to aid church and community groups interested in starting programs to address the needs of female offenders are other aspects of the one-year project.

"While our project will benefit all women prisoners we're concentrating on the black community," Ms. Powell says. "Although black women represent less than 13 percent of the female adult population in the U.S., over 50 percent of incarcerated women are black."

"Relationships with family and friends are difficult for female offenders to maintain," she explains. "They get fewer visits than men. Cut off from their families and children, women prisoners often become depressed."

Some ways the project is already helping these otherwise "Forgotten Women" are a half-way house in Raleigh, N.C., a visitation program in Chicago, and an ex-offender

"hotline" in New York City.

The Rainbow-Harbor House, Raleigh, N.C., sponsored by the Gethsemane Rainbow partnership, provides a transitional half-way house for women ex-offenders which offers room and board, 24-hour supervision, and individual counseling while they seek employment and housing.

"They must be willing to take charge of their own lives," explains Delores Glenn, director of Rainbow House, and a member of the project's advisory committee. "We don't coddle them here. We give them support, which is 'tough-love.'"

To one resident, Rainbow-Harbor House "meant a roof over my head because I had no family and no friends. Most of all it means love and family." Now her goal is to "work with underprivileged people—like the handicapped—so I can show them love like I've been shown love," she says.

Rainbow-Harbor House receives \$15,000 a year from the City of Raleigh and is supported by church and civic groups. When the women find jobs they contribute \$35 a week while living there.

"Without a job these women will revert to their old ways," Ms. Glenn says. "They need a job they can take pride in and feel a part of."

To meet this need Ms. Glenn and her board of directors developed the Rainbow Upholstery Shop, where the women reupholster furniture.

"It's exciting to see the pride they take in their work," she says. "One of our goals is that this project will be fully staffed by ex-offenders, parolees and women on work release."

In Chicago, members of Trinity United Church of Christ visited women in Cook County Jail and provided a "social evening" of entertainment and refreshments. Now the restrictions have been increased and they can't bring any refreshments.

"The women are treated differently than the men are," explains Karen L. Cooper of Trinity's prison ministry. "The men have a full-time, regular education schedule for high school equivalency diplomas and college credits, while the women only have occasional classes. From what we could see, the women don't get access to the yard outside. When they're not in their cells they stay in a large room with a TV, like a herd of cattle in a pen."

Ms. Cooper describes her emotional reaction after a discussion with a 22-year-old incarcerated mother who never took proper care

of her child because she was too busy supporting her drug habit. "Now that she is facing time, she understands the harm she has done to her child," Ms. Cooper said. "I just cried all evening."

And in New York City the United Church of Christ's Metropolitan Association is developing a telephone "hotline" staffed by women ex-offenders that will provide support service referrals.

"Women who are coming out of prison in New York state have literally nowhere to turn for a support group, especially one comprised of other ex-offenders," reports Gwen Tomlin of the Riverside Church prison ministry.

"They need a variety of things. With the hotline we can ease some of the stress associated with coming from prison, especially during the first 30 days when finding a job seems like a catastrophe."

The United Church of Christ is a 1957 union of the Evangelical and Reformed Church and the Congregational Christian Churches. Its Commission for Racial Justice works with churches, interfaith groups and communities to combat discrimination and secure justice for blacks and other minorities.

A&T Alumni Scholars Program Attracts Bright Students

By Richard E. Moore

Special To The Post

Greensboro - What the National Alumni Scholars Program means to A&T State University can easily be measured by students like freshman Natalie McQueen.

When she graduated last spring from Person Senior High School in Roxboro, N.C., she could call the shots as far as attending college is concerned. After all, she had won at least six major college scholarships, thanks to her tremendously high SAT score.

But the articulate 17-year-old elected to attend A&T under the scholarship program financed by the A&T State University National Alumni Association. She has already attracted attention as an extremely bright young lady to be reckoned with.

Natalie has no regrets that she bypassed other academic heavyweights, including Duke University, North Carolina State University, and Meredith College.

"I know that I made the right decision," she said recently, "I just love A&T."

Natalie, an electrical engineering major, said she first learned about the prestigious A&T National Alumni Scholarships last summer



The Ushers of Steele Creek AME Zion Church recently hosted the monthly Ushers District Meeting. Because Steele Creek had the largest number of ushers represented, its ushers were proclaimed Ushers of the Month. In attendance were Cora Johnson, president of the Senior Usher Board, and Margaret Carothers,

president of the Charlotte District Board of Ushers. Rev. Smith Turner is the presiding elder of the district. And James Graham, who was absent, is president of the Senior Usher Board. There are 10 churches in the Charlotte district. Rev. Fred McCullough is pastor of Steele Creek.

while visiting A&T. An admissions counselor suggested that she apply for the grant and she did.

Natalie said she knew a lot about A&T, since her parents, Robert McQueen and Gwendolyn Nelson McQueen, are both graduates of A&T. "They feel great about my going to A&T," she said, "but they didn't pressure me about it."

Natalie's father is a telecommunications employee from IBM, and her mother teaches home economics in Roxboro.

Natalie spent last summer working in an engineering pre-coopera-

tive program at Carolina Power and Light in her hometown. That experience introduced her to engineering.

"I love math and science and it seemed the best way to combine the two," she said, "and I was impressed with the engineering school at A&T."

Natalie is one of 16 National

Alumni Scholars currently enrolled at A&T. Students selected for the program are provided with scholarships of \$2,000 per year for in-state students, and \$3,000 per year for out-of-state students.

In addition to the alumni scholarship, Natalie won scholarships from IBM and the National Achievement Scholarship Program.

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