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## HOPE AT DAWSON STATE JAIL

March 31, 2005, Texas HOPE Literacy received the *2005 Governor's Most Innovative Program Award* which was presented at the regularly scheduled Criminal Justice Board meeting in Austin, Texas.

This is the first time the Dawson State Jail has received a governor's award. The award was given in honor of **Unity City (HOPE Dorm 10-A)**.



Lucy Smith, Founder

Texas HOPE Literacy was founded in 1997 by Lucy Smith. HOPE is a faith based non-profit organization dedicated to providing churches, prison systems and community service organizations with customized program models designed to meet needs brought about by illiteracy and learning disabilities among adult inmates, incarcerated juvenile offenders, at-risk youth and children.

The concept of *city governance*, whereby offenders learn to govern themselves under the auspices of prison governance was a new concept for HOPE. The prototype of *city governance* is operative at the Dawson State Jail in downtown Dallas. Since Dawson has limited programming space, Warden Keeton asked Lucy Smith to implement the HOPE Literacy program in a dorm setting of 54 female offenders. In order to provide quality programming in this type of environment, there needed to be a structure that would engage the offenders to take ownership in the HOPE program.

The intent is to give the offenders autonomy and teach them to coexist in a community comparable to the free world. In this environment, they assume responsibility and hold each other accountable for their behaviors and actions. They learn to plan and think before speaking or acting out, to maintain respect for the staff and their peers, to encourage and uplift others in the dorm, to become positive role models, and to make necessary adjustments in their lives prior to release.

Volunteers, knowledgeable in city government, came to Dawson to help the ladies learn how to campaign to elect their own Mayor, City Council members, and City Manager. Following the election, the ladies formed Boards so that each member of the community would be an active participating member. The 54 female residents in Dorm 10A held their first election in 2004. At this time they voted to name the city *Unity*. The Dorm was divided into three neighborhoods and nine families, with names being voted on for each. Permission was granted for the ladies to paint their walls with pictures that would visually depict HOPE. *Unity City* has enabled HOPE to implement the educational component in an effective manner. Needless to say, the ladies are very excited about the potential for growth with this innovative concept. The best news is that Warden Keeton says it is his best dorm on the unit.

In June 2005, the ladies held a second election since most of their elected officials had or were being released. They gave campaign speeches, and several of the candidates had campaign "managers." It was a positive experience for the candidates as well as the voters. *Unity City's* previous mayor was released about a month ago. She has been accepted at a local university, and starts this summer. She will be majoring in psychology. One of the students, recently released, has also been accepted at a local university. Both ladies are maintaining contact with HOPE volunteers.

In addition to *Unity City* at Dawson State Jail, customized HOPE models are operating at Hutchins State Jail (Male), Dallas, TX, Gatesville Trusty Camp (Female), Gatesville, TX, and Freedom Initiative InnerChange at the Carol Vance Unit, (Male) Sugarland, Texas.

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