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## Gemeinschaft Home Lands Grant For Rehab Program

Delancey Street A Model For Halfway Houses

By **DAN WRIGHT**

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Shirley Lamarr was introduced to Delancey Street by a California judge 15 years ago.

At the time, Lamarr was sitting in jail, hooked on heroin, a single mother who had been in a string of violent relationships.

Instead of handing down a recommended 8-year sentence for burglary, the judge sent Lamarr to Delancey Street for two years.

Delancey Street's rehabilitation program stuck.

"And I thank God every day," said Lamarr, who is now replication coordinator for the Delancey Street Foundation. Lamarr is in Harrisonburg this week helping Gemeinschaft Home adapt the Delancey Street model to its program.

Gemeinschaft was awarded a \$50,000 grant from the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation to create a partnership with Delancey Street.

Delancey Street is one of the most successful rehabilitative and educational institutions for ex-offenders and drug users in the world. The program, which was founded by Dr. Mimi Silbert in San Francisco in 1971, has achieved unprecedented results with what Lamarr calls "society's throwaways."

The program, Lamarr adds, teaches men and women to be "the best of who you are, instead of the worst of who you are."

"We take the bottom 2 percent of society," the 55-year-old Lamarr said. Ex-felons, drug addicts and alcoholics are taught the skills needed to rebuild their lives.

"We have three cardinal rules," Lamarr said. "No violence, no threats of violence and no drugs or alcohol."

The program has transformed more than 14,000 people from America's underclass into tax paying citizens leading productive lives, Lamarr said.

"When I was studying substance abuse counseling, Delancey Street is what I read about," said Jennie Amison, executive director of Gemeinschaft Home.

In her passion for Delancey Street, Amison begins to sound like an evangelist. "For me, it's anointing," she said. This is what I was called to do."

A native of Norfolk, Amison has a history similar to Lamarr's — years of drug use and living on the streets. In her office, she has framed a certificate and letter from the governor restoring her voting rights, which were lost after a felony conviction.

People coming out of jail or cleaning up from drug abuse have to change everything about their lives, Amison explained, which makes Delancey Street a perfect fit for Gemeinschaft.

"We have a 78 percent success rate in keeping men from returning to jail," Amison, 53, said. "What we do works."

### Training School And Business

As a partner with Delancey Street, Gemeinschaft will function as a business and a training school.



Holly Marcus / DN-R

Jennie Amison (right) executive director of the Gemeinschaft Home, introduces Shirley Lamarr (left) of the Delancey Street Foundation to Jerry DuBois, former resident and now staff cook at the home. Lamarr came to speak to residents about their life after they graduate from Gemeinschaft program.

Using its core philosophy, "each one teach one," Delancey Street has developed more than 20 enterprises, including a restaurant, moving and trucking company, and bookstore.

"Delancey Street doesn't cost the taxpayer one quarter because we're self-sufficient," Lamarr said.

Following that model, Gemeinschaft has already begun work on an auto detailing shop, to be operated by Gemeinschaft residents and former residents.

The shop will be located off Early Road, near Harrisonburg Auto Auction, which sells about 2,000 vehicles a week.

"We're networking with some of the dealerships as well as the auto auction," said Lawrence Andrews, a former resident of Gemeinschaft.

Andrews, 38, was in prison for five years and requested to come to Gemeinschaft when he was about to be released. He's looking forward to working in the detailing shop.

"I knew I needed to change," Andrews said. "And over the years, I realized that nobody could do it but me."

With new job skills, Andrews is an example of what Gemeinschaft can do as it begins its partnership with Delancey Street.

With \$50,000 start-up money, Gemeinschaft will seek matching funds from other foundations and localities. They also want to partner with organizations in the community, such as A&E Automotive Inc., which is training the residents in auto detailing.

"We have a wealth of resources at our fingertips," Amison said. "Sometimes, all you have to do is ask and I don't have a problem asking."