



U.S. Department of Labor
Women's Bureau



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Women's Bureau Mission

The Women's Bureau's mission is to improve the status of wage-earning women, improve their working conditions, increase their efficiency, and advance their opportunities for profitable employment.

Women's Bureau Vision

The Women's Bureau promotes 21st Century solutions to improve the status of working women and their families.

"Better Jobs, Better Earnings, Better Living"



Vermont WWIT



Building Modular Homes:

WWIT Trains Women for Better Jobs Outside Prison Walls



Women incarcerated at SESCOF building affordable housing and learning construction skills.
 (Photo by Jon Olender)

The Women's Bureau's Working Women in Transition (WWIT) project in Vermont prepares incarcerated women to transition out of prison into better jobs with better earnings. On February 6, 2007, Women's Bureau Director Shinae Chun visited the Southeast State Correctional Facility (SESCF) in Windsor, Vermont, to observe WWIT participants learning construction skills, building a modular home, and developing resumes -- all within prison grounds. "We are giving women a second chance," she declared. "This program offers a unique opportunity for incarcerated women."

The Women's Bureau contracted with Vermont Works for Women (VWW) to provide these women with hands-on training in finish and frame carpentry, electrical wiring, plumbing, weatherization, painting, and roofing, as well as soft skills training in resume writing, communication skills, and interview techniques.

WWIT participants are matched with successful women in the community who volunteer to serve as mentors both during incarceration and after release. Mentors arrange informational interviews with employers, set up job-shadow experiences, connect participants with other women in the community, coach participants in job interview skills, and provide the support these women need as they begin new jobs or educational programs. Tiffany Bluemle, VWW Executive Director, describes the goal of the WWIT project as "giving the women everything they need so that they never have to come back to prison."

One successful graduate, Kim Tyler-Greene, was 48 years old when she arrived at Southeast State. She was assigned to the garden crew and was reluctant to join the building program. However, she soon found that "it changed my life. I never missed a day of work there during my six months. We built a home for a low-income family . . . My self-confidence is high, and I'm making good judgments now." When Kim was released from prison, she found a construction job through the Vermont Department of Labor On-the-Job Training Program and later acquired an even higher-paying carpentry position.



Participant at SESCOF improves her construction skills by installing a door on a modular home.
(Photo by John Olender)

The staff at Southeast State Correctional Facility sees the difference in the confidence levels of the women in the WWIT home-building program. One official observed, "They walk around with their heads held high." New job skills, team building, and values clarification contribute to increased self-esteem, which helps these women face the challenges of post-prison life. Director Chun's belief in second chances was reinforced when four participants publicly credited the WWIT program with giving them tools and **hope** for a better future for themselves and their children.

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