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Breaking the cycle of crime—jail—more crime—more jail: This is what AWE is all about.

Tammy: Transformation

"Will the defendant please rise?" the judge asked.

This wasn't the first time Tammy had stood before a judge. But perhaps being there shouldn't be a surprise when she still used drugs at age 35. Despite the drugs, Tammy had always worked, supporting three children and a husband. He used drugs, too—so much he couldn't work. But had he ever been arrested? No. Tammy, however, had gone to jail twice, and now she awaited sentencing a third time. Her parents looked on, heartbroken. Her father sat straight in his wheelchair, his face a mask. Her mother blinked back tears. Finally the judge said, "I sentence you to seven years in the penitentiary."

Seven years! That meant Tammy wouldn't see her twin daughters until they had graduated from high school. And what would happen to ten-year-old Reggie? His behavior was already getting him in trouble. She turned to wave awkwardly at her parents before following the deputy back to the jail.

Five years later, Tammy heard the news she dreaded over the phone in the day room at the jail. Her father was dead. "I wondered," she said later, "if he ever thought I could turn my life around. I wish he had lived long enough to see the change. Of course when I heard he was dead, I worried more about my mom. Would she be able to take care of the kids by herself? My daughters seemed OK, but Reggie had already been through juvenile court. I wondered if I could ever change. I wanted to do it for my dad."

Tammy knew she could do something with her life. She had been hired on the streets after one interview, holding that job until her imprisonment. She made friends easily. She earned a GED. But could she ever *really* change?

The answer came when Tammy followed her cellmate's urging to enroll in AWE's cognitive/behavioral change program—Achieving Your Potential (AYP). During the eight week program, she began to identify a lifetime of dysfunctional thinking and behavior. As she watched videos and read her workbook, she learned about her blind spots and the *reasons* she kept sabotaging herself. With the help of the other women in her group, she persevered in the long, hard work of dealing with the poor choices she'd made. And very importantly, Tammy not only recognized her immense potential but also applied herself in developing it.

Today, Tammy is a free woman. With her children grown, she has her own apartment and is living alone for the first time in her life. She knows she needs no partner to validate her worth. She treasures the new friends she's made, and she enjoys her own company. "I know I can't make up for the years I missed with my kids. But I'm sure trying to be the best mother and grandmother I can be right now." Tammy's children are learning that it's not only possible to change, but that somebody can transform—even after 40 years of poor choices.

Since Tammy's mother died last year, Tammy stays in touch with us at AWE frequently. Recently she said, "It's hard for me sometimes to forgive myself for being the kind of mother I was, but I couldn't change what I wasn't aware of. Now I know what needs to be different, and I have help. Thank you for recognizing something good in me and helping me to see it too. Thanks for being there now when I need to talk."

AWE understands that many incarcerated persons need to change their dysfunctional thinking and behavior if they are to develop their potential. With the help of donors, AWE can continue providing opportunities that prevent people like Tammy from appearing before a judge yet another time.

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