

Newport Life
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Outreach program helped ex-inmate to regain dignity

By Joe Baker/Daily News staff

Virginia Cherry was on a downward spiral.

She moved to Newport from her native Baltimore in 2003. Although she had never been in trouble before, her life hit a rough patch after she arrived. She got involved with the wrong people. She started using and then selling crack.

Last fall, she was arrested on a charge of domestic violence. Unable to pay her bail, Cherry was in state prison when she learned she also was being charged with selling crack cocaine. She pleaded no contest to the crack charge and was sentenced to four months in prison.

Before she was due to be released, a prison discharge planner put Cherry in touch with Cheryl Robinson, of the Newport-based [Turning Around Ministries](#).

But when she was let out of prison in January, Cherry did not contact Robinson right away. She did turn to Robinson for help, though, when her daughter-in-law kicked her out of the house.

"They provided shelter for me. They provided me food, transportation, guidance," Cherry said of the faith-based community outreach program more commonly known as TAM. "They did everything like a big-sister setting."

Cherry now goes to drug counseling at CODAC. She isn't working because she is collecting disability, but she has her own apartment at the McKinney Shelter on Farewell Street in Newport. Her apartment is a source of pride.

"(The apartment) might not be the biggest and best, but it's mine," Cherry said. "I made a mistake. I paid my debt. Now I'm back and doing the best I can. I love paying rent. It gives me myself back."

Cherry, 51, has no illusions though. She knows that Turning Around Ministries can only offer her a helping hand. She has to do the heavy lifting herself.

"They can help out, but you've got to want the help," Cherry said. "This program gives you a chance to redefine yourself. It's a blessing. I have my life back just because somebody gives a damn (about me)."



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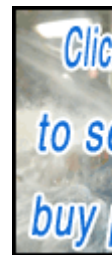


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