

Toastmasters Release Captives:

The Next Step

By Jim Arnold

Last summer, UMMen highlighted the effectiveness of a Toastmasters program for prison inmates operated by Skills for Life. Skills for Life, Inc. is a Houston based non-profit corporation. Skills for Life, Inc. was organized for the purpose of reducing the recidivism rate in our nation's prisons by instilling Christian behavior through the development of social, communication and leadership skills of the incarcerated.

Leaders from Skills for Life minister to the incarcerated by running weekly supervised meetings, which teach public speaking, personal responsibility and leadership skills. These two-hour long meetings provide an impetus for inmates to help each other to learn.

The results?—this program transforms lives. Inmates develop a meeting community where they display dignity, courtesy and respect for each other. Evidence of increased self-esteem abounds.

The Next Step - Currently, Skills For Life, Inc. is constructing its website, skillsforlifepm.com. Once completed, people will be able to visit the web site and download a 5 minute overview of a Toastmasters meeting done by the inmates at Central Prison.

This overview will provide individuals and local churches an inside view as to the effectiveness Toastmasters. You can then order from us a DVD or video tape of the entire meeting. The DVD will contain both the full length meeting and the ability to look at any segment of the meeting (speeches, introductions, evaluations, table topics, etc.). Once other Toastmasters clubs are established in other units, their talks can be video taped and sent to Skills for Life to be placed on the website.

The program director for Texas Dept. of Criminal Justice granted Skills for Life permission from to go into any state prison and video tape the inmates giving their speeches (provided the warden and chaplain agree). People are amazed by the quality and depth of these talks. The talks will fall into four categories—inmate issues, religious issues, societal issues, and just for fun. Talks will also be placed on the web site for downloading for use in prisons and for discussion. To order resources or for more information contact Jim Arnold at:

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