

7TH STEP GROUP FORMED

Ex-Convicts Help Each Other

BY JACK BOETTNER
Times Staff Writer



Santa Ana Police Chief Edward Allen says he likes the 7th Step program, an approach geared to achieving freedom.

"No one can help another unless the person truly wants to help himself," Allen said. "Here we have a group of men in difficulty who want to help themselves and have banded together with this thought in mind.

"It's an excellent idea. It is the group therapy idea and has been practiced successfully. These men in the 7th Step group apparently want to improve themselves without indulgence and self-pity. There can never be a cure by indulgence."

Sheriff James Musick says he is not familiar enough with the 7th Step program to comment.

But Fullerton Police Chief Wayne Bornhoft contends that "anything along the line that tends to help persons who have run afoul of the law to rehabilitate is certainly good.

Successful Movement

"I haven't looked into the 7th Step so I really know nothing about it personally. If it does what it purports to do then it will be a good thing."

Superior Judge Kenneth Williams, former Orange County district attorney, believes the 7th Step movement will be successful "if it takes into account the propensities of those persons who use the service."

Cecil Hicks, who succeeded Williams as district attorney, has not yet had any experience with the

Johnny Urdaburn looks the part of a used car salesman as he shuffles among the shiny cars on a Santa Ana lot.

He is neatly dressed, gifted of tongue, ready to close a deal.

At day's end he goes home to an apartment in Anaheim. He was divorced many years ago.

But Johnny is different.

Urdaburn, 60, is an ex-convict—a four-time loser. He is striving to find the key to a life outside prison walls. He believes the 7th Step Foundation is the answer.

Chapter Organized

Urdaburn is secretary and public relations director for the foundation chapter being organized for Orange County. Its operation closely parallels Alcoholics Anonymous.

"Our No. 1 objective is to maintain our freedom," Urdaburn points out. "As ex-convicts we're out to help each other regardless of the time—day or night. We can talk their language to find out what's on their minds.

"A double-talker won't get far and I don't care how tough he is.

"The odds are far better for rehabilitation of ex-convicts now than they were—say—10 years ago. If we succeed we become taxpayers instead of tax eaters. I've spent 19 years in prison—Folsom, Quentin, Chino—and I've been out on the bricks now for nearly four months."

Ray Stock. The foundation's purpose is to help ex-convicts rehabilitate themselves and become useful members of society. Meetings are held in Fullerton.

STUDY SESSION—Discussing bylaws for 7th Step Foundation under formation in Orange County are, from left, Bob Hart, president; Johnny Urdaburn and

Times photo

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Ex-Convicts Set Up Goal of Self Help

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"I did not know that the chapter was under formation here," Hicks said. "However, I can't see but what it will be a profitable venture. The fact they are motivated themselves would reduce prison re-entries."

"They apparently are setting for themselves a goal of staying out of conflict with the law. They obviously are getting together to discuss their problems and temptations. Motivation is the key. Many ex-convicts are going back to prison because they do not have the internal motivation to get squared away."

In Habern and Ross Olin and Bob Land, both in the Orange County 7th Step unit, helped launch the foundation's chapter in Chino Prison on Aug. 22, 1963. Olin was the coordinator of the Temecula chapter advisory committee.

Little Attention
Olin, now the operator of a television repair service in Lynwood and a Garden Grove resident, says, "It was something different for us. We didn't pay too much attention to the idea at first."

"But after a while we found the truth of it. It really was working on the outside."

"Several 7th Stepers came in to Chino and talked to us. One was an executive with General Motors and another the manager of a large merchandising setup."

"They had made it. They showed us an ex-convict can straighten up and be accepted by society if he wants to do it. I decided that if they can do it so can I."

"I'm a businessman now and have been completely accepted by my community. I have a wife and daughter. I too can show the ex-convict that it can be done."

The county 7th Step group has held its five pilot meetings as required by the national foundation and is ready to apply for official standing, according to Bob Hart, acting president.

Hart is a "house job" (a non-convict) and manager of a car agency's body shop.

"I would expect that we will be granted our charter within five weeks," Hart said. "Then we can really get going. After we have been chartered we will be required to so notify the Department of Corrections in Sacramento."

The group meets at Room 27, 215 N. Lemon St., Fullerton, from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m. each Thursday. Its post office box number in Fullerton is 207. All ex-convicts are welcome, says Hart.

\$15,000 Cost
He estimates it will take approximately \$15,000 a year to support an office, telephone answering service and a full-time staff man.

Funds to operate the chapter will have to come from donations, Hart said. "There is no membership charge."

The chapter employes would keep records on ex-convicts available for work and places of possible employment. He would take the former prison inmate to the prospective employer and assist with the interview.

"However," Hart says, "your reformation is not just a salvage yard, but a preventive yard. We'd like to halt a crime before it can occur. We hope to supply three or four of our ex-convicts for an assembly at Buena Park High School before the semester is over. Let the kids fire the questions at the guys who have been through it and who know crime doesn't pay."

Check List
The building chapter already has set up a close liaison with Fullerton churches.

The board of directors of the proposed county chapter is made up of Art Hart, businessman, vice president; Ray Block, business man, treasurer; Landon Thompson, businessman; bylaw chairman and Bob Hart—some of whom have been involved with the law, U-habern, Olin, Bob Land and Jas. Vastano, all ex-convicts.

Vastano, tall and dark haired, says: "When I left the gate of San Quentin last October I had no money. A 7th Step man met me outside the gates, drove me where I wanted to go, helped me find a room and a job."

Vastano is an electric motor mechanic. James Betty, assistant regional administrator for the parole and community service division of the State Department of Corrections, says a lot of good in the 7th Step Foundation.

"I see nothing wrong with their philosophy," he said. "We want to help the ex-convict wherever we can. We are working for the same end."

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