

“Mothers Learn ‘SMART’ Concept at Imani Family Center: Director helps women clear hurdles of addiction”

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Belinda Pittman has the most challenging job of her life: teaching abused and addicted mothers to save themselves and move on with their lives.

She's reaped professional success in seeing her clients transform themselves into healthy, recovering women who support each other and take care of their children.

On a personal level, Pittman has overcome a barrier herself: dyslexia, a learning disability that affects reading and writing.

Pittman is co-founder and executive director of Imani Family Center, 5736 N. 63rd St.

She acknowledged that she had to learn to change the changeable, or accept what is, and move on.

Pittman said she accepts her disability, but she worked to keep it from being a handicap. She writes a lot.

And you should see her many written presentations about jumping hurdles, goal-setting and believing in oneself.

For example, she created the SMART concept as a way of teaching her clients. S stands for special, M for measurable, A for attainable, R for reachable and T for timing.

"We follow the SMART concept here," she says.

At first, she says, the 32 to 38-year-old women told her, "I've been in so many programs, I'm programmed out. What's different about yours? You just want to get paid, too."

They were shocked, Pittman said, when she told them she doesn't get state money or a paycheck for their services.

"I told them, 'If it weren't for my fiance, I couldn't pay my rent.' "

The 11 mothers, and 20 children total, pay 90% of their salaries for living expenses at the Imani Center in the six-month to two-year program.

The center got started on hopes, prayers and tons of furniture donations and money to pay a security deposit on the building.

For years, Pittman aspired to work with women and help them improve their self-esteem, set goals and "reach" women.

"We even talked about our plans when we worked together at her cleaning business and at other treatment centers," said Allie Ndiaye, Pittman's partner, who is an alcohol and drug counselor.

"We work well together; we have the same desires and ideas about how to treat women who have repeat relapses.

"We talk it out when there are differences; our good relationship sets a positive example for the women who had to learn to get along well, too."

Pittman, a divorced mother who raised three children alone, said the women's stories are different today.

"The moms now have jobs. They take care of their kids, and they're learning to develop healthy relationships.

"All of us have learned and grown together," she said.

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