Elayn Hunt Correctional Center nurse practitioner Joni Nickens, left, and inmate Ellis Banks discuss the options available to him for his HIV/AIDS treatment outside prison once he is released. A new program in the greater Baton Rouge area seeks to link former prisoners with various services, including medical treatment, before they are released.

HIV/AIDS after prison

State-federal program gives soon-to-be-released inmates a safety net

By AMY WOLD
Advocate staff writer

Five days before Ellis Banks finished serving his sentence at Elayn Hunt Correctional Center in St. Gabriel, he already had a doctor’s appointment scheduled for after his release.

Banks, 32, had known about his HIV-positive status since 1990, when he was tested upon being incarcerated at the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola.

However, he didn’t address the disease for years. “I really didn’t accept it then because I really didn’t believe it,” Banks said. “As the years went on, I started seeing a difference in myself because I didn’t take my medicine.”

Because of a relatively new state- and federally funded program, Prison Project, Banks and other HIV-positive inmates in Louisiana are leaving prison better educated about the disease and with medical appointments to continue their treatment, in addition to connections with caseworkers who have access to other services.

Inmates can't be tested for HIV without their consent. If inmates have HIV/AIDS, they don’t have to tell anyone — including fellow inmates and their families, friends and partners — they are infected.

No one can say with certainty if, or to what extent, former inmates who are HIV-positive have contributed to the spread of the disease in Louisiana or other states. Testing policies in all U.S. prisons are inconsistent. There is also a stigma attached to the risky behavior associated with the disease, meaning inmates who may be infected might not seek help.

Prison Project does not monitor HIV-positive inmates. The program is an option for them prior to leaving prison.

Where to get help for HIV/AIDS, Page 4A

THE ADVOCATE
BATON ROUGE, LA

Date: 1-5-03
SecA 8-1
Col1
Adapted staff photos by Travis Sprading

Advocate graphic

Inmate Robert Landry, who teaches boxing, uses that sport to educate new inmates during the HIV/AIDS peer education leadership meeting at Elwyn Hunt Correctional Center in St. Gabriel. The inmates, new counselors are counseled on how to avoid contracting diseases like HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C.

HIV/AIDS and where to get help

AIDS, acquired immune deficiency syndrome, is a blood-borne disease that damages the immune system and is spread primarily through unprotected sexual intercourse and intravenous drug use. AIDS, which can also be spread through blood transfusions and from mother to child during pregnancy, can affect all ages and races. There is no known cure for the disease, which has claimed more than 20 million lives worldwide since it was first reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States in the early 1980s.

According to national figures, the numbers of HIV/AIDS cases are under-reported and it is estimated that there are at least 12,000 individuals in the United States infected with HIV/AIDS who are unaware of their infection.

Information and assistance

If you or someone you know is at-risk for HIV/AIDS, the Baton Rouge AIDS Society, 4550 North Blvd., Suite 101, offers a class about sexually transmitted diseases from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. each Thursday at the Society's headquarters.

The class is free, as are HIV testing and counseling, which are available at the Society's headquarters and Friday at the Holy Cross Catholic Church, 2251-223-2473.

The estimated number of people living with HIV and AIDS worldwide was 42 million.

The estimated number of people worldwide who had died of complications from AIDS was 20 million.

Facts and Figures

According to the Louisiana Office of Public Health, as of Dec. 31, 2002:

- There were 8,692 Louisiana residents known to be living with AIDS.
- 14,294 are known to be HIV-positive and 7,857 have died of complications from AIDS.
- The cumulative number of people living with HIV and AIDS in the United States was 347,910.
- The cumulative number of people known to have died of complications from HIV/AIDS is 477,910.

At the end of each presentation, Hunt's peer counselors encourage inmates to get tested if they have engaged in risky behavior.

Elwyn Hunt Correctional Center inmate William Wallace raises his hand to ask a question during a recent HIV/AIDS peer education leadership meeting. Hunt educates all inmates about the disease upon their entry into the facility.

Scallops estimated that between April and November, $33,000 in Title II case management money was spent on the 63 newly released inmates and in and around Baton Rouge.

Prison Project ties in with a district judge that the state Department of Corrections is taking, Hegmann said.

"We’re all about taking care of people while they’re with us," he said, "but there isn’t much of a safety net in helping people once they leave the institution."

Hegmann said.

While the state pays for testing and treatment of HIV-positive inmates, federal Ryan White Title II money helps to cover case management.

Information and assistance

If you or someone you know is at-risk for HIV/AIDS, the Baton Rouge AIDS Society, 4550 North Blvd., Suite 101, offers a class about sexually transmitted diseases from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. each Thursday at the Society's headquarters. The class is free, as are HIV testing and counseling, which are available at the Society's headquarters and Friday at the Holy Cross Catholic Church, 2251-223-2473.

The estimated number of people living with HIV and AIDS worldwide was 42 million.

The estimated number of people worldwide who had died of complications from AIDS was 20 million.

Facts and Figures

According to the Louisiana Office of Public Health, as of Dec. 31, 2002:

- There were 8,692 Louisiana residents known to be living with AIDS.
- 14,294 are known to be HIV-positive and 7,857 have died of complications from AIDS.
- The cumulative number of people living with HIV and AIDS in the United States was 347,910.
- The cumulative number of people known to have died of complications from HIV/AIDS is 477,910.

At the end of each presentation, Hunt's peer counselors encourage inmates to get tested if they have engaged in risky behavior.

Elwyn Hunt Correctional Center inmate William Wallace raises his hand to ask a question during a recent HIV/AIDS peer education leadership meeting. Hunt educates all inmates about the disease upon their entry into the facility.

Scallops estimated that between April and November, $33,000 in Title II case management money was spent on the 63 newly released inmates and in and around Baton Rouge.

Prison Project ties in with a district judge that the state Department of Corrections is taking, Hegmann said.

"We’re all about taking care of people while they’re with us," he said, "but there isn’t much of a safety net in helping people once they leave the institution."

Hegmann said.

While the state pays for testing and treatment of HIV-positive inmates, federal Ryan White Title II money helps to cover case management.

Information and assistance

If you or someone you know is at-risk for HIV/AIDS, the Baton Rouge AIDS Society, 4550 North Blvd., Suite 101, offers a class about sexually transmitted diseases from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. each Thursday at the Society's headquarters.

The class is free, as are HIV testing and counseling, which are available at the Society's headquarters and Friday at the Holy Cross Catholic Church, 2251-223-2473.

The estimated number of people living with HIV and AIDS worldwide was 42 million.

The estimated number of people worldwide who had died of complications from AIDS was 20 million.

Facts and Figures

According to the Louisiana Office of Public Health, as of Dec. 31, 2002:

- There were 8,692 Louisiana residents known to be living with AIDS.
- 14,294 are known to be HIV-positive and 7,857 have died of complications from AIDS.
- The cumulative number of people living with HIV and AIDS in the United States was 347,910.
- The cumulative number of people known to have died of complications from HIV/AIDS is 477,910.

At the end of each presentation, Hunt's peer counselors encourage inmates to get tested if they have engaged in risky behavior.

Elwyn Hunt Correctional Center inmate William Wallace raises his hand to ask a question during a recent HIV/AIDS peer education leadership meeting. Hunt educates all inmates about the disease upon their entry into the facility.

Scallops estimated that between April and November, $33,000 in Title II case management money was spent on the 63 newly released inmates and in and around Baton Rouge.

Prison Project ties in with a district judge that the state Department of Corrections is taking, Hegmann said.

"We’re all about taking care of people while they’re with us," he said, "but there isn’t much of a safety net in helping people once they leave the institution."

Hegmann said.

While the state pays for testing and treatment of HIV-positive inmates, federal Ryan White Title II money helps to cover case management.

Information and assistance

If you or someone you know is at-risk for HIV/AIDS, the Baton Rouge AIDS Society, 4550 North Blvd., Suite 101, offers a class about sexually transmitted diseases from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. each Thursday at the Society's headquarters.

The class is free, as are HIV testing and counseling, which are available at the Society's headquarters and Friday at the Holy Cross Catholic Church, 2251-223-2473.

The estimated number of people living with HIV and AIDS worldwide was 42 million.

The estimated number of people worldwide who had died of complications from AIDS was 20 million.

Facts and Figures

According to the Louisiana Office of Public Health, as of Dec. 31, 2002:

- There were 8,692 Louisiana residents known to be living with AIDS.
- 14,294 are known to be HIV-positive and 7,857 have died of complications from AIDS.
- The cumulative number of people living with HIV and AIDS in the United States was 347,910.
- The cumulative number of people known to have died of complications from HIV/AIDS is 477,910.

At the end of each presentation, Hunt's peer counselors encourage inmates to get tested if they have engaged in risky behavior. 