

Grads mark new start



Photos by John Rowland/jrowland@theadvertiser.com

E.J. Berry leads the Voices of Recovery Choir during Friday's Acadiana Outreach Center's Job Opportunity Training Center graduation ceremony. Graduates work to overcome substance abuse or behavioral disorders to achieve balance in their lives, said Todd Dugas, director of programs at Acadiana Outreach.

Program seeks to bring balance to lives in crisis

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Eleven people began new chapters in their lives Friday night as they graduated from the Acadiana Outreach Center's Job Opportunity Training Center program.

Todd Dugas, director of programs at Acadiana Outreach, said each of the graduates has worked for the past nine months to achieve a balance in their lives and get back on their feet after battling multiple problems.

On the Web

For more information about Acadiana Outreach Center, go to www.theoutreachctr.org.

"Each of the participants in this program has to have co-occurring disorders, such as substance abuse and a psychiatric disorder," he said. "When they come in, we talk to them about 10 basic outcome areas, including mental stability, sobriety and employment, and we also look at areas specific to their situation, such as child support or legal fees."

The program is designed in phases, so that participants can measure success through various steps in the process, Dugas said.

Jim McGehee, a member



Mary Francis celebrates her graduation Friday from the Acadiana Outreach Center's Job Opportunity Training Center.

of the Outreach Center's board of directors, said program participants' family and friends are also a vital part of the recovery process.

"It takes family members

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and loved ones to help us along the way," McGehee said. "It is your support we all rely on when things get tough."

One of Friday's graduates, Nora Sparks, said the best part about the program was the structure it provided.

"I felt I really needed that," said Sparks, a recovering alcoholic and crack-cocaine addict. "This program has totally changed my life. They've taught me a new way to tackle the challenges in my life, and I stay focused."