

# ANNA LOUISE GRADUATION



Photos by Leigh Taylor/The Enquirer

Graduate **Amanda Hughes**, right, receives a handmade quilt from facilitator **Lisha Lungelow** after the Off the Streets graduation at the Anna Louise Inn.

## MORE THAN A MILESTONE

### Program helps women beat addiction, prostitution

By **Mark Curnutte**  
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**Jennifer Roether**, right, gets a hug from volunteer **Nancy Baxter** during the Off the Streets graduation. Roether was one of seven graduates.

Amanda Hughes started at less than zero.

Her mother was a heroin-addicted prostitute who used the drug while pregnant with Amanda.

She introduced her daughter to prostitution, and Amanda would spend more than 10 years selling her body to feed her own alcohol and drug addictions.

On Friday afternoon, in a basement meeting room at the Anna Louise Inn in Lytle Park, Hughes marked a significant milestone.

Now 14 months clean and sober, and six months into a steady job at a fast-food restaurant, Hughes graduated from a rehab

program for addicted and broken women, Off the Streets.

"This program taught me to be a lady," Hughes, now 30, told an audience of friends, relatives and program supporters – including Cincinnati Vice Mayor Roxanne Qualls – who gathered for the seven graduates.

The ceremony comes at

a time when the Off the Streets program and the Anna Louise Inn, as well as their parent nonprofit, Cincinnati Union Bethel, have been embroiled in a legal battle with their corporate neighbor, Western & Southern Financial Group.

Western & Southern has tried to stop Union

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# Local

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### ABOUT OFF THE STREETS

Off the Streets, a rehabilitation program for addicted women who were prostitutes, was started in April 2006 by Cincinnati Union Bethel.

Of more than 400 women who entered the program, 226 (58 percent) stayed involved for at least 30 days, a threshold of long-term recovery. More than 8 in 10 of participants acquired housing at Anna Louise Inn, and 7 in 10 secured employment or educational placement; 89 percent did not return to

prostitution. Eight in 10 women reported that they no longer used alcohol or drugs once they completed the entire Off the Streets program.

Source: Cincinnati Union Bethel

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# Streets: Program helps women stay off them

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Bethel's \$12.4 million plan to renovate the inn because it wanted to buy the building and develop it into high-end condominiums. On Monday, the Cincinnati Zoning Board of Appeals approved Union Bethel's building permit and design plans to transform Anna Louise from more than 160 dormitory-style units into 85 apartments for women - some of whom may be formerly homeless, victims of domestic violence or battling drug and alcohol addictions, including some who'd been prostitutes.

Six of the seven graduates had their turn at the podium Friday during the one-hour ceremony. The seventh couldn't be there. She was in class at the University of Cincinnati.

Their words were at times honest, brutal and raw in telling about the mistakes they'd made. Tears flowed without apology.

*I finished something. I never did that. My mother and my son are here. I love you guys so much.*

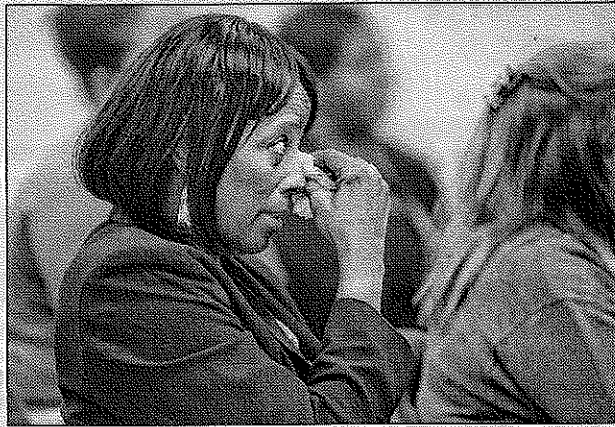
More than 400 women have come through Off the Streets since it started in April 2006.

Through a network of 20 agencies, led by Cincinnati Union Bethel, the women receive emergency housing - some at Anna Louise - as well as substance abuse treatment, health care and job training.

Alumnae often return, sharing their stories of personal success and sobriety and offering their encouragement and congratulations to new graduates.

*I can't get through this without crying. I'm sorry. I am just so proud of you.*

Hughes had one false start in Off the Streets and re-



Photos by Leigh Taylor/The Enquirer

**Outreach/Intake Coordinator Carol Thornton** wipes away tears during the Off the Streets graduation ceremony.



**Vice mayor Roxanne Qualls** speaks during the Off the Streets graduation Friday.

turned to prostitution. "When I came back, one of the counselors told me, 'It's good to see you vulnerable,'" Hughes said at the microphone.

Life on the streets can do that, she said. A john shot her. Then she was stabbed and beaten. She realized she needed help and was ready to listen.

*You can't go around your pain. You can't go over it. You have to go through it.*

Like the other graduates, Hughes graciously accepted her diploma among other gifts, a quilt created by the Quilting Queens group, a sterling silver heart pendant from Scott Reising Hyde

Park Jewelers and a recovery tool kit. It includes an eraser "to wipe away the past," a marble "for when you think you've lost yours," a tea bag "to remind you to relax every day" and a thread "to hang onto when you think it's all you've got left."

Yet she was slightly uncomfortable with the term graduation.

"There will never be a moment of arrival," said Hughes, now engaged and living on her own. "This (sobriety) is a lifetime commitment that happens one day at a time. I am drawing strength from my family."

Hughes' sponsor from Alcoholics Anonymous, Ida Mueller, was there.

"Amanda stays in the moment," said Mueller, herself a recovering alcoholic. "She knows the past and the future are too much."

*I am now what I envisioned myself to be. I am a graceful, patient, intimate and balanced woman.*