

## **‘Growing Stronger’ offers unique services to local women**

*BY MORGAN SCOTT ROGAN ReminderNews*

Lynn White of Willimantic is a woman of vision who has harnessed the energy of her passion into a non-profit organization helping others in a very unique and powerful way.

White is the founder and director of the organization known as “Growing Stronger” – a mentoring and service program whose motto is “transforming landscapes, transforming lives” in the Windham/Willimantic area.

Two diverse and deserving groups of women benefit from the efforts orchestrated by White and her program. The focus of the mentoring aspect is young women at risk whose lives are in transition from either substance abuse recovery or recent release from incarceration. Working one on one with White, these individuals learn the basics of horticulture and landscaping design and then provide free landscaping and gardening services at the homes of women with physical challenges who are no longer able to do the work themselves.

White’s background makes her well qualified to take on this endeavor. She holds a bachelor of science degree in environmental horticulture and landscape design from the University of Connecticut and has received accreditation as a nurseryman with the state of Connecticut. She spent three years as a designer and foreman of a landscape crew in East Hartford and conducts an after-school mentoring program with the Windham Heights Teen Center.

A member of the Garden Club of Windham, White was the recipient of the Virginia B. Darrow Award and has been instrumental in several Willimantic Urban Beautification projects.

The Growing Stronger program was created in the spring of 2002, but the seeds for the idea came years earlier. White, the mother of four with children ranging in ages from 9 to 22, was a stay-at-home mom for many years.

During the time when her own mother was widowed and trying to get used to living alone, White used her skills as a landscaper to help her out. Later, she did the same for a couple of acquaintances who had also become widowed and could no longer take care of their own gardens. White said that she found great satisfaction from the work, so she combined that with her enjoyment of instructing young people, and a fresh idea was born.

The mentoring aspect of the program works much like an apprentice program would. Growing Stronger is a sixto eight-week program that includes 20 hours of free training in the skills required for successful landscape design. This provides the trainees with invaluable skills that are sometimes used in the pursuit of a new vocation. They also learn how they can make a difference in other people’s lives and end up with a greater sense of self-worth.

In addition to helping individuals in need, White and her mentors also participate in the planting and maintenance of gardens at non-profit agencies servicing women and public spaces in Willimantic.

When White speaks of Growing Stronger, she says, “It is our pleasure and privilege to contribute to the success of our community.” Testimonials from those who have successfully completed the program and from recipients of their work confirm the importance of this organization. Spring and fall are the busiest times for the organization. Anyone interested in

participating as a trainee or who may know someone in need of the services should contact Lynn White at (860) 450-1813.



**Lynn White is the founder and director of the "Growing Stronger" program, which benefits two different groups of women. Photo by Morgan Scott Rogan.**