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The EOC's liberty tattoo removal program: Erasing traces of an old life

For those looking for a fresh start, unsavory associations literally explode off with help from lasers

People who are breaking from a life of gang involvement or drug addiction received special laser treatments this past weekend to remove gang or antisocial tattoos and improve their chances for finding work.

Under the Liberty Tattoo Removal Program, dermatologists Charles Fishman and Frederick Novy donate their services each month, and Sierra Vista Regional Medical Center offers space at its facility for the treatments.

The program, conducted under the auspices of the Economic Opportunity Commission, offers free removal of tattoos that mar the appearance of wearers and make it harder to find a job.

Since its inception in 2000, the program has provided nearly 2,100 treatments to 240 men and women. Participants must donate 16 hours of work to a nonprofit organization of their choosing. More than 32,000 hours of volunteer service have been completed so far.

The hardships and success of those in the program have been captured in a photo and story exhibit that will go on display at the San Luis Obispo Art Center starting March 31. The exhibit is the work of program coordinator Janet Allenspach.

For more information about Liberty Tattoo Removal, call Allenspach at 544-2484 or e-mail her at honujan@yahoo.com.

— *Tribune staff report*