

JOBS Coalition Pathways

BUILDING PATHWAYS OF PROMISES

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Coalition Teams with Construction Companies in Effort to Build Vocational Education Academy at Cardozo Senior High School

By RODERIC WOODSON

In a promising development, the JOBS Coalition has joined with several major construction companies to begin a vocational education academy at Cardozo Senior High School in Northwest Washington, D.C. If successful, Cardozo would be the site for the first Construction Trades Academy in the District of Columbia, and classes would start in Fall 2005.

Helping the Community

This effort began in June of last year when representatives of the Coalition met with officials of the Montgomery County Students Construction Trades Foundation, and visited their facility located at the Thomas Edison School of Technology Institute adjoining Wheaton High School. At the urging of the Coalition, Reginald Ballard, principal of Cardozo, along with members of his administration and faculty, as well as D.C. School

Board Member Dr. Julie Mikuta, have visited the Edison School to observe its operation and learn its history.

Over the last several months, the Coalition and industry partners Miller & Long, Sigal Construction, and M.C. Dean have joined with D.C. officials to establish a construction trades academy at Cardozo modeled after the Edison School. The Coalition and its industry partners are assisting Cardozo in efforts to rehabilitate a portion of its school building and commence a vocational education curriculum in September of 2005, which would start with the carpentry and HVAC (heating, ventilation, air conditioning) trades. Other trades would be added over a two- to three-year period as faculty, training, and student interest expand.

A key feature of this collaboration would be the establishment of a nonprofit foundation that would work cooperatively with Cardozo and D.C. public school officials to operate and

maintain the Academy. Such work would include: completing the physical alterations of the space at Cardozo; assisting with training of certified faculty for the Academy; providing equipment, tools, and supplies; developing curriculum materials that meet the needs of modern construction techniques; and facilitating and supporting classroom, laboratory, and on-site learning experiences for the students.

Hands-On Opportunities

An exciting aspect of this relationship would be the opportunity for D.C. high school students to obtain hands-on experience by constructing a house. Under the supervision of industry-certified faculty, D.C. students would use the techniques learned in their various skilled-craft classrooms at a site made available by the foundation for construction of a house. Once the house is completed, it would be sold, with proceeds from the sale going to

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Collaborations Key to Breaking Cycle of Recidivism in District

By ARNESA HOWELL

Life after incarceration isn't easy. Housing, transportation, and illiteracy are significant barriers ex-offenders must conquer as they return home to the District in search of jobs. And through the efforts of the JOBS Coalition, it's a task that many of these young men and women won't have to tackle alone.



Forum attendee questions panelists about next steps for helping returning ex-offenders gain housing, transportation opportunities.

"How can we help a person without crippling them?" asked Carol Randolph, consultant to the JOBS Coalition, at the latest forum held June 10 at the JW Marriott Hotel in Washington, D.C. The answer, she said, rests in bringing together representatives from community organizations and government agencies to discuss the issues facing returning ex-offenders, particularly getting and retaining jobs. Support from the community is key in breaking the cycle of recidivism, she added.

"Collectively, all things are possible," Randolph, who also moderated the event, assured attendees of the forum, appropriately titled, "Establishing Partnerships: Success Through Collaboration."

Government Resources

Understanding this need for collaboration, officials from both local and federal government welcomed the opportunity to participate in the forum and share strategies and resources their agencies could offer in helping ex-offenders gain meaningful employment.

The Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency for the District of Columbia (CSOSA), an independent federal agency responsible for supervising individuals in the District who are on pretrial release, probation, parole, or supervised release, is one of the entities that helps returning ex-offenders with re-entry into the community. Through its Vocational Opportunities Training and Education/Employment Unit (V.O.T.E.E.), CSOSA is providing educational, vocational, training, and

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 the purchase of land and materials for construction of the next dwelling. Under this approach, the D.C. students would not only make use of their skilled trade abilities, but they would receive exposure to related activities such as architectural design, real estate finance and insurance, and accounting requirements.

Membership in the foundation would consist of firms, corporations, associations, and other entities that have an interest in promoting vocational education in the District. Led by the Coalition, the founding members are Miller & Long, Sigal Construction, and M.C. Dean. Other industry companies and organizations are expected to participate soon. A board of directors for the foundation would be drawn from the ranks of industry and related professionals who are familiar with construction and real estate, including architects, accountants, insurers, and attorneys. It is expected that at least one member of the board would be appointed by the Superintendent of the District of Columbia Public Schools and would also serve as the executive officer of the foundation.

Through a series of meetings with D.C. officials, the Coalition identified the use of Qualified Zone Academy Bonds as a technique for financing the renovations at Cardozo. It is a unique way to fund public school construction. Instead of receiving interest payments on the bonds, the bondholders receive federal tax credits. In effect, the school receives an interest-free loan that is repaid over time from the school system's regular capital budget.

Working with Principal Ballard and his staff, the Coalition has helped prepare the application for the bond financing, and is taking steps to obtain approval from D.C. school officials and the D.C. Board of Education. At press time, the Board of Education was expected to vote on the application within days.

Whether or not students plan to pursue a career immediately after high school or want to build a solid foundation for continuing their education in college, apprenticeship, or career training, the Cardozo Construction Trades Academy would provide education and experience to make appropriate career and academic decisions. Moreover, the success of this effort would offer a template for expansion of the program to other high schools throughout the District. It is a first step toward re-invigorating the vocational education experience for the city's young people and expanding their horizons of choice as they seek fulfilling and rewarding careers. ■

Faith Community Must Step Up Efforts to Help Returning Ex-Offenders Succeed

By REV. STEPHEN E. TUCKER

Last month, we shared the news that several faith institutions in the District of Columbia have stepped forward to assist those returning from incarceration. When the Lorton Correctional facility closed, it left a deep void for many families that previously drove the

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few miles from the District to see loved ones. The inmates from Lorton were scattered across the country, but now many are beginning to come home, and the challenge to integrate them successfully back into our communities has fallen largely upon the faith community. However, the few institutions actively involved are far from what is needed to tackle this massive integration effort.

There are some disturbing realities pertaining to the faith community's efforts. First of all, there are more than a thousand churches in the District, and while several have some form of prison ministry operating within their walls, less than 80 are participating in the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency's (CSOSA) "Faith-Based Re-Entry Initiative." Another interesting fact is that many of the

more than 1,000 churches are African American, and approximately 92 percent of the returning ex-offenders are also African American. So, there has never been a more compelling reason to encourage African-American churches to become more involved in the initiative. While there is much-needed involvement from the larger churches, there are opportunities for white churches to expand their community ministries and help the largely African-American ex-offender population as well.

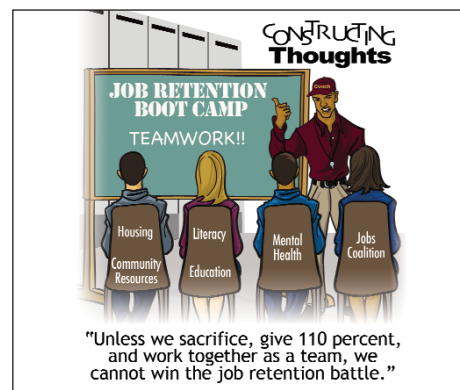
One example is Johnny Ranger (not his real name), who came home in December 2003 after serving 32 years behind bars. A white mentor brought him into the Jobs Partnership Greater Washington Program. The mentor did a superb job in encouraging the returnee—making sure he attended classes, completed homework, and kept interview appointments. As a result, Johnny was the first one in his class to land a job. He has since offered to mentor someone else in a future class, and at his graduation, he lauded his mentor, who was there to celebrate with him.

Overcoming Barriers

One of the greatest needs of the ex-offender is reliable transportation. The need to get to and from job interviews, and then to the job site, has never been more essential.

Many church vans sit in their parking lots during the week. Why not develop "van caravans" to help these brothers and sisters get back and forth to work? New Commandment Baptist Church has a Token/Flashpass Program that provides public transportation for returning offenders. Even the smallest church could provide roundtrip tokens for one person and not be overly burdened. There are many employers outside of the District that are

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referral services to people under its supervision. Equally important, CSOSA is providing these opportunities with the assistance of the University of the District of Columbia (UDC).

“CSOSA utilizes UDC to provide services... including GED (General Education Development) services to help offenders,” said Traquel Butler, development and training specialist for CSOSA. She added that the local community college also offers training courses in culinary arts and apprenticeship, areas of particular interest to CSOSA’s target population.

Besides offering employability services such as job readiness assistance and educational services, CSOSA is working to help ex-offenders deal with one of their primary obstacles to finding and keeping employment—transportation. For many returning ex-offenders who are often without a license, vehicle, or reliable support system to get to job sites within or outside District lines, CSOSA offers transportation vouchers. Hallem Williams, a senior program analyst for community justice programs with CSOSA, added that the agency works with the JOBS Coalition, the faith community, and the D.C. government in this effort as well.

Butler noted that the agency routinely works with a variety of transportation resources in the city as well as the Department of Employment Services (DOES).

“We ensure offenders have successful re-entry through development services... we make referrals to community-based resources, including DOES,” Butler stated.

Through a variety of grants, including the Employment Service Grant and the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Adult Training Grants, DOES is able to offer those in need with job referral and other skill-building services. However, most District job seekers may be familiar with DOES through its One-Stop Career Centers, which provide career counseling and planning services, résumé assistance, and job placement, as well as classroom and on-the-job training. The three full-service One-Stops—located at 1500 Franklin Street Northeast, 4049 South Capitol Street Southwest, and 2626 Naylor Road Southeast—are designed specifically to help put people in jobs.

“Eighty-five percent who visit One-Stops are filing for unemployment,” said Daryl Hardy, acting administrative officer for DOES’ Workforce Development Programs, funded by grants offered through the Department of Labor (DOL). He added, however, that while One-Stops are important, they are not the sole

solution to the problem.

“One-Stops have limited resources” when it comes to ensuring ex-offenders retain their jobs once employed, admitted Hardy. “It’s a gap better served by nonprofits with job coaches.”

Still, Thomas Hooper, member of the Business Relations Group at the Department of Labor, agreed One-Stops are important, saying they provide access to employers, who are key partners; provide much-needed services, from job availability information to training opportunities, that ultimately help job seekers and employers; and offer partnership opportunities with government agencies and other nonprofits, which is important to leverage and develop effective collaborations.



DOES Acting Administrator Daryl Hardy, seated beside CSOSA’s Traquel Butler, explains One-Stop Centers are trying to “put people in jobs first.”



Panelists agree community-based organizations are strategic partners in effort to help ex-offenders overcome obstacles.

“Effective partnerships mean developing effective relationships with other agencies and knowing their needs,” asserted Hooper, adding that collaborations are important in helping to provide individuals with the skills they need to advance in the labor market.

Hooper added that DOL has launched a training initiative that has pinpointed construction among the 12 high-growth industries, which is of particular interest to the JOBS Coalition because it works to provide educational and training opportunities to District residents interested in pursuing careers in voca-

tional trades. Once the training initiative identifies the needs of these high-growth industries, Hooper said, it then invests in strategic initiatives.

Community Partnerships

Susan Newman, senior advisor for Mayor Anthony Williams’ Office for Religious Affairs, acknowledged that government and community came to the forum to “be on common ground and share resources to employ people,” particularly ex-offenders. More than 40 churches, mosques, and temples are mentoring ex-offenders, she said, but small faith-based and nonprofit organizations need assistance. “[They] can be partnered with larger nonprofits through the help of the D.C. government,” Newman said.

Progressive Life Center is one of the community organizations that is reaching out to help returning ex-offenders overcome the psychological hurdles they may face when looking for jobs after incarceration.

“Two psychological questions [ex-offenders] have are: ‘Can I do this?’ and ‘What do others think of me?’ The question is more difficult for those men abused over time. They either become aggressive or become passive aggressive,” explained Frederick Phillips, president and chief executive officer of Progressive Life Center, which offers mental and behavioral health services. Phillips added that the underlying emotion is doubt, which together with fear leads to a “chip on the shoulder” for many returning ex-offenders. But together with other organizations such as East of the River Clergy, Progressive Life Center is making a positive impact. While the Center focuses on the mental health side, East of the River Clergy is tackling other issues, including the challenge of housing for ex-offenders.

Tracie Roberts, a consultant and attorney for East of the River Clergy, said the organization purchased an apartment building in August 2004 in Southeast D.C. that it plans to renovate. It is expected to offer transitional housing for ex-offenders in less than six months.

Working to the Future

The District, as the home to government agencies and community-based organizations like East of the River Clergy and CSOSA, needs to increase collaborative efforts to offer much-needed assistance to the large number of ex-offenders expected to come back home in the coming years. Through such collaboration, the returning ex-offender can receive educational and training opportunities that are crucial to removing the barriers to meaningful employment. ■

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reluctant to hire because of the transportation issue. Employers have a right to expect their employees to get to the job site on time, and not have job performance negatively impacted because of transportation hurdles.

There are two other critical areas in which the faith community can play a significant role. The first is in the area of relationships. The deepest need of any returning ex-offender is to establish good, positive relationships. In many cases, it was bad, negative relationships that landed the person in prison in the first place.

When they arrive in the city, ex-offenders need to be met immediately by positive people who can assist them in mending strained and broken relationships. They can also offer positive and credible solutions to other problems, both past and present.

The second area in which the faith community can play a significant role is citywide participation. Collaboration has never been more critical. Mailings go out to hundreds of churches inviting them to training, recruitment, and planning sessions, but sometimes only a sprinkling from the faith community responds. Clearly, more effort needs to go into reaching and educating church leaders. In addition, more communication needs to take place between the faith community and employers, not only in the area of job readiness, but also job retention.

For example, an employee of Manganaro Midatlantic started out doing a great job. But all of a sudden, he started exhibiting some bad habits that concerned the employer. John Livingston, director of business for Manganaro Midatlantic and secretary of the JOBS Coalition, called the employee's pastor and expressed concern. The pastor then spoke to the employee and discovered the reason for the deficiencies: a fear of losing his job if he told his employer about an impending court date and

some court-mandated requirements. The situation was resolved through an employer-faith community relationship, and the job was salvaged.

One of the main purposes of this follow-up article was to report the volume of calls that came in as a result of the phone numbers listed in the June 2004 issue. Although 2,500 ex-offenders are returning to the District this year, only a few calls came in. In this latest communiqué, I again urge everyone to call the following organizations that would welcome an offer of assistance:

- JOBS Coalition** (202) 373-1817
- Jobs Partnership Greater Washington** (202) 726-7400, 291-5513
- Inner Thoughts Inc.** (202) 373-1810
- East of the River Clergy-Police Community Partnership Inc.** (202) 373-5767
- RAPP Inc.** (202) 678-6012
- Marshall Heights CDC** (202) 396-1201
- Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA)** (202) 220-5320

The faith community has a long, credible, and established history of providing support and assistance to returning ex-offenders. We have every confidence that the faith community will answer this current call for support. An awesome power once said, "When you have done it unto the least of these, you've done it unto me." ■

Rev. Stephen Tucker is Vice-President of JOBS Coalition, Chairman of the Board and Executive Director of Jobs Partnership Greater Washington, and Senior Pastor of New Commandment Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. New Commandment is the Cluster "C" coordinating church for CSOSA's Faith-Based Re-Entry Initiative.

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