



# NEXT STEP

Fall 2009

The Amherst H. Wilder Foundation Job Club's Quarterly Newsletter

## Wilder JobsFirst Program Bids Farewell

On October 14, 2009, the Wilder Foundation Board of Directors in collaboration with the Leadership Team announced a new strategic plan which will eliminate programming in several areas of the organization. Included within these areas is the JobsFirst program, which will discontinue when its contract expires with the Minnesota Department of Corrections at the end of June 2010.

“The Wilder Foundation is taking this proactive approach in defining a new strategic direction due to changes in service delivery, shifting priorities of funders and the very challenging economic times facing all organizations,” said Wilder President Tom Kingston.

As further explained in the news release for the Wilder Strategic Plan, “funding from many sources has not kept pace with total costs to run all of Wilder’s programs over the last five years. As a result, the Board allocated additional endowment funds to make up these shortfalls, anticipating that funding sources and the economy would recover sooner, including the 17% loss to Wilder’s endowment. This has not been the case. In fact, overall endowment spending increased to a level that would place future generations at risk of not receiving Wilder services.

“Timelines for completion of these changes will vary based on the unique need of clients, but it is anticipated that the majority will occur within the next nine months. Approximately 200 full-time equivalent employees will be impacted by these transitions.”

Wilder has decided to transition out of the following programs: Children’s Placement Services, Home Health Agency and Homemaker Services, Housing Management Services, the Neighborhood Leadership Program, and Employment Services (JobsFirst).

But while Wilder will discontinue its employment services for ex-offenders, the organization will continue to focus its work in three main areas: children and families (especially low-income and at-risk youth and families), the elderly (especially low-income seniors living in the community), and community research and leadership (especially on issues affecting our community’s most vulnerable residents and neighbors).

JobsFirst, which started in 1990 as the EXCEL program, has provided employment services to ex-offenders in the East Metro community for nearly 20 years. Since 2004, JobsFirst has served an annual average of over 2,297 participants, and in the 2008-2009 fiscal year served 3,192 participants, a program high (see graph below).

The JobsFirst team would like to thank those at Wilder and throughout the transitions community for their support and collaboration with the program over the years. We wish the best for all of those who continue to transition from corrections back into the community.

### Five Year Demographic Trend Data Of Pre-Release And Post-Release Programs

	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
<b>Number served</b>	1,233	1,829	2,418	2,814	<b>3,192</b>
<b>Percent participants of color</b>	55%	51%	49%	47%	<b>45%</b>
<b>Percent male</b>	77%	89%	87%	86%	<b>88%</b>
<b>Percent female</b>	23%	11%	13%	14%	<b>12%</b>
<b>Average age</b>	33 years	34 years	34 years	35 years	<b>35 years</b>
<b>Percent below 125% of poverty level</b>	100%	100%	100%	100%	<b>100%</b>

Data and table provided by the 2008-2009 JobsFirst evaluation by Wilder Research, released August 2009 (page 5).

# Small Steps Yield Big Results With Participant Pilot Program

Wilder JobsFirst recently initiated a pilot program in which select participants have been given the opportunity to work as building-maintenance interns at the Wilder Center.

The first participant in the program, **Dianna Pervin**, started the three-month program on September 21, and has been working the morning shift ever since. Meanwhile, participant **Shuniqua Waddell** has been working afternoons since early October.

When asked about the experience thus far, Dianna expressed her enjoyment of the experience.

“The Wilder Foundation has been absolutely great to me,” she said. “From Becca with pre-release on down to Kate and Hakim in Job Club, to the computer class and now this internship program, everyone’s been so nice and helpful.”

But while JobsFirst provided Dianna with various tools and services, she accomplished each step in the process through her own consistent efforts.

“The whole experience has been great—it gave me the opportunity to help myself get back on my feet, and I feel like I’ve done that.”

Dianna first became involved with the Wilder JobsFirst program earlier this year while attending pre-release classes in the Shakopee Correctional Facility.

Soon after returning to the community, Dianna enrolled in Job Club and

performed each of the steps necessary for successful completion of that program. She also attended and completed the Level 1 Basic Computer Class through the SHES Mobile Resource Center, and she was eventually accepted to intern at the Wilder Center as part of this pilot program.

While performing building-maintenance duties 20 hours per week, Dianna has also continued her job search, and recently found out that she will be hired on by Wilder as a site responder at one of the organization’s many housing sites.

“I’m excited,” she said. “Now I’m going to try and save money for a car.”

The JobsFirst team is currently in the process of identifying potential candidates for the next two internships, which will begin in January 2010.

We would like to congratulate both participants for their progress and accomplishments over the last several months, and wish them continued success in all future endeavors.



Select Job Club participants are now building-maintenance interns at the Wilder Center (left) as part of our new Participant Pilot Program.

## Pentair Awards Funding to JobsFirst

During this challenging economic time, individuals and organizations everywhere are asked to “step up to the plate” to help improve living conditions for those in need. The Pentair Foundation recently did just that by providing a \$10,000 award to the JobsFirst program.

Pentair’s generous donation has allowed JobsFirst to fill program funding gaps and to implement our new Participant Pilot Program.

With few resources available for offenders upon their release from state correctional facilities, the tools and services provided by JobsFirst help our participants in taking the first steps towards reentry in the competitive workforce. The JobsFirst program applauds Pentair’s innovation and contribution to employment services.

## JobsFirst Staff Teaches Importance of Researching Employers

With state unemployment rates continuing to mount, many ex-offenders are facing significant barriers in their job searches.

Employees at the Wilder Foundation Job Club, recognizing the difficulty in overcoming these obstacles, have been emphasizing the importance of researching employers’ businesses before interviews.

In recent months, Employment Counselors Hakim As-Siddiq, Rebecca Ballard, Marvin Burgess, and Kate Ellefson have conducted several interactive presentations in which they have discussed with participants the importance of looking into employers’ businesses online, and how to appropriately utilize the information they gather in an interview setting.

## iSeek Website Offers Valuable Resources to Ex-Offenders

At the Wilder Job Club, staff have recently incorporated aspects of the iSeek website, described as “Minnesota’s career, education, and job resource,” into the JobsFirst training curriculum. While the website provides many valuable tools to a wide variety of people, the “Employment Resources for Ex-Offenders” section—developed with contributions from JobsFirst Employment Counselor Hakim As-Siddiq—has been especially useful. During the section’s development, Hakim has helped by evaluating the content of the section and contributing feedback regarding the accessibility and usefulness of these features. More information can be found at [www.iseek.org](http://www.iseek.org).

The Wilder Job Club serves people who have been released from prison, *not* jail or workhouse, and are currently under Minnesota Department of Corrections supervision. Job Club is open Monday through Thursday, 9:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M. Intakes of new participants take place between 9:00 and 9:30. The Amherst H. Wilder Foundation Job Club is located at 1600 University Avenue, Suite #219, St. Paul, Minnesota 55104. We can be reached by phone at (651) 288-5191 or e-mail at [JobsFirst@wilder.org](mailto:JobsFirst@wilder.org).