



# NEXT STEP

The Wilder Job Club's Quarterly Newsletter

Fall 2007 Issue

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Here for good.

## NEW OPPORTUNITIES AT JOB CLUB WITH THE RE-ENTRY WORKS PROJECT

The Wilder Job Club has partnered with Goodwill/Easter Seals to participate in a national research study on job programs for recently released felons. The study, which is being funded by the Joyce Foundation and evaluated by the New York based research organization MDRC, is designed to analyze the success of transitional jobs and job search assistance programs for different ex-offenders.

In recent years states have funded a number of transitional jobs programs that give offenders a minimum wage job for a

period of a few months to ease them back into the workforce, a strategy that has proven to be successful for welfare recipients. Several cities are participating in the Joyce Foundation's study, each with a transitional job program and a more traditional job search assistance program for comparison. Here in St. Paul, Goodwill/Easter Seals is offering the transitional jobs program and the Wilder Foundation's Job Club is offering the job search assistance program.

Participation in the program is limited to

males over 18 years of age who have been released from a Minnesota Department of Corrections facility within the last 90 days and are not on work release. Since assignment to the transitional job program is random, there is no guarantee of a job, although all participants will receive assistance.

Eligible individuals should come to the Wilder Job Club, at 1600 University Avenue, Suite #219, St. Paul. All participants must be present at 8:20 A.M. and be ready to work the following day. Contact Chris Fotsch at (651) 288-0324 for further information.

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### Upcoming Events

- Late October: Wilder Job Club gets Star Tribune Jobview software on computers.
- Thursday, November 15: CareerBuilder Job Fair at Minneapolis Convention Center from 10:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M.

## Employers Make a Difference at Job Club

The Wilder Foundation Job Club is currently looking for employer representatives to participate in their Job Opportunity Builder (J.O.B.) program. Job Opportunity Builder/J.O.B. is an on-site employment seminar on good work practices and interviewing techniques that is held at Wilder's Job Club.

Employers participating in this event will be asked to provide information on

their companies' hiring practices and discuss information relating to their business. There is no obligation for employers to offer jobs or hire. Simply offering general insight and real life employer perspectives is highly valuable to our job seekers. J.O.B. is held every Wednesday between the hours of 10:00 A.M. and 12:00 P.M. Giving a few hours of your time can make an incredible

difference to a person who is transitioning back into the workforce.

If you are interested in learning more about Wilder's Job Opportunity Builder, or if you would like to register for a J.O.B. seminar this fall, please contact Chris Fotsch at (651) 288-0324 or send an e-mail to CLF1@wilder.org.

## Job Club Participant Heads for Success

Johnnie first came to Job Club in November of 2006. At that point, she had little work history and had never held a job for more than a matter of months. Now she is successfully employed at a sandwich shop in St. Paul, and is continuing her education by taking computer skills classes at the Wilder Foundation's mobile resource lab, a project in partnership with Cummins Power Generation and Target.com that aims to bridge the digital divide.

She says that Job Club helped her in a variety of ways. Not only did she look through job listings to find employment opportunities, she also took advantage of the computers to work on her typing skills, she updated her resume, she bought discounted bus cards to go job searching, and, once she was hired for a job, received help getting her uniform.

In the end, it was personal networking that led her to her current job. A friend of hers at Job Club told her about the shop where she now works, which was just opening up at the time.



"Another thing that job club helps with is setting you up to learn how to interview well," she says. During her first job interview, at a telemarketing company, she was so nervous

that she "just blanked." But she practiced in Job Club, things went much better when she interviewed for her current job, and she was offered the position. After working for a while she was promoted to a manager. She says that she loves her job and has a great boss.

In the future, she hopes to continue her education by learning data entry skills and then applying these skills to her work. Her advice to people reentering the workforce is "Don't give up. Somebody somewhere is going to be willing to give you a chance. Don't be afraid to be challenged."

## COUNCIL ON CRIME AND JUSTICE INITIATES NEW PROJECT ON REENTRY

Starting this past August, eighteen volunteers from all walks of life are setting out to increase the potential and effectiveness of organizations that work in prisoner reentry. The volunteers are working through Americorps VISTA, a government funded program that supports thousands of volunteers across the country. VISTA volunteers generally spend a year working to increase the capacity of a nonprofit organization.

Last fall the Council on Crime and Justice applied for a VISTA volunteer to work as an assistant case advocate for some of their clients who had recently been

released from prison. The volunteer, Erica Fricke, started to work on expanding resources for their clients by contacting employers, rental housing owners, and social service organizations. She quickly discovered that there was a lot of work to be done in reentry. "Even just being in the field for a year, I realized that there is a lot of duplication (between organizations)," she said.

Midway through her year of service the Council on Crime and Justice and the Minnesota state office of the Corporation for National and Community Service developed a much more extensive project on prisoner reentry that was launched this August. This project has VISTA volunteers

working on a number of approaches to prisoner reentry, including workforce development, reentry evaluation and research, community outreach, education development, and volunteer coordination. This year Erica has signed up to be a VISTA leader on the project, and hopes to increase the collaboration between different organizations working on reentry in the Twin Cities. The Wilder Foundation has received a VISTA volunteer to work in employer development. For more information on the project, contact Erica Fricke, (612) 348-7874 or [fricke@crimeandjustice.org](mailto:fricke@crimeandjustice.org).

## FOCUS ON INDUSTRIES: CONSTRUCTION

One of the largest and best employers of ex-offenders is the construction industry. Nationally, construction accounts for thirty one percent of all jobs in the goods-producing sector, a total of over seven and half million. While many manufacturing and natural resource extraction jobs are shifting overseas, construction is the only goods-producing industry that is expected to expand in coming years. Despite predictions of growth, the recent crash of the housing market will certainly set back the construction industry, especially companies involved in residential construction. In the Twin Cities, levels of home sales

and residential building permits are the lowest they have been in a decade.

Many of the most common positions, such as carpenter, plumber, and electrician, are skilled labor that require several years of training or education. For ex-offenders, it is often difficult to take classes immediately after release and the training and apprenticeship positions may be hard to get since they require a proven work record and a long commitment. Other positions, as helpers or general laborers, are more demanding than skilled positions and pay less, but require fewer qualifications.

In the Twin Cities area, construction jobs make up about four percent of all employment, which is significantly less than the national average of five and a half percent, but pay is above average for many positions.

*Figures and graph are from the US Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, available online at <http://www.bls.gov>*



## MINNEAPOLIS AND SAINT PAUL GOVERNMENTS "BAN THE BOX"

A nationwide "ban the box" movement, which seeks to remove the check box on criminal history from job applications, has been picking up steam in recent years, winning over the cities of Chicago, Boston, San Francisco, and the county of Los Angeles. These examples were followed last winter by the city councils of St. Paul and Minneapolis, which both decided to take questions about criminal history off of their applications for employment. Both cities cited laws that kept them from discriminating against people with criminal histories as a major reason for removing the questions. But they also noted that removing the questions gave thousands of

people with criminal records the opportunity to advance themselves economically and maintain a crime-free life.

In a memo to St. Paul's city council, Mayor Chris Coleman expressed hopes that the private sector would follow St. Paul's lead and promised to write letters to CEOs encouraging them to consider job applicants with criminal backgrounds. For many companies, advancing technology has made it easier than ever to perform background checks while potential lawsuits for negligent hiring have made it seem dangerous not to. Often their solution is to simply block

everyone with any criminal history from even getting an interview, which makes it difficult for people with criminal records to find work. Since joblessness is a major contributor to recidivism rates for ex-offenders, removing barriers to employment can help people stay out of prison.

The cities will both keep people with criminal records from obtaining certain jobs, such as police or firefighting positions. Other jobs, including those dealing with vulnerable populations, will restrict people convicted of certain crimes from being eligible for employment.



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*The Amherst H. Wilder Foundation is a nonprofit health and human services organization that has served the greater Saint Paul, Minnesota, area since 1906. We operate dozens of programs that help children succeed in school, older adults remain independent, troubled youth create healthy futures, and individuals and families maintain long-term housing and employment.*

The Wilder Job Club Serves:

People who have been released from prison, *not* jail or workhouse  
Must be under some kind of Department of Corrections supervision

The Wilder Job Club Provides:

Daily topic presentations relating to job search and interviewing  
Information on talking about convictions to employers  
Daily job leads  
Access to computers, phones, fax, and Internet  
Help creating individualized resumes  
Assistance with work related needs

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

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