



NEXT STEP

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

Winter 08-09 Issue

2009 SECOND CHANCE DAY ON THE HILL

At 10 a.m. on February 11, 2009, ex-offenders, their families and supporters will congregate at the Capitol Rotunda in St. Paul, Minnesota, for "Second Chance Day on the Hill," an annual event intended to raise statewide and national awareness of the issues facing individuals with criminal records. Sponsored by a partnership of Minnesota-based nonprofits, the effort will highlight the importance of fair access to credit, housing, employment, voting rights, and higher education for former inmates. According to the Pew Center On The States' report, *One in 100: Behind Bars in America 2008*, "more than one in every 100 adults is now confined in an American jail or prison." Moreover, the Minnesota state prison population underwent a 5.1% increase between December of 2006 and January of 2008. With 95% of incarcerated individuals returning to their communities, these alarming numbers can be attributed in part to high recidivism rates both in Minnesota and throughout the nation. Through necessary rehabilitative services such as fair access to public assistance, community-based intervention for youth, criminal record correcting-mechanisms

and full disclosure of collateral sanctions, we seek to better transition prisoners from corrections to community and to render recidivism a non-issue. On Second Chance Day, a coalition of community organizations and leaders hopes not only to shed light on the difficulty of this transition, but also to connect the dots between the various issues involved with the process of ex-offender reentry. In the first hour of the event, eleven different speakers will explain these issues through the context of their own unique and informed perspectives, drawing from a wide array



of personal and professional experiences. Among those in the diverse group are Judge George Stephenson of the Ramsey County District Court, Fr. Eric Rutton of the Minnesota Catholic Diocese, and Minnesota State Representative and Speaker of the House, Margaret Anderson Kelliher, who will be speaking about these issues from judicial, faith-based, and legislative points of view, respectively.

Despite the severity of the problems associated with ex-offender reentry, the first step in countering recidivism is simply recognizing the assorted barriers facing ex-offenders and their families. At 11 a.m. there will be an opportunity to take efforts even further with a "lobbying crash course," followed by a chance to meet with legislators first-hand. By acknowledging the issues at hand and contacting those with the ability to change policy, we hope to gain the public support and organizational effort needed to break the ongoing cycles of poverty and crime. Please help us move closer to achieving this goal and attend the 2009 Second Chance Day on the Hill on Wednesday, February 11.

Mock Interviewing at Job Club

The Wilder Foundation Job Club, in collaboration with the Wilder Human Resources Department, is now offering mock interviewing opportunities on the third Wednesday of every month.

The services will be available to all Job Club participants as a means for individuals to develop interviewing skills and build self-confidence in professional situations.

In the interviews, participants are encouraged to practice vital components of the actual interview process, including felony-conviction statements and



articulation of soft and hard skills. Interviewees are evaluated by 14 different categories, including communication skills, stress tolerance, and professional demeanor.

As part of the feedback process, interviewers will provide participants with verbal and written performance evaluations, and participants themselves will be asked to complete independent self-assessments.

Job Club staff anticipate that this will be an excellent means of assisting ex-offenders in rejoining the workforce.

JobsFirst Staff Head North for Employment Seminar

This past December, JobsFirst staff had the opportunity to head north to Togo, Minnesota, to facilitate an employment seminar at the Challenge Incarceration Program (CIP), a boot-camp style program for non-dangerous drug and property offenders who are currently incarcerated in Minnesota Correctional Facilities. The Challenge Incarceration Program is an intense, highly-structured, discipline-focused opportunity for carefully selected men and women, all of whom are physically and psychologically screened to meet specific CIP guidelines. The goal of CIP is not only to hold offenders accountable for their actions, but also to address chemical dependency issues, protect public safety and prepare offenders to successfully transition back into the community.

While in the program, CIP participants are also given many opportunities to work on preparing themselves to return to their communities, including the job-readiness seminar presented by JobsFirst, under contract with the Minnesota Department of Corrections. During the seminar, which is conducted twice a year, JobsFirst staff work individually with women offenders to build on the skills they've learned in the



pre-release employment class, which is held at the Shakopee Correctional Facility and is also facilitated by JobsFirst staff. Some of the topics discussed include skill identification, resume creation, application tips, conviction discussion with employers as well as general interviewing practices.

CIP consists of three phases, beginning with an offender's transition from a state facility to the program site, either in Willow River, Minnesota, for the men's program, or Togo, Minnesota, where the women's camp is located. During the first phase of the program, offenders follow a rigorous daily

schedule that includes physical labor, chemical dependency programming, behavioral modification classes and other outward-bound activities. At this point, offenders are given very little time for themselves, with telephone calls and visiting restricted.

The second phase of the CIP program focuses on offenders returning to the community under Intensive Supervised Release (ISR), in which they are required to meet daily with their supervising agents and to follow a strict release plan. Lastly, when an offender moves to phase three of the program, that person is expected to practice what he/she has learned in the previous phases while an appropriate level of supervision is maintained by an agent. After a minimum of six months, offenders are placed on regular supervised release until the expiration of their sentences.

Many of the participating women have expressed what a life-changing experience the CIP program has been for them and that this was a great opportunity to reflect on their lives and the choices they've made while gaining valuable skills that can be applied in the future.

Staying Positive During Hard Times

According to the *New York Times*, "the United States economy shrank at its fastest pace in a quarter century from October through December," and the unemployment rate has now climbed to a staggering 7.2%. Most of us have already seen statistics that illustrate the severity of this recession, and it is probably unnecessary to dwell on line after line of numerical data when they all, essentially, say the same thing: times are tough in America, especially so for those currently pursuing employment.

But as dismal as the economic forecast appears, and despite massive job losses occurring nearly every day, the fact remains that there are plenty of vacant

positions simply waiting to be filled. We see direct evidence of that fact every week at Job Club.

Despite reentering their communities with felony records during what has been called the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, many participants at Job Club have found stable, gainful employment in recent months. From November 2008 through January of this year, 50 of 80 participants were able to secure jobs at an average wage of \$9.04 per hour.

So even during this bitter economic winter, more than sixty percent of all Job Club participants had, at the time of case closure, found their way back into

the workforce. While it can be easy to get discouraged and to blame misfortune on the current state of the nation, many have found that a combination of tireless work and good fortune can pay off significantly. Job-searching requires, however, a level of patience that goes beyond what many have needed in the past, which is why now, perhaps more now than ever, tenacity is an essential virtue. By committing fully to skill-building practices such as resume development and conviction response training, Job Club participants have proven that this tenacity can truly bring about employment opportunities.

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.