

Rikers Island Job Training Program

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A fresh start for Osborne's Rikers Island Job Training Program graduates.

The Osborne Association's Fresh Start Program trains men incarcerated on Rikers Island with the job skills and life skills they need to stay clean, hold down jobs, and avoid returning to crime. Fresh Start became part of the Osborne Association in 1997; and since that time, the program has served more than 450 inmates.

Attesting to its success, Fresh Start was highlighted as a model re-entry program in the U.S. Department of Justice's Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council. Graduates from Fresh Start have gone on to become prep cooks, catering assistants and counselors at substance abuse programs. Several students in the program have gone on to publish articles in New York City magazines and newspapers.

On June 30, 2009, men who are currently participating in the Fresh Start program on Rikers Island will be graduating from the 12-week classes with a foundation in culinary arts and computer literacy, as well as "life skills" training which includes:

- Workshops and individual counseling on issues such as relapse prevention, anger management, personal relationships, budgeting, problem-solving and goal-setting.
- A Parenting Education Program with a curriculum that teaches men to better communicate with their children and with their children's caretakers, strengthening their ability to contribute as parents.
- Men's Group, a group that allows participants to address the changes needing to happen in order to be successful in relationships. Participants take sessions on topics such as anger management, domestic violence, substance abuse and safe sex practices and learn the importance of investing time in family relationships.
- Career counseling and job development, including standardized career assessment tools, mock interviewing, resume-writing and job leads upon lease.

- Educational assistance including GED preparation and testing as well as college-preparation and admissions assistance upon release.
- Aftercare assistance, including housing referrals, substance abuse treatment, counseling and “coaching” from program counselors, mentoring from successful program graduates, weekend outings and recreational activities.

Specific indicators of the effectiveness of Fresh Start include a recidivism rate of less than 20%, compared to Rikers’ 60% recidivism rate, as well as a high program retention rate. Fresh Start helps break the cycle of recidivism by working with a relatively small number of individuals over a sustained period of time and engaging them on several different levels simultaneously—self-examination, relationship building, vocational training, life skills and values.

The Osborne Association is dedicated to offering opportunities to individuals who have been in conflict with the law to transform their lives through innovative, effective, and replicable programs that serve the community by reducing crime and its human and economic costs.

