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Green Career Center Helps Former Prisoners Find New Jobs

By: Dean Meminger



A Bronx organization dedicated to helping former prisoners turn their lives around is now helping them find "green" jobs. Borough reporter Dean Meminger filed the following report.

Many unemployed are having difficulty finding jobs, but people with criminal records who have done prison time have an extra hurdle to get over.

"I know that people who know me probably assume that I was automatically going to stay in trouble, and I didn't want to be looked in that light any more," says ex-offender Pablo Negron.

Negron and others like him are transforming their lives with the help of the Osborne Association, which assists former inmates. The organization has also recently started the Green Career Center in Morrisania, Bronx, which teaches former prisoners all about jobs in environmentally-efficient products and services.

"You might start doing weatherization, but there are all of these new companies coming into being, and our guys and women have an opportunity to grow with the field," says Osborne Association Executive Director Elizabeth Gaynes.

"It could be the installation of solar panels, wind turbines, co-generation, energy efficient boilers," says Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr.

Another company in the Bronx makes solar-powered trash compactors.

To help train and give ex-offenders these skills, the state's Division of Criminal Justice Services has awarded the Osborne Association \$2 million from the president's federal stimulus package.

Those involved say the money and efforts are definitely needed. Approximately 13,500 people parolees live in the five boroughs, and 68 percent of them report they do not have a job.

"That's New York State's and City's unemployment problem. That is why jobs initiatives for formerly incarcerated people are good criminal justice policy and good public policy," says Acting DCJS Commissioner Sean Byrne.

It is a policy that could change lives for ex-offenders and their neighborhoods.

"It's like a recycling process, recycling ourselves. They are giving us a chance to start over," says one participant.

"To better my life, to become a productive member of society and just become the best I can," says another.

To find out more about the Green Career Center, call 1-718-707-2706 or visit www.osborneny.org