

# JOBS Coalition Pathways

BUILDING PATHWAYS OF PROMISES

JUNE 2004

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## Forum Offers Returning Ex-Offenders Job Readiness Advice

BY SPENCER COLBERT

Like many people in the District of Columbia who are either on probation or parole, Cimeron Paden is overly cautious about accepting help to get back on his feet in society. Although he is currently employed as an electrician, he still asks, "Why would my current employer let me get a job with a competing company?"

### Helping the Community

Despite his hesitancy, Paden didn't back away from the opportunity to participate in a recent career forum and fair sponsored by the JOBS Coalition. He was one of only 96 men and women selected by the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA), an independent federal agency responsible for supervising individuals in the District of

Columbia who are on pretrial release, probation, parole, or supervised release, to participate in a career fair designed exclusively to help others like himself. Out of the roughly 14,000 individuals that CSOSA supervises, only a select few are qualified to participate in



Job seekers listen closely to those offering career management, life skills advice.

the career fair, the fifth of its kind.

The two-day event, held April 22 and April 23, brought some of the area's leading construction companies to interview candidates for positions as carpenters, electricians, plumbers, mechanics, and HVAC technicians.

Participating companies such as Miller & Long Concrete Construction and Manganaro Midatlantic LLC have apprenticeship programs for individuals who may not have any training or relevant experience in a trade, but are anxious to work and willing to learn. CSOSA has worked closely with these and other companies to ensure that the career fair attendees are all able and ready for hire based on a comprehensive pre-screening process and needs assessment.

"CSOSA's function is to make sure that the  
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## JOBS Fair Gives At-Risk Youth, Adults Skilled Trades Opportunities



Gabrielle Urquhart checks up on Potomac Job Corps training program student John Jefferson during the fair at Pilgrim Rest.

BY ARNESA HOWELL

By the time the doors opened at 10 a.m. for the JOBS Coalition fair, the line of job seekers wrapped around Pilgrim Rest Baptist Church in Northeast Washington, D.C. The sidewalk was filled with men and women hoping to find opportunities in masonry, electrical, labor, plumbing, or drywall work with one of the many companies looking for hard-working employees.

"The fair is extremely important. In the past, there are many cases where promises are made and promises are not kept," said Hallem Williams, a senior program analyst for community justice programs with the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency for the District of Columbia (CSOSA), which helps returning ex-offenders with re-entry into the community. "The difference here is that employers are making a commitment [with] jobs. The frustrations are being addressed."

A common barrier for returning ex-offenders looking for work is transportation to the worksites, which can be outside city lines. While assistance is offered through programs such as the faith-based Jobs Partnership, which

provides Metro tokens, many need more help.

Tamika Wellington had been participating in an area Jobs Partnership program for about three weeks when she heard about the fair. Wellington, 20, came out to Pilgrim Rest to look for a job in painting or drywall.

"I've been working for a long time, but hadn't been looking for that type of job because of transportation issues," the Southeast D.C. resident said. Two interviews later (one with Manganaro Midatlantic LLC and the other with Command Labor), she seemed optimistic about her job outlook.

"As long as I don't be lifting," Wellington said, "I know a woman can do the job as easily as a man."

### A Helping Hand

Gabrielle Urquhart has been working with at-risk youth and ex-offenders as vice-president of the Business Resource Group for The Welfare to Work Partnership. The Washington, D.C.-based group develops relationships with businesses for the sole purpose of finding jobs for the 18- to 25-year olds the programs serves.

"We focus on trying to make sure they have  
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## JOBS Fair *Continued from page 1*

proper resumes, interview, and prep skills,” said Urquhart of the nonprofit organization’s goal. “We really work on attitude... making sure they come on time to work, go every day, and have the proper life skills.” The most difficult task, added Urquhart, is changing the mindset these young people have developed over time. It’s also important to develop a relationship of trust, she noted.



**Tamika Wellington has long-term aspirations of becoming a painter.**

Not one who believes in lip service, Urquhart offers the young people in the program the help they need with kindness and sternness. Twenty-five-year-old Antonio Myers, who participates in The Welfare to Work Partnership and attended the job fair, said that as his counselor, Urquhart has worked hard trying to help him find a job.

“In this case, [The Welfare to Work Partnership] called and notified me of the job fair because they thought I might find opportunities,” said Myers, whose specialty is electrical wiring and home improvement.

As a returning ex-offender, Myers admits that it’s hard for people with criminal backgrounds or felonies on record to find a job. Also, he said, it’s hard to get to work site locations without transportation.

“At the job fair, I know these companies are trying to hire people and there is a greater opportunity to get hired,” he explained. “I think I have a good chance with some of the companies hiring here.” ■

*As the first of a two-part series, author Rev. Stephen E. Tucker says this communiqué shows “the power of the faith community to respond to emergencies” or “how much harder we have to indeed pray for that part of the faith community not yet on board.”*

## Faith Community Stepping Forward to Help District’s Ex-Offender Population

By Rev. Stephen E. Tucker

A mere three years ago, prison ministry to the average church or mosque consisted of a few dedicated and committed members traveling to the Lorton Correctional Facility in Northern Virginia to provide religious services to inmates. The group usually consisted of those gifted in song, prayer, and proclamation. The mission was to lift the hearts of the incarcerated, and in some cases, assure them that outside the prison walls, someone was indeed praying for them. When Lorton closed its doors and the incarcerated were dispersed throughout the country, all of that changed.

When prisoners were transferred to institutions beyond reasonable driving distance, families who used to visit their loved ones were devastated. Many still are.

When incarcerated men and women were consequently released, the challenge then became, “How do we keep them from returning to prison?”

Often they returned home to find unemployment, an unforgiving community, and a system that seemingly worked against their successful re-entry. The churches and mosques were challenged to find new strategies for ministering to them. Inmates at your doorstep always present a greater challenge than those willing to participate in a worship experience inside the prison.

Though a long way from being totally “on board,” the faith community is seeing more

and more churches and mosques stepping to the forefront of this strikingly visible ministry to assist those who have been incarcerated. Regardless of size, religious groups of all denominations, races, and income levels are realizing the role they can play in addressing the 600,000 persons scheduled for release in 2004 (more than 2,500 will be returning to the District of Columbia). This new role requires one thing that heretofore has been a challenge to the faith community, and that is unity and collaboration.

*“Regardless of size, religious groups of all denominations, races, and income levels are realizing the role they can play in addressing the 600,000 persons scheduled for release in 2004...”*

Oftentimes, this requires the assistance of a committed third party or non-denominational nonprofit. JOBS Coalition, Jobs Partnership Greater Washington, Inner Thoughts Inc., East of the River Clergy-Police Community Partnership, RAPP Inc., and Marshall Heights Community Development Corp. are among those who have been successful in bringing churches together for a common cause.

### Cutting Prison Profits

A church or mosque might ask, “How can we become involved?” The “why” has already  
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returning ex-offenders are ready for employment and have a notion of what to do,” explained Hallem Williams, a member of the JOBS Coalition’s executive board and senior manager of faith-based re-entry programs at CSOSA. “We understand the initial job is not the end of the road. We want them to carve out a career path. Through hard work and expertise, they can advance in the workplace.”

**From the Beginning**

Following a modest spaghetti and meatball dinner, Myles Gladstone, vice-president of human resources for Miller & Long, a leading construction company that has built over \$2.5 billion worth of commercial and residential



**Myles Gladstone of Miller & Long urged forum participants to pursue careers, not simply find a job.**

structures, gave “career” seekers a few pointers on how to handle themselves throughout the interview process.

It is important to research a prospective employer before the interview, Gladstone said. And during the interview, it’s important for prospective employees to be assertive by asking questions and presenting possible scenarios.

“[F]ind out if the company is right for you,” he advised, adding that it is equally important to focus on the big picture. “Think of starting a career, and not simply look for a job,” Gladstone said.

With the doors of opportunity opened and a newfound focus, the determined can have a career, stated Gladstone, who emphasized the importance of keeping a balance between career and family because “if home isn’t being taken care of, work will follow suit.”

Gladstone also reminded attendees to communicate with supervisors if there is a conflict with a probation or parole obligation. CSOSA has developed job coaches to assist with these types of conflicts.

**An Opportunity for Everyone**

Because the fair was set up to provide opportunities for everyone, there was one question on the minds of many women in attendance: Are there really any construction-related jobs for women?



**JOBS Coalition Secretary John Livingston explains a career in construction trades can be financially and emotionally rewarding.**

“These are not conventional positions held by women, but if they are willing to learn, they will be given an opportunity to start a career,” responded John Livingston, director of business development for Manganaro Midatlantic and secretary of the JOBS Coalition.

Like Gladstone, Livingston, whose company regularly recruits at these Coalition-sponsored forums and fairs, encouraged attendees to consider a career in construction trades because it can be a rewarding experience. “Construction,” said Livingston “is the quickest way to business ownership in the United States.” ■

**Faith Community** *Continued from page 2*

been established. The Muslim faith has always exhibited a passion for helping its brothers. The Christian community has always promoted the words of Jesus Christ as recorded in the parable of the prodigal son who came home to much more than an antagonistic and uncooperative community (Luke 15). The “how” is simply a matter of follow-through based on what each faith believes. Prisons are big business, and many dollars exchange hands when (a) an arrest is made (b) a conviction takes place, and (c) incarceration becomes a reality, sometimes over and over again.

The faith community can put a damper on prison profits by taking the following basic actions:

- Providing financial support to organizations that work with ex-offenders through (a) intentional line item budget allowances and (b) special offering days;
- Providing personal support for re-entry workers by designating membership manpower to serve as mentors, job coaches, and life skills partners who attend planning meetings representing the church;
- “Adopting” an ex-offender through a bonafide re-entry program where time is more valuable than money;
- Assisting the families of returning inmates, again through bonafide programs; and
- Serving as scouts for job openings, sensitizing their own employers to the value of hiring ex-offenders who are willing and trained to work.

These are but a few things the faith community can do to assist the ex-offender. Some churches and mosques, however, are doing even more.

Florida Avenue Baptist Church, Redemption Ministry, Pilgrim Baptist Church, New Commandment Baptist Church, and Pilgrim Rest Baptist Church have all hosted job fairs, while 14 churches have hosted Jobs Partnership classes. Churches such as Takoma Park Baptist Church, Craig Memorial Community Church, Israel Baptist Church, St. Phillips Baptist Church, and Darnestown Presbyterian Church are among those that have contributed financially. Other churches have used their own prison ministries to lend a hand.

The buzzword, however, is expediency. Help is needed right now.

Below are the phone numbers of just a few organizations who would welcome a phone call offering assistance:

- JOBS Coalition** . . . . . (202) 373-1817
- Jobs Partnership Greater Washington** . . . (202) 726-7400, 291-5513
- Inner Thoughts Inc.** . . . . . (202) 373-1810
- East of the River Clergy-Police Community Partnership Inc.** . . . . . (202) 373-5767
- RAPP Inc.** . . . . . (202) 678-6012
- Marshall Heights CDC** . . . . . (202) 396-1201
- Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA)** . . . . . (202) 220-5320

*Rev. Stephen Tucker is Vice-President of JOBS Coalition, Chairman of the Board and Executive Director of Jobs Partnership Greater Washington, and Senior Pastor of New Commandment Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. New Commandment is the Cluster “C” coordinating church for CSOSA’s faith-based Re-entry Initiative. ■*

# Career Expo Draws Thousands of Young People to District

By ARNESA HOWELL

Alicia McKeithan has always held a fascination with electrical work, so it's no surprise that she successfully wired two interior lighting fixtures in little more than 15 minutes during the recent 2004 Careers in Construction Expo held at the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C.

"I like making stuff light up," admits the 15-year-old student at Friendship-Edison Collegiate Academy in Northeast D.C. "This [Expo] lets me explore my areas of interest. It's a good place to teach kids."

McKeithan was one of thousands of young people who came from as far away as West Virginia, Delaware, and Pennsylvania and as close as Maryland, Virginia, and the District to attend the April 29 Expo, sponsored jointly by Associated Builders and Contractors and Future Force Now. An estimated 2,000 secondary school students traveled by bus and Metrorail to attend the event, designed to introduce students in grades 7 through 12 about the professional and educational opportunities available in the construction industry.

Clyde Feron, 16, a student at Swenson Arts & Technology School in North Philadelphia,

couldn't pass on the learning opportunities offered at the Expo. He seemed particularly interested in a set of innovative tools one company showcased for use in pipe cutting. Having a strong interest in plumbing, Feron (who usually uses a hacksaw), was amazed that the more "modern invention" only took a couple of minutes.

## Hands-On Learning

Glancing around the exhibit hall, Christine Bahar Hess, director of Careers in Construction, noted that more than 30 interactive construction craft exhibits, including concrete finishing, electrical work, fiber optics, carpentry, plumbing, and estimating, were featured and had been well-received by visiting students.

"There's so much positive energy," said Hess, who herself has worked in the field of welding. "The students get to try hands-on exhibits like nail driving, and get to talk about construction technology programs."

Representatives from schools such as the Pennsylvania College of Technology in Williamsport, PA, and government agencies including the U.S. Department of Labor joined a laundry list of construction-related companies in attendance at the event.

Rich Schneider, an account manager for Welding, WV-based Valley National Gases Inc. (VNG), was on-site to discuss the many opportunities available with VNG, whose clients span the construction industry, as well as mining and steel production and fabrication. VNG offers a wide variety of products, from fire safety equipment to welding and cutting equipment.

Schneider noted that through the training and learning opportunities provided at VNG, young people can build their skill sets and use them across a variety of industries.

"Pipe welding, installing steel beams on buildings, body work on autos, even jewelers" can use welding in some way, he explained. "I think the skilled trades will make more money than office people in the future."

With many field workers headed for retirement, Rockville, MD-based P&P Contractors Inc. is reaching out to bring in fresh talent, according to Javier Ramos, an estimator who's been with the company about six months.

"Construction can be a profitable and rewarding field," stressed Ramos. "Lots of kids in high school aren't aware of that. [P&P] is hoping to get kids interested in the construction industry... period." ■

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