

Model Education Programs for Rikers Dischargees

The Model Education Programs for Rikers Dischargees places individuals leaving the custody of the NYC Department of Correction into post-discharge educational programs. There are three model programs: GED/college preparation, basic literacy instruction, and mentoring services.

<i>Agency</i>	<i>Start Date</i>	<i>Number Served per year</i>	<i>CEO Budget (City FY 08)</i>	<i>Total Budget (City FY 08)</i>
The Department of Correction	fall 2007	660	\$875,000	\$875,000

Problem Statement

Among young adults, aged 16 to 24, who are in poverty, youth exiting detention and young people returning from incarceration are at particularly high risk of becoming disconnected from school and work.¹ About 70% of offenders and ex-offenders are high school dropouts² and, according to at least one study, about half are "functionally illiterate."³ This lack of literacy skills contributes to the chronic unemployment experienced by young adults discharged back to the community. Without intervention, two-thirds of ex-offenders are likely to be re-arrested.

Research and Evidence

The issue of low-level reading skills has been identified as a systemic problem for youth involved in the criminal justice system. A 2002 report by the Casey Foundation identified New York’s CUNY Catch and Friends of Island Academy as successful national models in establishing a pathway for GED completion and college admission.⁴ These two programs have high GED completion rates (70-80%) and are successful in finding employment for participants. The CUNY Catch program is also noted for helping participants enroll in college.

Research suggests that an individual with a job is less likely to commit another crime following incarceration. For example, an evaluation of the Windham School District, a prison educational system in Texas, found that 70% of individuals in the program were employed during their first year of release. And, of this 70%, the recidivism rate was 15%, which is significantly lower than the rate for the general prison population.⁵

Program Description

The Model Education Programs for Rikers Dischargees expands educational opportunities available to youth upon their release from DOC custody. The initiative also expands work readiness and literacy during incarceration and post-discharge.⁶

Participants will be offered education and mentoring services through one of three providers, each utilizing a different service delivery model, and meeting different participant needs.

- **GED/College – CUNY Catch** provides inmates, ages 16-24, with post-incarceration educational services, including pre-GED classes, GED preparation classes, and college preparation classes at three CUNY campuses: Bronx Community College, Medgar Evers College, and LaGuardia Community College. Assessment of participant educational needs may take place either on Rikers Island (prior to discharge) or at one of the participating CUNY campuses after discharge. (500 students)

- **Basic Literacy – Friends of Island Academy** offers basic literacy instruction for low level readers using the Wilson Reading System. The Wilson System has been in use for the past two decades, and has been found to be effective for a wide range of reading problems, including those at risk for reading failure.⁷ It uses direct, explicit and multi-sensory instruction to facilitate reading. (25 students)
- **Mentoring – Getting Out/Staying Out** provides inmates who are enrolled in schools on Rikers Island with one-on-one mentoring, including representation by mentors at court appearances to provide testimony on student achievements, as well as post-discharge transitional services leading to educational and/or job training opportunities. (135-150 students)

Evaluation Framework

Recruitment, retention, educational, and employment outcomes will be measured, as well as recidivism rates. In addition, the readmission rate of program enrollees will be compared on an annual basis to the rate for a similar inmate population.

Target Population

The initiative serves young adults, ages 16-24, who are being discharged from the Department of Correction.

Expected Outcomes

Short-Term:

- Increase the number of young adults enrolling in educational programs after incarceration
- Increase the literacy levels, educational skills, and occupational skills of participants

Long-Term:

- Reduce the recidivism rate among participants in educational programs
- Increase the number of discharges achieving a HS Diploma/GED
- Increase the number of discharges enrolling in college
- Increase the ability of participants to obtain employment

¹ CEO Report, 33-34.

² Travis, Jeremy, Amy Solomon, and Michelle Waul. "From Prison to Home: The Dimensions and Consequences of Prisoner Reentry." Washington D.C.: The Urban Institute, 2001. See also, Freeman, Richard. "Crime and the Employment of Disadvantaged Youths." In George Peterson and Wayne Vroman (eds.) *Urban Labor Markets and Job Opportunities*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute Press, 1992.

³ Hirsch, Amy, Sharon Dietrich, Rue Landau, Peter Schneider, Irv Ackelsberg, Judith Bernstein-Baker, and Joseph Hohenstein. "Every Door Closed: Barriers Facing Parents with Criminal Records." Washington, D.C.: Center for Law and Social Policy and Community Legal Services, 2002.

⁴ Brown, David, Sarah Maxwell, Edward DeJesus, and Vincent Schiraldi. "Barriers and Promising Approaches to Workforce Development for Young Offenders Toolkit." Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2002.

⁵ Martinez, Alma I. and Michael Eisenberg. "Impact of Educational Achievement of Inmates in the Windham School District on Recidivism." Texas: Criminal Justice Policy Council, 2000.

⁶ Other CEO initiatives targeting the court-involved population include the Civic Justice Corps, Educational Expansion on Rikers Island, and Employment Works.

⁷ Bursuck, William D. and Shirley V. Dickson. "Implementing a Model for Preventing Reading Failure: A Report From the Field." *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 14(4):191-202, Fall 1999.