



SNEAK PEEK 2016: NEW YEAR, NEW BEGINNINGS

Look inside the new Academy of Construction & Design at IDEA Public Charter School in the Jan/Feb 2016 issue of *JOBS Coalition Pathways*. Its launch brings more opportunities to students, with Council member Yvette Alexander (Ward 7) saying: "We have to offer every option to our young people."

For the latest, visit: www.jobscoalitiondc.com

MAKING STRIDES: JOBS COALITION ACCOMPLISHMENTS



While raising awareness of workforce challenges and potential barriers to employment, the JOBS Coalition and its members have combined their resources and industry expertise to achieve the following results:

- Built the Bellevue Resource Center, a program facility serving the hard-to-reach, hard-to-employ, and returning ex-offender populations. The Center was completed on September 30, 2003.
- Guided the creation of the Construction & Design Academy at Cardozo, providing District students access, training, and preparation for careers in the construction industry and trades after graduation. The Academy officially opened in September 2005. □



THE BEST OF 2015: A YEAR IN REVIEW

2015 marked a year of change. The Academy of Construction & Design celebrated its 10-year anniversary while bidding farewell to the Cardozo Education Campus. ACAD graduates continued to make their marks in the world, pursuing college degrees, careers and returning to their alma mater to be guiding stars to future generations. IDEA Public Charter School in Northeast Washington, D.C. welcomed the Academy into its academic fold. News anchor Jim Vance kept it "real," urging Academy graduates to adjust their attitudes – be savvy savers, be careful of the company they keep, and work towards home ownership: "Don't park a Lexus in front of an apartment you rent." And formerly incarcerated employees came together to offer support in life and on the job, helping the younger workers deal with their issues and stay employed. These are among the stories told in this year's *JOBS Coalition Pathways* newsletter. Here, a look back through excerpts of the top stories of 2015:

By Arnesa A. Howell

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2015

Not every student who studied a skilled trade at the Academy of Construction & Design decided the trades would be in his or her future. Still, studying career and technical education provided each graduate a solid foundation, no matter the life path chosen. *JOBS Coalition Pathways* caught up with past grads and chatted one-on-one about lessons learned, careers chosen, and advice they'd give to the students now being groomed at the Academy.

MARIE LOUISE NGO MBOCK: 'SPIRIT AND METTLE'

Skilled Trade: Electrical

Class of 2009: The determination to succeed

overshadows the petite frame of Academy graduate Mbock. She remembers facing her fears as a new student at Cardozo Senior High School, where she enrolled after leaving her native Cameroon, West Africa. She spoke French. Her classmates did not. That didn't keep Mbock from excelling in the Academy and gaining skills that even then she knew she would "carry for a lifetime." Today, Mbock holds a bachelor's degree in construction management from Westwood College in Virginia and is pursuing her master's in project management at Catholic University in the District of Columbia. "My goal is to finish my master's degree in project management so I can be a really good project manager in the fu-

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MARCH/APRIL 2015

Kenny Glover has a storied history, one that has journeyed through the valleys of incarceration before finally climbing out to the other side. He's open about the challenges he – and other ex-offenders – must face to make it and keep going. And he offers a “real” brand of support on and off the job by sharing his experiences and leading ex-offender forums at Miller & Long, the company that gave him a second chance.

Ask the day his life turned around, and Kenny Glover answers easily: Sept. 25, 1996. It's a date seared into his mind. The day he knelt in his cell at the correctional treatment facility in D.C. while serving out the remainder of a six-year sentence for attempted robbery and burglary. On a Wednesday – after years struggling with crack cocaine and a cycle of incarceration that started at the age of 11 – he'd finally been “broken.”

“My mom wouldn't answer the phone; she wouldn't send me no money. It was just me and God,” remembers Glover, now 47. “I just got on my knees and prayed.”

Almost 19 years later, Glover is in a different and

better place. He's exchanged drugs and idle time that he readily admits led him to “criminal activity with a cocktail of crack cocaine, PCP, marijuana and alcohol” for mentorship and 12- hour-plus days with the construction company Miller & Long. There, he works in the human resources department. It's the company where he started out as a carpenter's helper in 2003, making \$10 an hour.

Nowadays, Glover faces a different set of challenges: helping other formerly incarcerated men build their own success stories. As an HR specialist at Miller & Long, Glover does everything from doling out advice to younger guys new to working in the belly of a construction site, known as the pit, to transporting workers to health clinics and drug rehabilitation programs. Of course, he recruits for the company as well. Glover also leads regular discussions during ex-offender forums hosted at Miller & Long headquarters in Bethesda, Maryland. During these sessions, returning citizens have an open forum to discuss work and life issues, and are offered resources to help them succeed on the job.– JOBS Coalition Pathways, LEADING BY EXAMPLE: GLOVER SAYS EX-OFFENDERS MUST ‘WANT TO CHANGE’

It's just after 9 a.m. on a Saturday morning, and two construction workers are already seated at the tables inside the Miller & Long Cantrall Training

Center in Bethesda, Maryland. They're dressed week-end casual – a white short-sleeved tee for one and a light gray jacket for the other; both wear blue jeans. No work, no hard hats. For them and four other formerly incarcerated employees, this day off means coming together for a returning citizens forum about their daily struggles on – and off– the job.

Surrounded by fellow workers at his first forum, Dartangan “Tang” Page, 20, expressed frustrations over a recent incident when his timeliness on the site was questioned. His experience sparked a conversation over attendance and workplace communication with job foremen, among key issues workers face when transitioning back into the workforce after serving time.

“I lived in Montgomery County, I'm in the sticks. There's only one bus I could catch when I first started that could get me anywhere near the job site on time,” said Dairon “Bo” Upshur, a safety manager at Miller & Long, remembering when he took a 5:30 a.m. bus that got him to work “an hour and some change” early. On a separate job, he got up at 5:30 a.m. but “no matter what” could not get to the site on time. Those experiences, he said, made him work towards getting a car. He's had three since working at Miller & Long.

Damon “Pizza” Valentine, 38, also chimed in, encouraging Page to stay focused in challenging times. Valentine is an “older brother” to Page, who's been on the job about a month as a carpenter helper. “If he wasn't there during the couple times I got angry at the job, I probably wouldn't have my job right now,” said Page. “I'm thankful that he's here to help me and guide me through these situations.”

These men shared their experiences – and advice – as part of “Men's Rap,” the most popular segment of the forum, where employees can vent and air their frustrations in a healthy way and get positive feedback from their peers and company management, according to Otto Girr, vice president of human resources for Miller & Long Concrete Construction. – JOBS Coalition Pathways, SECOND CHANCES: EX-OFFENDER FORUMS ENCOURAGE PEER SUPPORT, EMPLOYMENT STABILITY □

January/February 2015 *Continued from page 1* ture,” says Mbock, adding that she wants to explore and learn through every opportunity.

She's getting that chance at M.C. Dean, where she started as an intern before moving up to work with the company's Transportation Systems Group. Recent District traffic projects on her slate include the D.C. Streetcar line and the Third

Street Tunnel, which runs underneath the Capitol Crossing development.

Words of Wisdom: “No excuses. I know life might be difficult for some of us – and it might be easier for others – but I don't see that as an excuse. There's no, ‘I can't.’ Always ask for help, because you can't do [anything] by yourself.”



INGRID LOPEZ: ‘FINDING HOME’

Skilled Trade: Carpentry

Class of 2011: She climbed to the top of her class to take home a \$3,000 Norman Dreyfuss scholarship, money she planned to use to help fund her dream of attending Clinton Community College in Plattsburgh, New York, where she enrolled to study psychology to become a family therapist. But life

doesn't always go as expected. “My grandmother was very ill while I was away, and I decided to come back,” shares Lopez, who returned home to Washington, D.C., to be close to her family before her grandmother's passing. Once back, Lopez joined the Metropolitan Police Department and enrolled in the University of the District of Columbia Community College. She graduates in May 2015 with an associate's degree in law enforcement. “Whether I was to be a family therapist or a police officer, I'm still serving the community, serving the people. That's my main priority,” says the police cadet, who's looking forward to moving up the ranks to become “Officer Lopez.”

Words of Wisdom: “Follow your heart. Life is going to throw things at you, so be ready. Everything happens for a reason.” – JOBS Coalition Pathways, ACAD GRADUATES: WHERE ARE THEY NOW? □



MAY/JUNE 2015

Thriving at nine years, the Academy of Construction & Design celebrated its annual Meet the Future Luncheon with the graduation of 15 students. While all were lauded for reaching an academic milestone, a select few received extra accolades: scholarships to help them become workforce- or college-ready. The Norman Dreyfuss Scholarships, the Janifer Outstanding Senior Award, and the Sigal Awards were among the kudos bestowed upon the students – with monetary awards.

Fighting to reach academic success amid family struggles. Aiming to transform lifelong dreams into realities. Searching for jobs in construction or money for college in hopes of building brighter futures after high school. These are the behind-the-scenes stories of the Academy of Construction & Design's latest graduates, who marked new beginnings at the 2015 Annual Meet the Future Luncheon.

The Academy has mentally prepared me for the world ahead," said graduate Taylor Herndon, who plans to attend community college before transferring to a four-year university to study media and communications.

Herndon, the recipient of the Isiah Willis Humanitarian Award, praised the program for giving hope to those who choose an alternative to pursuing a college degree.

"Even though college is good, you don't need college to be successful. You can always go into the

construction business and be successful. It gives people a sense of hope," she said.

On May 15, during its 9th annual luncheon, the D.C. Students Construction Trades Foundation lauded Herndon and her 14 classmates for their commitment to learning the skilled trades before moving forward to the next step in their lives: going off to college or joining the workforce.

This year's award ceremony honored the past, present and future of the Academy of Construction & Design. Two students brought home Norman Dreyfuss Scholarships, competitive awards given to promising graduates to help them realize their personal or professional aspirations after high school.

A Legacy Continues

*In memory of former carpentry instructor Marshall Janifer, who passed away in January 2014, one student received the inaugural Janifer Outstanding Senior Award. Winner Mauri Williams, who received a \$1,000 monetary award, plans to pursue a career with Miller & Long Concrete Construction – JOBS Coalition Pathways, **MEET THE FUTURE 2015 AWARDS LUNCHEON HONORS OUTSTANDING ACADEMY STUDENTS, MCMAHON** □*



SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2015

Mass incarceration is a national issue that has always been on the front burner for Congressman Danny Davis (D-Ill.). During the latest Congressional Black Caucus Legislative Conference, Davis tackled an issue that is overwhelmingly affecting black men and their families as part of his reentry forum, "What's Really Working for Returning Citizens?" Panelists included federal and state representatives, as well as grassroots activists who examined programs and strategies that are working to help this population.

For Avon Hart-Johnson, the issue of mass incarceration for black men hits close to the heart. She remembers her son being taken away when he was 15 years old and returning at the age of 27. He spent 12 years of his life incarcerated, and during that time, Hart-Johnson did what she had to do: mother him through prison.

I mothered him through letters to his jail cell; I mothered him through collect phone calls," recalled Hart-Johnson, who would launch D.C. Project Connect, a nonprofit dedicated to helping other families maintain the bond with their loved ones during – and after – release from prison.

"Families are the best and one of the most effective [reentry] strategies because they are the 24/7 safety net when the social services and human services offices close. Family is the front-line intervention."

By the time he came home, Hart-Johnson said her son had earned a degree in information technology and moved on to work as a federal contractor.

This mother is not alone in her experience. Federal and local agencies estimate that more than 600,000 ex-offenders are released back into their communities each year. And for those returning home, steadfast family support and access to wraparound services that include counseling, training and transitional programs are keys to staying out of prison.

For the Sept. 19 panel, Davis brought together representatives of the government and private sectors to discuss programs that are helping returning citizens transition back to their communities and families.

"I am convinced that as long as I can walk down the streets of the community where I live,

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JOBS Coalition Pathways

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NOVEMBER 2015

Giving back. It's at the heart of the teachings of the Academy of Construction & Design. One student, Krystal Boone, has taken what she's learned at the Academy – and college – and returned to her academic home. She first worked with her mentor and Academy director, Shelly Karriem. Today, Boone is teaching at the Academy, now at IDEA Public Charter School.

Just five years ago, Krystal Boone didn't know what her future held. As a new graduate of the Academy of Construction & Design that year, Boone was focusing on going off to college, where she planned to study business. But it had at times been a difficult



road to get to this point in her life. When she started at Cardozo Senior High School in 2008, it wasn't where she wanted to be. So, she "acted out" – roaming the halls and skipping classes. That all changed when she discovered the Academy, where motivation and support from staff helped her believe in herself, stay in school and pursue a college degree.

The Academy taught me skills more valuable and important than safety and carpentry – it taught me to value my education, and not to let it go to waste," she said at the time.

Now, Boone is working as a teacher at the Academy she graduated from in 2010, and sharing those same values and giving support to future generations of students. For students facing academic challenges, she is "constantly trying to motivate" them to "keep up morale and stay in school," encouraging them not to give up on themselves so they finish the year strong.

*Calling her a "go-getter," Karriem said Boone isn't afraid to delegate responsibility or look to others for help, even if that means reaching out to her and school officials for teaching tips, insight to getting along with others and personal assessments to ensure she's "on the right page." – JOBS Coalition Pathways, **HOME AGAIN: ACADEMY GRAD KRYSTAL BOONE RETURNS TO HER EDUCATIONAL ROOTS** □*

September/October 2015 *Continued from page 3 [if] I run into three African-American males, one of the three has been incarcerated," Davis told the audience at the start of the forum. "That does not speak well for equal justice." – JOBS Coalition Pathways, **REENTRY FORUM 2015: FAMILIES, SUPPORT SERVICES KEY TO EX-OFFENDER SUCCESS***



16. 15. 31. Eddie B. Ellis Jr. went to jail at 16 for manslaughter and served 15 years behind bars before coming out at

the age of 31. During that time, Ellis spent most of his years in solitary confinement, with six years in the ADX Supermax in Florence, Colorado. As one of the formerly incarcerated panelists during Rep. Danny Davis' Reentry Forum, the native Washingtonian made sure to "keep it 100."

*"They say most of us who come home will never be successful, never make it, never be right again in life. But I'm here to prove them wrong," Ellis said. – JOBS Coalition Pathways, **EDDIE B. ELLIS JR.: ONE MAN'S JOURNEY** □*



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