

## **STRIVE – A Model for Helping the Chronically Unemployed**

Today the United States has the highest rates of urban unemployment in our lifetimes. The official unemployment rate in New York City has hit 10 percent, but those without skills and a diploma, especially those who are black or Latino, are facing a jobless rate many times the official statistics. For those with a felony conviction, unemployment is virtually impossible.

Many young people cannot find entry level jobs to join the labor market. Many of those who lost jobs in the recession are still unemployed. Some of them will never again hold a full time job. There was a time when a factory job provided millions of Americans without a college degree with an entry into the middle class. Those days are all but gone now. The factory economy has given way to the service economy, where new and different skills are necessary to succeed.

### **Need National Effort**

In this crisis situation, there ought to be a national mandated effort led by the federal government to train those who are jobless in industries with a future. The nation's economy never stands still. As time goes on, some parts of our economy shrink while others expand; yet others, that never before existed, flourish. We know that many jobs that disappeared during the recent recession will never come back.

Without a national policy to respond to this crisis, there are organizations that have answered the call. One of these is STRIVE, which has 21 affiliates around the country. Here in the city, STRIVE's programs are meant to build the job skills and personal confidence of chronically unemployed New Yorkers from the bottom up.

STRIVE was founded by Rob Carmona in 1984 as a workforce development agency. It has helped nearly 50,000 individuals in New York City and across the country on the path to sustainable employment and a better future for themselves and their families.

The STRIVE programs are offered at no cost to their clients. In 2011, the STRIVE Network graduated 3,000 individuals from its programs and placed over 2,200 in jobs. Over 400 businesses and corporations have employed STRIVE graduates.

STRIVE's initial program emphasizes the "soft skills" necessary to successfully hold any job – showing up on time; working well with others; taking responsibility. It's a three to five week program of attitude and job readiness training. This is followed by occupational skills training – the "hard skills" in the areas of construction, maintenance, office operations, medical billing, landscaping, and others.

In addition, the advent of the "green economy" and the climate change challenge are creating whole new industries, new jobs, and new types of responsibilities within existing jobs. There is a policy in place in New York City to "green" commercial buildings so that they achieve a more efficient use of their energy sources. The job that needs to be done for this to happen didn't exist a

few years ago. Asbestos removal and the reclamation of brown fields are part of the green economy. These are also areas where STRIVE has focused its job skills and employment efforts.

### **Helps Those Left Behind**

The New York STRIVE office, located in Harlem, usually graduates 25 to 30 people from each class of its readiness program. Who are these people? Most are young; 35 to 40 percent are ex-offenders; many do not have a high school diploma or GED; and nearly all are black or Latino. In each case, these are people who have been left behind as a “jobless recovery” followed the recent recession.

When applicants arrive at STRIVE, trained specialists review their background and needs, and they complete a written application. This is followed by an extensive personal interview where their eligibility to participate is determined, as well as their ability to fully benefit from the training, and to retain a job once it is secured. Once they are employed, STRIVE actively follows up the job placement for two years.

Outreach teams visit street fairs, prisons, youth service agencies, churches, and other organizations to distribute information about STRIVE’s work. A wide network of contacts with other community-based organizations often refers people to STRIVE. Many applicants are referred by STRIVE graduates.

Unfortunately, the private sector has not stepped up to support organizations like STRIVE. Seventy to 80 percent of its financing comes from governments, a risky proposition in this time of budget cutting. In this city of myriad foundations, few have focused on providing financial help to STRIVE and like organizations.

That’s a shame because STRIVE helps those who have never before held a job finding meaningful employment and keeping it year after year. It helps people who get off public assistance and find fulfillment in self-sufficiency. It helps ex-offenders who beat the odds and become contributing members of society rather than taking the expected path towards recidivism, and so many more who overcome enormous obstacles every day.

The Sundance Channel ([www.sundancechannel.com](http://www.sundancechannel.com)) will be showing a new program, “Get to Work,” on August 13 at 10:30 p.m. EDT - an unfiltered, uncompromised look at the STRIVE program at Second Chance in San Diego. “Get to Work” chronicles the efforts of STRIVE to empower people long dismissed as unemployable to reenter the job market that many assumed had left them behind.

---

David R. Jones, Esq., is President and CEO of the Community Service Society of New York (CSS), the leading voice on behalf of low-income New Yorkers for over 168 years. The views expressed in this column are solely those of the writer. The Urban Agenda is available on CSS’s website: [www.cssny.org](http://www.cssny.org).

**From the New York Amsterdam News**  
August 2 – August 8, 2012