



Fresh Start Program

In 1989, Living Classrooms Foundation partnered with the Maryland State Department of Juvenile Justice to create the Fresh Start Program. Fresh Start is certified by the Department of Juvenile Services as a non-residential, community based education and vocational program. Fresh Start is a 40-week program providing services through vocational, academic, and social skills development training to high-risk, out of school males ages 16-19. Fresh Start is designed to mirror the workplace by giving participants an opportunity to practice job skills and attitudes as well as interpersonal skills that will help them in their careers and future endeavors. In addition to GED preparation

classes, the program uses carpentry and woodworking as a medium to teach skills that are needed to be successful in any job: punctuality, cooperation, self-motivation, efficiency, work quality, and staying on task.

In addition to teaching the soft skills necessary for retaining a job, the program incorporates a firm attendance policy, service learning hours, experiential field trips, and GED classes. The program also incorporates a student-run business. Fresh Start students produce, market, and sell a line of outdoor furniture and accessories. The proceeds from these student-made products are deposited into the Fresh Start Student Account. Students receive their share of the student account upon graduation.

The program follows a structured curriculum that has five different modules: Toolbox, Production, BOAT Building, Work Study, and Internship. Each module has specific outcomes that each participant is required to meet in order to continue to the next module and eventually graduate from the program. Once the first three modules have been successfully completed, participants then model the skills they have learned by creating their own curriculum and working semi-independently in a local business of their choice. Youth participate in job-search seminars and "mock" interviews, as well as prepare a cover letter and resume in preparation for this component. Once the Work Study component is completed successfully, youth move into the Internship module, where full-time, paid employment is the goal. Following completion of the 40-week program, youth transition into the workforce where Living Classrooms Foundation provides three years of aftercare and follow-up services. It is our goal that youth who complete this program will exhibit positive changes in self-esteem and will remain employed and/or in a continuing education setting. Our aftercare statistics consistently show that 78-81% of Fresh Start graduates are still employed and/or continuing their education after 3 years with only an 11-13% recidivism rate.

Recognition

Fresh Start has been a *PEPNet* award-winning program since 1996. This award recognizes programs for best practices serving at-risk youth and for engaging in a continuous improvement process. The *PEPNet Award* is given by the National Youth Employment Coalition in partnership with the U.S. Department of Labor.

In December 2007, the U. S. Department of Labor awarded Living Classrooms Foundation with a \$1.6 million grant to replicate the Fresh Start Program in Baltimore and Washington, DC. Both new sites opened in July 2008.

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