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Ex-offenders Go to Delancey Street

by Ken Morgan
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On Monday, Feb. 6, Christopher Faye, director of the Delancey Street Replication Project of the Milton Eisenhower Foundation and Abubakr Muhammad Karim, an OSI Senior Justice Fellow spoke about the project. They spoke to over 40 persons, who were mostly Baltimore and Maryland based nonprofit service providers to ex-offenders. The meeting was held in the Baltimore Urban League's historic Orchard Street Church sanctuary.

The sponsor of the replication project is the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation. It got its focus through the work of two presidential commissions. They were the 1967-1968 National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (the Kerner Riot Commission) and the 1968-1969 National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence (the Eisenhower Violence Commission) according to Faye. The Foundation "replicates and communicates scientifically evaluated, multiple solution successes to problems experienced by the poor, racial minorities, the jobless, the undereducated, youth, families, persons leaving prison and America's beleaguered inner cities."

Karim gave the reason for the Baltimore Informational meeting. "Given the state's increased focus on treatment and reentry, we believe the time is right to talk about replicating this program in Maryland. The Delancey Street model has proven to curb recidivism rates and set each participant on a path to success, which ultimately increases public safety." He said, "We can create models like the Delancey model. They don't want to be treated like children, but have something that they can run," says Abubakr.

The Delancey Street Project is designed to help communities replicate a successful program implemented in San Francisco to help ex-offenders called the Delancey Street Project. The ex-offender program is educational and entrepreneurial based.

Founded in the early 1970s by Dr. Mimi Silbert, the Delancey Street Foundation, the original project is a private educational institution. Its belief is that "ex-offenders and substance abusers can become the solutions to their own problems." The participants live and work in a mutually supportive setting. The setting is built on several basic principles. They include "each one teach one," and "learning by doing." They hold each other accountable to do the right thing and live up to the "highest standards of conduct."

This original project counts over 15,000 graduates since its inception. Graduates have found careers as chefs, business owners, managers, counselors, teachers, lawyers, and accountants, often climbing to the highest career ladder rung.

A person who is accepted into the program must commit to staying at least two years. The average is three to four years. You can enter at the age of 18. Participants pursue vocational skills, academic skills and living skills. Your peers decide your preparedness in all of the skill areas as a requirement for graduation.

Faye says, "The ultimate goal is to work our way out of business. Presently, there are five Delancey Street replications around the country." Faye proudly states

"1499 people are running the organization," referring to the five sites run by ex-offender residents.

Plans are underway to launch a Baltimore Delancey Street replication. If you or your organization want to be involved, contact Christopher Faye, director of Delancey Street Replications at the Milton Eisenhower Foundation at 202-234-8104 or Abubakr Muhammad Karim at 301-613-8292. A local contact is Kimberly Haven at Justice Maryland: 410-224-6334.