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World Bank grants homeless new lease on life

BY SCOTT ROSENBERG
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The protests and rallies outside The World Bank Group usually grab the headlines. But for homeless men and women involved in the company's back-to-work program, the real news is the company's investment in their rehabilitation.

The International Finance Corp. (IFC), a member of the World Bank Group, has established a program called A Chance to Work, which offers jobs to rehabilitated drug addicts.

The program works with Gospel Rescue Ministries to bring in homeless men and women and enable them to sustain employment, says John Jackson, the executive director of the ministry.

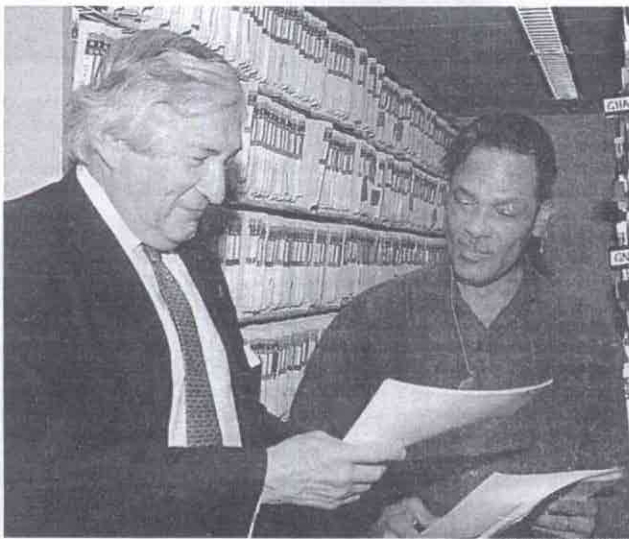
"This is a chance to get some people who want to turn their life around," Jackson says. "Men and women get back in the work force in a meaningful way."

These people come to the ministry (www.grm.org) from the streets, often battling drug and alcohol addiction. Many are referred to the organization from courts, detox centers and churches, Jackson says.

When a person enters the program, there is a two-week period to assess the level of commitment. From there, the rehabilitation program is broken down into four three-month phases. Participants are trained in life skills, academics and faith and are prepared to re-enter the work force.

"It's a hand up, rather than a handout," says Michael Cortese, an IFC information officer.

After nine months in the program, the men and women are expected to get full-time employment, often starting with The World Bank through A Chance To Work. After one year, they are encouraged to seek out employment at other organizations, including D.C. law firms, hotels and other nongovernment



World Bank President James Wolfensohn reviews the work of Chance to Work participant William Payne.

COURTESY / CHANCE TO WORK

organizations, Jackson says.

According to World Bank officials, the program's "primary goal is to provide them with confidence, training and self esteem they need so they'll move on to more permanent jobs with local businesses."

TAKING HIS CHANCE

Scott Morgan graduated from the University of Missouri's well-respected journalism program in 1979. He came to the ministry in 2000, heavily addicted to drugs and having lived on the streets for four years. Morgan completed the program a year and a half later. Through A Chance To Work, he started working at the World Bank, spending a lot of time in the records department.

"I was given a rare opportunity," says Morgan, who now works as a legal assistant at

White and Case Law Firm. Both Morgan and his employers credit his World Bank experience with getting him where he is today.

"It prepared him more than anything else," says Ashera Stanton, records manager and Morgan's supervisor at White and Case Law Firm.

At the World Bank, the graduates are working in a variety of positions, including some with management roles; not all are file clerks.

Regardless of the job, Jackson says the important part is the process. After the one-year program, there is a two-year after-care program.

Despite having placed more than 60 people in jobs, the program knows the 10 percent who relapse may not be ready or willing to change. But no one gives up on them immediately, Cortese says. If there is a

relapse, the person is sent away for one month, typically to another shelter.

"We don't write people off ... they have to pay the penalty of their poor choices," he says. "They've got to earn their pay. This is an important lesson. No one will feel sorry for you."

Over the last decade, up to 500 people have entered the program, but not all graduate, Jackson says. The program graduates about 35 people per year, with a new set of roughly 10 to 12 graduates every three months.

"We have a good work force here," Jackson says. "These are employable people."

In the program, the men and women are educated on social and career skills, including how to prepare a resume, handle medical and legal issues, network and interact.

"What we provide is an environment where they have contact with those they wouldn't normally," Cortese says. "Most people are surprised how articulate they are."

REVENUE AND RELIGION

The ministry's funding sources include churches, government, grants, Fannie Mae and individual donors. Jackson says he likes to keep the funding "balanced."

A good example of what President George W. Bush calls faith-based organizations, the ministry is nondenominational. Although "religion isn't crammed down their throats," Jackson says participants are made aware of the connection upfront.

Mainly, the program is also about making changes and bringing structure into the lives of people who had little or none.

"This is something where all you're doing is giving someone a chance to earn something for a day's work," James Wolfensohn, president of The World Bank Group, says in a video on the program. "So that's not a particularly complex proposition."

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