



## THE READY, WILLING & ABLE PROGRAM:

A BALANCED, PROVEN APPROACH TO REDUCING RECIDIVISM & RESTORING CIVIC LIFE

The United States is suffering from an acute incarceration crisis that has disproportionately impacted the nation's poorest communities. Poverty is a strong corollary of incarceration: the median pre-incarceration income of men in prison is 52% lower than their non-incarcerated counterparts.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, incarceration exacerbates poverty; over 2,000 men each year are paroled homeless in New York City alone.<sup>2</sup>

The extraordinary unemployment rates among parolees (65.6%)<sup>3</sup> and the high rate of recidivism among those in poverty (twice that of stabilized individuals)<sup>4</sup> have created a terrible revolving door that ejects individuals from the mainstream economy and shuffles them between prison cells and shelter beds.

The moral cost to society and the financial impact on taxpayers are profound and destructive. The Doe Fund's *Ready, Willing & Able* program alleviates both.

For more than twenty five years, *Ready, Willing & Able* has successfully addressed the dual issues of recidivism and poverty and delivered tens of thousands of men back to their families and communities as productive, stable members of society. *Ready, Willing & Able* transitions formerly incarcerated men to the mainstream by offering a unique combination of paid work, transitional housing, professional career training, comprehensive social services and case management, and by requiring child support payments and sobriety.

The program was originally designed by Harriet and George McDonald to address the homeless crisis of the mid-1980s. Over time, the exhaustive data produced by *Ready, Willing & Able* proved the program's efficacy in managing an individual's return from prison. Today, *Ready, Willing & Able* is the

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<sup>1</sup> Rabuy and Knopf, "Prisons of Poverty: Uncovering Pre-Incarceration Incomes," Prison Policy Initiative (2015)

<sup>2</sup> New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (2016)

<sup>3</sup> Nally et al, "Post-release Recidivism and Employment," Intl. Journal of Criminal Justice Sciences (2014)

<sup>4</sup> Peterson, "Re-Arrests of Homeless Defendants in New York City," New York City Criminal Justice Agency (2016)



most comprehensive residential reentry program in the nation— and the only post-incarceration program validated by decades of painstaking data collection.

An independent study by Dr. Bruce Western of Harvard University concluded that *Ready, Willing & Able* reduces recidivism dramatically. According to his findings, graduates of the program are 60% less likely to be convicted of a felony three years after exiting the program.

Even participants who depart the program before completing vocational trainings experience benefits across the criminal justice spectrum. After the first five months of *Ready Willing & Able*, participants are 56% less likely to commit a violent crime three years later. Overall, *Ready, Willing & Able* cuts the risk of future police contact by a third.<sup>5</sup>

As the nation awakens to the crisis of mass incarceration, *Ready, Willing & Able* is proven to break the cycles of poverty and recidivism that are so much a part of its underpinnings.

### **THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF WORK**

At the heart of the *Ready, Willing & Able* program is paid transitional work— the opportunity to go to work and earn money from a participant’s first day in the program— complemented by personalized case management and social services, education, career development and training, and lifelong alumni services. The program has been honed and refined over twenty five years, with precise data collection and analysis driving continuous improvement. *Ready, Willing & Able* has served more than 22,000 individuals since 1990.

In a study produced by the Urban Institute, paid transitional jobs proved to be more effective at reducing poverty than any other method, including a \$15/hour minimum wage, the Earned Income Tax Credit, increased housing vouchers, increased SNAP benefits, etc.<sup>6</sup> Since the days of the Works Progress Administration, the power of work to uplift impoverished Americans has been well known.

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<sup>5</sup> Western et al, “An Evaluation of Ready, Willing & Able,” Harvard University (2010)

<sup>6</sup> Giannarelli, Wheaton and Morton, “How Much Could Policy Changes Reduce Poverty in New York City?” Urban Institute (2015)



*Ready, Willing & Able* is the first structured program that leverages that principle to benefit formerly incarcerated men and their families.

The *Ready, Willing & Able* program's benefits extend far beyond the population it serves, however. The program saves the citizens of New York millions of dollars each year. An independent audit concluded that for every dollar utilized in *Ready, Willing & Able*, the taxpayer saved \$3.60 in costs associated with emergency city services and the criminal justice system.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the demonstrable power of work to transform lives and rebuild civic life, *Ready, Willing & Able* remains the only proven program that combines paid transitional work with rigorous, personalized case management, first rate transitional housing, social services, vocational training, and education.

## THE PROGRAM

*Ready, Willing & Able* begins with an education assessment and personal history inventory, a customized social services and education plan administered by a dedicated case manager, and one month of stabilization during which a trainee begins earning money by performing light custodial duties in-house.

A participant's wages are automatically deposited into a personal savings account administered by the program. Beginning with his first paycheck, a participant must pay child support, set aside savings, and remit nominal fees for room and board. Child support paves the way for family reunification upon exiting, while mandatory savings and room and board payments prepare a participant for the rigors of independent living. All *Ready, Willing & Able* participants must abstain from substance and alcohol use and are drug tested randomly, twice a week.

After a participant's stabilization period is complete, he begins three to four months in the *Community Improvement Project*, in which crews of "men in blue" clean over 170 miles of New York City streets

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<sup>7</sup> Tranfa-Abboud et al, "The Value of Investing in Ready, Willing & Able: A Cost-Benefit Analysis," Marks, Paneth & Shron (2012)

and sidewalks each day under contracts with Business Improvement Districts, City Council members, and park and public space organizations.

This introductory work improves the quality of life for city residents while teaching participants the soft-skills of employment, personal responsibility, and teamwork— replacing the culture of prison with the mores of mainstream, working society.

Throughout the program during evenings and off hours, participants are actively engaged in mandatory classes and workshops that cover foundational education and a variety of essential skills, including parenting (required for those with children under 18), adult literacy, financial management, conflict resolution, and relapse prevention. A host of elective educational opportunities are also available, including the chance to achieve high school equivalency diplomas and pursue post-secondary coursework and degrees.

Around the halfway point of the program, participants enter professionally licensed career training tracks in one of several recession-proof, growth industries, including the Culinary Arts, Commercial Driving, Pest Control, Building Maintenance, and Fleet Management/Logistics. Each training track is taught by professional instructors, on site in The Doe Fund’s facilities. Most end with a certification and professional license, significantly enhancing the likelihood of a higher starting wage and the potential for lifelong career advancement.

Career training extends beyond the classroom as well. The Doe Fund owns and operates a host of “Social Enterprises” — businesses that earn essential revenue to support the program and provide vital experience and paid work for participants. Besides the *Community Improvement Project* (the organization’s largest social enterprise), The Doe Fund operates an exterminator service, *Pest at Rest*, and a catering business attached to its Culinary Arts training program, *Dishes by Doe*. The Doe Fund was the first organization in the nation to bring this unique, hybrid business and training model to scale.

In the final months of the program, clients participate in dress rehearsal-style mock interviews with corporate volunteers. The program’s onsite graduate services department links participants with

employment opportunities through a network of over 400 employer partners. Housing specialists help participants identify and apply for self-supported apartments. After securing independent housing and private sector employment, all graduates are eligible to receive lifelong career services and social service support.

In the year following graduation, *Ready, Willing & Able* provides \$1,000 as a savings matching grant in installments. An installment is paid only when a graduate checks in with their caseworker and reports on their employment, housing, and criminal justice statuses. Employment must be verified by pay stubs; housing is verified by a rent receipt. Incentivizing the reporting of outcomes has provided the program unmatched, fully validated data to drive constant improvement.

## MODELS & CAPACITIES

**Residential Program:** The original residential program model transitions individuals with histories of incarceration to total self-sufficiency through paid work, drug counseling and testing, vocational training, education, and holistic social services. *Capacity: 670 across 3 facilities*

**Non-Residential “Day” Program:** A nonresidential version of the program that offers all the same paid work, vocational training, and social services of the residential model for domiciled parolees. Originally developed under a grant from the US Department of Labor. *Capacity: 150 trainee positions*

**Residential Young Men’s Program:** A threefold increase in the number of young men ages 18-26 in *Ready, Willing & Able* led us to develop a special version of the program for the population. Neurological research confirms that the brain’s executive functions are fully formed only at age 25,<sup>8</sup> despite the treatment of young men as adults in the criminal justice system. Furthermore, young people with a history of foster care have dramatically increased rates of unemployment (50%), homelessness (31%), PTSD (60%), and incarceration (57%).<sup>9</sup>

The urgency surrounding this population’s needs compelled The Doe Fund to create the Young Men’s Program, an education- and personal development-focused version of *Ready, Willing & Able* that

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<sup>8</sup> Johnson, Blum, et al. “Adolescent Maturity and the Brain.” *The Journal of Adolescent Health* (2009)

<sup>9</sup> Mastin et al. “Foster Care and Disconnected Youth” *Community Service Society/The Children's Aid Society* (2013)



includes paid work and vocational training enhanced by comprehensive education programs, intensive social services, and social, emotional, and personal skill building. *Capacity: 100+; for young men ages 18-26*

## REPLICATION

The Doe Fund receives replication and training requests on a weekly basis from municipalities and sister organizations around the country. To date, The Doe Fund has trained providers in a half dozen regions including Chicago, Atlanta, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C., on operational and programmatic facets of *Ready, Willing & Able*.

The sole full replication of *Ready, Willing & Able* is a daughter program operated by The Doe Fund in Philadelphia. The *Ready, Willing & Able Philadelphia* residential program serves 70 men at a time and celebrated its fifteenth year of service in 2016. The Philadelphia program's data shows identical efficacy and outcomes as the New York program.

The Doe Fund is actively considering requests to develop a full replication program for additional locations throughout the United States.

## PROGRAM DETAILS

**Program length:** 9-12 months, including one month of post-incarceration orientation and sobriety stabilization with in-house paid work; 3 months of paid transitional work on street cleaning crews; 4-6 months of intensive vocational training and paid work; 1-2 months of job and housing search. Social services and personalized case management follow participants throughout the program. Lifelong graduate services are available, including job and housing placement, for those who require additional assistance.

**Requirements:** Stable physical and mental condition for work; abstinence from drugs and alcohol, verified by twice weekly drug testing.



**Earnings & Savings:** Participants earn money from their first day in the program. Mandatory savings, room and board contributions, and continuous child support payment ensure self-sufficiency and provide the opportunity to reunite with family upon exiting.

**Education & Coursework:** Adult literacy and high school equivalency courses; computer training; personal financial management; conflict resolution; fatherhood workshops; relapse prevention.

**Vocational Training & Professional Licenses:** Onsite, professional instruction and licensing in Commercial Driving (CDL License); Pest Control (NY State License); Culinary Arts/Food Handling (ServSafe Certified); Green Building Maintenance (OSHA Certified); Logistics, Dispatch, and Crew Management.

**Data collection and utilization:** Hundreds of data points collected at intake, throughout the program, and in one- to three-year follow ups including demographics, family characteristics, foster care history, education, criminal justice histories, substance abuse, job retention, wages and sectors, and many other categories. Data is leveraged internally to drive program improvements and externally, by the academic and policy communities, for research initiatives.

**Transition to independence:** Graduate services departments connect participants with a network of over 400 private sector employers that have partnered with The Doe Fund to fill open entry-level positions. Corporate partners draw talent from *Ready, Willing & Able* because of the bottom-line benefits of employing program graduates, including lower turnover, higher productivity, sobriety, and the desire for continual advancement within a company. Housing specialists help participants identify safe, stable residences.

**Post-graduate services:** Post-graduation services, including social services, housing placement assistance, and ongoing career services, help ensure a participant's long term independence and success. Transitional work is available to all graduates in the event of a short-term employment lapse. A \$1,000 savings matching grant is provided in installments to graduates who report on and verify their outcomes.