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HOME FRONT

Help for Those Seeking a Job and a Home



Hiroko Masuike for The New York Times

Charles Lewis, right, a vocational coordinator for Praxis, helps Roy Simmons, left, and Leon Bradley with job hunting.

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ONE man is a former professional football player. The other has been a security guard and a short-order cook amid stints in prison for selling drugs. As different as their backgrounds are, both men are now homeless, jobless and infected with the virus that causes AIDS.

Roy Simmons, 51, was an offensive lineman for the New York Giants and Washington Redskins in the late 1970s and early '80s. Leon Bradley, 55, was recently paroled after four years in prison.

On a recent evening, they attended a session in Manhattan arranged by Praxis Housing Initiatives, a nonprofit group for New York City residents who are homeless and living with AIDS or H.I.V. In addition to providing temporary housing for such people and helping them seek long-term housing, the group also offers health and social service programs.

The session, which dealt with résumé writing and interviewing for jobs, was part of a voluntary employment assistance program that Praxis added for its residents in January. The program also helps participants find jobs or seek out vocational training programs.

The session took place at the former Riverside Hotel in Manhattan, one of four former single-room-occupancy hotels in New York in which Praxis runs its program. The four house a total of nearly 400 people.

Mr. Simmons is living at the Riverside facility. He landed there, he said, after a friend he had been staying with asked him to leave. "I didn't have a place to go," he said.

Mr. Bradley has been living in the Praxis facility in the former Lincoln Hotel in Brooklyn; he said he had nowhere to go after being paroled in early March.

People are generally referred to Praxis by the city's H.I.V./AIDS Services Administration, and stay an average of four months before finding long-term housing, said John Foran, Praxis's chief executive. Most Praxis residents are men, and most range in age from the mid-20s to the mid-50s, he said.

Helping participants join or rejoin the work force is a challenge, said Carolann Joseph, the employment program's director.

Thirty of the 135 residents who have joined the program have found jobs, Ms. Joseph said: "food service, maintenance, messenger — entry level." Many need to work on elementary job-seeking skills before they are ready to enter the work force, she said.

Albert Lee Jr., 46, recently moved from the Riverside site to his own apartment in the Bronx, but he has remained in the employment program as he seeks full-time work in place of his current part-time job.

At the recent session at the site, he played the role of a job applicant. LaDonya Bowie, a Praxis vocational coordinator playing a company interviewer, asked, "What kind of salary are you interested in?"

Mr. Lee was not sure. In her critique later, Ms. Bowie told the group, "He should have come back at me and asked, 'What is the position paying at the current time?'"

Praxis was founded in 1995 by the Rev. Gordon Duggins, an Episcopal priest, and G. Sterling Zinsmeyer. It survived a crisis in 2003 when the men were accused of using Praxis funds to create and run for-profit residences of a similar nature. They denied wrongdoing, but resigned and settled a state investigation by paying Praxis \$700,000.

Now, with the help of Praxis, Mr. Bradley and Mr. Simmons are trying to rebuild their lives.

"I'm trying to get a job so I can get an apartment," Mr. Bradley said.

Mr. Simmons said that he had developed diseases and conditions besides H.I.V., and that he had been unemployed and living on government disability benefits since 1999. He said he hoped to find part-time work as a drug and alcohol abuse counselor, a position for which he has earned state certification.

"I'm ready to move," he said, speaking of both his home and his work.