



# Business Access Community Update

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## Setting the Bar Higher in Lower Rio

We recently completed orientation for 80 Achievers in the Texas Lower Rio Grande area. Several unique processes are underway in this renewed community.

- We are placing wireless broadband cards in the Achievers' computers, making the Internet (and their training) accessible from virtually anywhere. (Wherever they can make a cell phone connection, they can connect to the Internet.)
- Lower Rio is using Business Access to serve their TANF Exempt population. Nearly 70% of the TANF Exempt Achievers in this community completed their first curriculum within 30 days of receiving their computer.
- Case management staff are taking an active role in customizing curricula to help Achievers meet their employment/career goals.
- One of these new curricula will help Achievers obtain the National Retail Federation certification. In addition, we have developed Work Readiness curricula.
- We will be adding specialized ESL online training in the near future.
- Business Services staff (and BA staff) are working to connect local employers with Achiever graduates whose training will make them good candidates for employment.

This is an excellent example of how the In-Home Learning System can be more fully integrated into the Workforce process, connecting Achievers to relevant training and employers to trained candidates, and doing it with a population traditionally difficult to serve.

## Chicago Comes Online

Our new Chicago community is off to a great start. Ten Achievers completed orientation September 8. In a little more than a week, the group had completed a total of 138 courses, and individuals had averaged more than 23 hours online. This is a program for low income working mothers with a goal to increase job retention and wages. We'd like to thank **Robin Watson**, whose efforts helped assure a successful launch!



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### BA Staff Volunteer

On September 11, Business Access employees participated in Freedom Day for the sixth consecutive year. This year we spent the cool, sunny day repairing, refurbishing, and repainting a Catholic Charities facility in Dallas. Many thanks to **Sonya L. Jackson**, who coordinated the event for Business Access staff.

### Achiever's Words

**Beth**, an Achiever in West Texas offers these words of wisdom: "The striving and adversity are all part of it. They make the journey worthwhile and lead to success. They are part of the fun. It's okay to get off track now and then. We all do. But getting back on track and continuing the journey is what it's all about!"

Business Access is spearheading a program for medium and minimum security female prisoners in New Jersey. This program follows inmates from prison, through the assessment center, to the halfway house, and finally into their homes when they move out on their own. Training is accessed through computer labs in the centers. The program is designed to help clients progress from acquiring basic computer skills to learning workforce readiness skills and, ultimately, to gaining career-specific skills. Learning curricula include skills training, basic application of skills exercises and real-world application projects. Participants who have completed training in the centers will advance to the in-home version of the program, which includes their own laptop and Internet access.

The program is conducted in cooperation with The Nicholson Foundation, Bo Robinson Education and Training Center, Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women, The Kintock Group, The New Jersey Department of Labor, New Jersey Workforce Development, Rutgers Center for Women in Work, Essex County College, New Jersey State Parole Board, New Jersey State Employment and Training Commission, and Write - New Jersey.

### **Learning to Embrace Conflict**

"Before, I never would have talked, I would have run away," **Esperanza**, an Achiever in Cameron County Texas, told Mentor Sonya Morgan, referring to a conflict she had with her Case Manager. A light seemed to go on after Esperanza completed several online courses about communication skills and, in particular, a course in conflict resolution. The knowledge bolstered her confidence. "I can handle that without crying." she realized, telling us, "I pulled everything out of the course and it worked." Her confidence spilled over into her interviews, ultimately landing her a job in sales with State Farm Insurance. While it's one thing to gain knowledge, it's another thing to put it into action. We applaud Esperanza for her effort!

### **Overcoming Homelessness**

At first, **Gecover** looked like an Achiever who simply wasn't meeting his participation requirements. The truth was, he had become homeless. He even returned his laptop, expecting to be dropped from the program. Instead, Mentor Georgann Miller worked with Gecover and his Case Manager to develop a plan. The Case Manager would hold on to his laptop, while Gecover would complete training on the computers at the Workforce office or at the local library. We switched his training to courses directly relevant to his homeless situation (Pikes Peak training). The planned worked: Gecover recently completed his courses, graduated, and earned his computer.

### **Snap Decisions Work**

Go with your gut. Several books – including the popular Blink and a new book entitled Gut Feelings – both recommend the wisdom in going with your first instincts. One test found that when choosing from a list of hundreds of potential stock investments, people fared better if they made decisions based on their gut feelings rather than careful analysis. If too many options and too much information seem to be clouding your logical abilities, perhaps it time to go with your gut.

### **Over 900 Course Offerings**

Our online course catalog contains over 900 courses available to Achievers and Case Managers. Course offerings include training from Alchemy, Learn.com, Skills Compass, GED Pathways, and Pikes Peak Learning, plus courses incorporated from other vendors.

### **Help Reading**

Achievers who struggle to read can activate a BOT (short for "robot") that will describe the features on Business Access Web site pages. It will also read selected text (or the text of a full article) in both English and Spanish. It's a terrific tool to help clients who struggle with their reading.

## Growing Up While in Prison

Over the years, a number of Business Access clients have described the changes they've made as a result of spending time in prison. You can read their stories on our Web site by visiting the "All of Us" article page.

Here's a sampling of experiences Achievers have shared with us:

### Not Seeing things in Extremes

While in prison, **Gloria** says she learned that she had been living like a victim. Though she had been victimized, abused as a child, she needed to change. "She (the pastor) taught us how we could break the cycle of victimization. To do that, I had to look at all the self-hate I had learned." The programs in prison and at the Salvation Army helped her find her spirituality, let go of her perfectionism, and stop beating herself up emotionally. "I love myself now. I pray to God. I don't see things in extremes. ...It's a daily thing. I have to work at loving myself every day. Now, I see things in colors...that there are beautiful days."

### One Day at a Time

One afternoon, **Kamela** exploded in a rage that landed her in prison for two years. "I used to blame myself. I'd think, 'No one wants to love me.' My mom wasn't there, and I didn't know my dad. Every man in my life winds up leaving and not loving me. What's wrong with me? Now ... I try to take things one day at a time. I don't try to make things more than what they are. I'm loving myself... me first. I think more about me and my well-being. I know it's not what happens to us (that counts), it's how we react. I know you can't say you'll never do something ...I can't say, 'I'll never do that' because I've done that...That was me...I did something I never thought I'd do. I'm trying to make sure that I take good care of myself and look up to myself, and if I do that, my choices of who I have around me are going to be better."

### Achiever Words: A Plan that Worked

**Mary**, an Achiever in New Orleans, has developed a plan for getting through difficult courses. "I completed two courses that I was having trouble finishing. It was my goal for the weekend to review both courses again and take the comprehensive tests. It worked!!! I find that when I am having trouble with something, it is better to back away, get some breathing space, and stop worrying about it; then, after a time, go back to it. You should be able to succeed with a fresh mind and outlook."

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### When a Loved One Is in Prison

Consider directing your clients with a family member in prison to a series of articles and information we have on the topic. Use the Search tool on our Web site to find articles about **Prison**; then select the article **Prison: How It Affects the Family**.

### Connected Bricklayers

At Freedom Day, many Business Access volunteers were taught how to fill and patch gaps and cracks in the mortar of a brick building by a young man who owned his own brick and stone laying company. During the day, he explained that he had an upcoming job installing nine pieces of high end Italian granite. When asked how he'd affix the stone, he explained. "I didn't know...I had to Google it."

**Learn more about how the Business Access has helped Workforce:**

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