

Education Program Aims To Give Inmates Self-Esteem

by Mike Russo Neighbors 12/06/12 Comment



Sean Pica, executive director, Hudson Link Prison. Photo Credit: *Contributed*

OSSINING, NY – Sean Pica, executive director of the Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison, a non-profit program to provide a college education to incarcerated men and women, is helping them make a positive impact in their lives and the community.

"Transformation is more than just the effect on an individual," he said, "It is also the ripple effect on the prison community, the students, families, and the communities they return to."

Since its inception in 1998 in response to a lack of legislative funding, the program has grown from 16 students at Sing Sing Correctional Facility to 250 male and female inmates at four prisons throughout the state.

Pica, who is also a graduate of the program, has a bachelor's degree from Nyack College, a master's degree from the New York Theological Seminary and a master's in social work from Hunter College. He is working on his master's in business administration from Mercy College.

In 2002, Pica was appointed as an Inmate liaison by the superintendent of the program before being appointed its director in 2004.

Since taking on that role, his responsibilities include program management, business development, fund-raising and setting strategic goals.

"My job has been to be the face of the organization and get the word out about what we do and how we do it," he said.

The program, Pica said, affords prisoners the opportunity to pursue college degrees while still incarcerated so they can have productive lives, build self-esteem and contribute to society when they are released.

He said since the program has been established, the recidivism of prisoners involved in the program has dropped to 0 percent.

The program works together with Mercy College to provide opportunities for students in prison to collaborate with traditional college students through debates and other learning events.

Pica said those events are very important to inmates because they build confidence and self-esteem.

Pica said that clothing programs to provide business attire for potential job candidates has also been established as well as networking programs for graduates, which include opportunities to share job leads and their experiences.

Currently HBO is producing a documentary titled "Sing Sing University," about the prison-education program.

"I have the best job in the world," Pica said. "To see other young students get the same opportunity I had, I would not give that up for anything."

For more information or to make a donation to the Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison Program, visit www.hudsonlink.org.

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