



## YO! Watts Putting Young Ex-Offenders on a Productive Path

Students for Higher Education Start Classes While Still Incarcerated



Recently an orientation for young ex-offenders, just released from juvenile camp, was held at the Youth Opportunity Movement (YO!) in Watts. The young people are participants in the YO's Students For Higher Education (SFHE) program which serves the growing number of youth released from incarceration. The program strives to put the young offenders on an education, employment and training path before they're released from juvenile detention camp.

YO case managers, who visit the camp, engage participants at least three months prior to release through intensive counseling and transition support. They are given academic assessments and can receive college credit for basic skills and general education courses. One-on-one tutoring is available and they are mentored by volunteer college students and program peers.

Upon release the young ex-offenders are taken to Los Angeles Trade Technical College—where they are again assessed academically—and enrolled in classes. Financial support is available for basic necessities and school supplies. The ex-offenders are closely tracked for the next 12 months and offered a variety of services to help them become self-sufficient.

The SFHE program prepares participants on how to get and keep a job. This includes resume preparation, interview basics, workplace etiquette, and proper dress. Once they pass the course, they're eligible for a stipend that will give them paid work experience. For most of them, this is their first formal opportunity in the workplace.

A personal development course addresses critical areas that cause recidivism, including anti-social behavior, attitudes, associates and criminal

*For many, the idea that they could even think about attending college, let alone secure up to seven college credits while at camp, is hard to imagine.*

background. Case managers work in conjunction with college counselors, professors, parents and probation officers to keep clients attached to the program and on the right track.

"Our goal is to help them reconnect to education and training that will enable them to obtain jobs in high growth, high demand industries," said Martin Flores, director of the youthful ex-offender program.