



Challenging Barriers. Empowering People.

NJISJ Graduate Lands Job as Assistant Superintendent at Newark Construction Site

Congratulations to Jim West of Newark, a recent graduate of the Institute's Workforce Development and Training Program, who was hired as an assistant superintendent with Hollister Construction Services in Parsippany.

Jim graduated in July from NJISJ's Newark Construction Careers Training Program, which prepares residents in the greater Newark region for meaningful employment in the building trades. During the 12-week program, Jim earned several certifications in construction trades and environmental

remediation. The program also provided academic instruction, technical skills training, comprehensive case management and assistance with job placement and retention.

"Our goal is to help participants overcome barriers to employment and to build on their strengths in order to empower them to secure for themselves fulfilling, living wage careers," said Frank Barszcz, the Institute's workforce development specialist. "We offer our participants some valuable tools and a direction to go in. The rest is up to them."

Jim said he is grateful to NJISJ and Hollister Construction Services. "This job has made a big difference in my life. Matter of fact, it saved my life," Jim said. "I had been unemployed almost three years, trying to find work. I owe a lot to Hollister Construction Services for giving me this opportunity. I can now live a comfortable and enjoyable life. NJISJ helped in so many ways. They gave me a comprehensive introduction into construction trades. I look forward to giving back and motivating the future graduates."

At the graduation ceremony in July, Jim introduced himself to the keynote speaker, Chris Johnson, founder and CEO of Hollister Construction Services. After a few conversations and several interviews, Jim was hired as assistant superintendent for construction at the Marion P. Thomas Charter School in Newark.

"Jim West's commitment to the project and Hollister has exceeded

our expectations and speaks volumes to the training received through the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice," said Brendan Murray, vice president of construction for Hollister. "We are proud to have Jim on our team and look forward to working with NJISJ to continue expanding the Hollister team."



Jim West

"I look forward to giving back and motivating the future graduates."



Dear Friend and Colleague,

Happy New Year! As we begin 2015, the Institute expects a productive year ahead advancing New Jersey's urban areas and residents, promoting social justice and strengthening the state's workforce.

The Institute continues efforts begun in 2014 to reduce the cost of in-state phone calls for inmates in New Jersey's prisons, jails and detention centers. Working with DLA Piper, the Immigrant Rights Clinic at NYU Law School and other partners, NJISJ has petitioned the state Board of Public Utilities to lower the cost of in-state calls at these facilities. The high costs of these phone calls causes unjust hardship for incarcerated individuals and their families.

The Institute's Workforce Development and Training Program continues its services preparing New Jersey residents for careers in construction trades and environmental remediation. This program has helped more than a thousand individuals acquire in-demand skills and find meaningful employment.

Finally, last month the Institute held its first convening of the New Jersey Juvenile Justice Reform Coalition, which included more than a dozen partners from across the state. The New Jersey Juvenile Justice Reform Roundtable addressed a host of topics about reforming the system before and after juveniles are detained. The Institute will provide updates about the Coalition's progress throughout the year.

These are just a few examples of the ongoing work of the Institute to promote social justice and expand economic opportunity for all New Jersey residents. We hope you will continue to follow our efforts at www.njisj.org and on Facebook and Twitter at @NJ_ISJ.

Sincerely,



Jerome C. Harris, Jr.
Interim President and CEO



Jerome C. Harris, Jr.

NJISJ Casework Helps Those in Need Rebuild Their Lives

When Mustafa turned to the Institute for assistance last year, he felt trapped in a legal system that punishes poverty. He is a bright young man from Newark who had a steady job with a trucking company until he was wrongfully arrested a few years ago. Under New Jersey's bail system, Mustafa was held for nearly four months because he could not afford bail, not because he posed a threat.

Although the charges were ultimately dropped, Mustafa incurred nearly \$10,000 in debt owed to bail bond agents. He lost his job. While behind bars, his car was issued several parking tickets and his driver's license was suspended for nonpayment. To make matters worse, when he was released he had trouble finding employment. Mustafa was entangled in an unjust bureaucracy and needed help.

With NJISJ's assistance, Mustafa's future looks brighter. The Institute has worked to get his traffic tickets dismissed, and he is on the verge of restoring his license. NJISJ also filed a petition on Mustafa's behalf to expunge his criminal record, and in December, a Superior Court judge granted Mustafa an order of expungement. This will clear Mustafa's record and allow him to pursue most employment opportunities free from unfair discrimination.

In 2014, Mustafa told his story to the state Legislature, testifying in support of the bail reform package that was signed into law in August. The Bail Reform Act (S946) will help revamp a system that keeps nearly 6,000 New Jerseyans in jail before trial because they can't post bail, not because they pose a threat. Like Mustafa, those



incarcerated because they cannot afford bail often lose their jobs and incur crushing debt.

In addition, the Institute helped Mustafa negotiate his bail debt down to \$4,000, and a colleague at another New Jersey nonprofit organization, so inspired by his story and activism, secured a donation to pay off his bail debt. Mustafa has now found a steady job with a trucking firm and is on track to get his GED. Mustafa's case is one of dozens the Institute works on each year to advance social justice for all New Jersey residents.

NJISJ Petitions State to Lower Cost of Phone Calls for Inmates

Reduced Phone Rates Will Help Incarcerated Individuals Stay in Touch with Their Families, Maintain Relationships

Working to prevent inmates from paying exorbitant fees to keep in contact with their families, the Institute has petitioned the state to lower the cost of in-state phone calls from prisons, jails and detention centers in New Jersey.

The Institute partnered with DLA Piper, one of the largest law firms in the world, and the Immigrant Rights Clinic at NYU Law School to file a petition earlier this year with the state Board of Public Utilities. The petition was submitted on behalf of the Institute itself, several community organizations and a group of formerly incarcerated New Jersey residents and inmates' families arguing that the current high rates impose an unfair hardship. The cost of these phone calls falls disproportionately on poor, minority families.



“Collaboration is the foundation of the Institute’s work, and the support of DLA Piper and our other partners with this BPU petition is invaluable,” said NJISJ’s Senior Counsel and Policy Director Craig Levine.

“Charging unfair and expensive phone rates hurts the most vulnerable – the innocent children of inmates who are

unable to talk to their parents,” said NJISJ Interim President and CEO Jerome C. Harris, Jr. “Limiting the ability of incarcerated people to stay in touch with their families makes it more difficult for them to rejoin their communities. We know maintaining family relationships is crucial to ensuring that those who are behind bars do not return to jail or prison.”

The petition comes in the wake of a Federal Communications Commission rule, implemented in February 2014, which caps the cost of out-of-state calls from correctional facilities but leaves in-state calls unregulated. The petition argues that “high phone rates lead to numerous negative effects for vulnerable families across the state.”

The petition asks the BPU to cap the cost of prison phone calls at rates similar to what is charged in New York. The cost of a 15-minute phone call from New York prisons is less than a dollar, while New Jersey families spend up to \$8.50 for the same call from some county jails. Many people in county jails have been convicted of nothing but are locked up pending trial merely because they cannot afford to pay bail. (The recently adopted bail reform in New Jersey, with which the Institute was involved, will substantially redress this. But the measure will not be effective until 2017.)

Many county jails also hold immigrant detainees who rely on calls to family and friends to help prepare their cases.

The BPU is expected to meet in late January to determine whether to move forward regarding the petition.

The Institute mourns the passing of our dear friend and esteemed colleague, Dr. Clement Alexander Price – Newark’s official historian and champion.



Dr. Clement Alexander Price

Clem, as we and so many Newarkers knew and cherished him, had been an ardent supporter of NJISJ since its founding. The truest way to honor his legacy is to carry on with the two uplifting actions that he undertook every day – celebrating and challenging his beloved city. To honor Clem, the Institute celebrates all that is noble and resilient about Newark. To honor Clem, the Institute challenges our city’s injustices and inequities. Clem’s generosity and eloquence, his scholarship and friendship are deeply missed.

NJISJ, Partners Celebrate Passage of Opportunity to Compete Act

The New Jersey Institute for Social Justice joined its many partners in November to celebrate passage of the Opportunity to Compete Act. Sponsored by PSEG, the event offered a chance for NJISJ to thank the government, business, faith and community leaders who worked tirelessly with NJISJ on this bill to promote fundamental fairness and expand economic opportunity for New Jersey's workforce.

Under the Opportunity to Compete Act (A1999) employers will not be permitted to ask job applicants if they have a criminal history until after the first interview. Also known as "Ban the Box," the bill eliminates the check box on job applications asking candidates if they have a criminal record. Gov. Chris Christie signed the measure into law last summer. The law will open the door to applicants who otherwise may never have been considered and give them the chance to present their skills and qualifications to a potential employer.



Jerome C. Harris, Jr., NJISJ Interim President & CEO, and state Sen. Ronald L. Rice



State Sen. Sandra B. Cunningham and Douglas S. Eakeley, NJISJ Chair



Richard T. Thigpen, Vice President, State Governmental Affairs, PSEG

Challenging Barriers. Empowering People. Making a Difference. Please support the ongoing work of the Institute - Visit njisj.org today!

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