



NYer of the Week



Culinary Program Teaches Homeless Cooking, Life Skills

September 29, 2007

Our latest New Yorker of the week dishes the necessary ingredients to land a job in the food industry. NY1's Shazia Khan filed the following report.

Chef Anthony O'Connor teaches the ABC's of food preparation, but Project Renewal's Culinary Arts Training Program serves up more than just cooking tips.

"Our goal is to help people become self-sustaining and to be able to live independently, not to be forever tied to welfare or other support systems," says Edward Geffner, CEO, Project Renewal.

Since its inception in 1967, Project Renewal has been tackling homelessness in the city, providing not only shelter but also addiction treatment and counseling services. The organization introduced the Culinary Arts Training Program in 1995.

"We chose cooking as a training program because there are jobs, and the whole reason to do this training is to get people back to work," says Barbara Hughes of the Culinary Arts Program.

Students spend the first half of the six-month course in this training kitchen located at the 3rd Street men's shelter on the Lower East Side.

"I've learned different techniques of cooking – the basic knife skills, basic sauces, different ways of cooking meat, all types of meat, fish, poultry," says student Jennifer Rodriguez.

After learning the basics, students advance their knowledge through internships at mostly corporate dining kitchens.

"We're also teaching them skills to get along in the place of employment: how to get along with their boss, how to get along with fellow workers how to come to work on time, how to dress for work," says Geffner.

According to Project Renewal, 89 percent of graduates land a job and after three months, 50 percent remain employed.

Joseph Fisher kicked his drug addiction and has been clean for nine months. He says cooking is his love and adds this program is teaching him how to handle the heat in the kitchen.

"I'm learning all kinds of cooking, responsibility," says Fisher. "You know, everything don't go your way. There is a lot of demand and pushing, yelling, whatever. You've got to be able to deal with it."

And Dwayne Williams says he'd like to open a restaurant in the future, however he doesn't overlook the more immediate benefits of preparing a delicious meal.

"They say a way to man's heart is through his stomach. I think it's the same way for the women, because I think they love when a man comes to cook for them and treats them good," says Williams.

So, for showing people how cooking can be a recipe for success, Project Renewal is our NYER of the week.

- *Shazia Khan*

If you'd like to nominate someone to be NY1's New Yorker of the Week, send an email describing their qualifications to: nyer@ny1.com or mail a letter to:

New York 1 News
New Yorker of the Week
75 Ninth Avenue, 6th Floor