

DAILY NEWS

Boroughs

Good Fortune Society

Classes for former prisoners receive \$465,000 in funding

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A nonprofit that gives former offenders another shot at education received a second chance of its own recently.

The Fortune Society, a 40-year-old organization that helps prisoners reenter the community, nearly lost its literacy and GED classes when its state education funding fell through.

But the city announced last week that it would provide \$465,000 for the programs through the Department of Youth and Community Development's budget, allowing 185 participants to continue learning.

"Without this funding, we wouldn't have an education program," said Stanley Richard, chief operating officer of the Fortune Society. "And the foundation for all of this is education."

The walls of the Fortune Society's W. 23rd St. complex are plastered with essays about novelist and poet Langston Hughes and student vignettes about the subway, work completed during various reading, math and English as a second language courses.

In English instructor Eric Appleton's course, students ages 17 to 50 silently read books ranging from "Jonathan

Livingston Seagull" to a high school drama called "Brothers in Arms," then reflect on them in journals.

When Kuron Halsey began reading the prison memoir "A Bright Spot in the Yard" for the class, he expected the book to scare him out of getting arrested again.

Instead, the 18-year-old found himself gripped by a quote from an inmate serving more than 20 years: "You don't know what hurting is until you try acting as if it doesn't hurt."

Halsey, who attends reading classes at the Fortune Society as an alternative to incarceration, filled a notebook page with his response to the passage, which made him realize he had been suppressing his emotions about a woman.

"Before, I would have read it and said, 'That's deep,' and moved right past it," said Halsey, who has previous arrests for robbery and assault.

Deputy Mayor Dennis Walcott said during a tour of the facility that programs to help ex-offenders reenter society are a priority of the administration's newly created Office of Adult Education.

"We feel this is a wise investment that will pay dividends into the future," Walcott said.