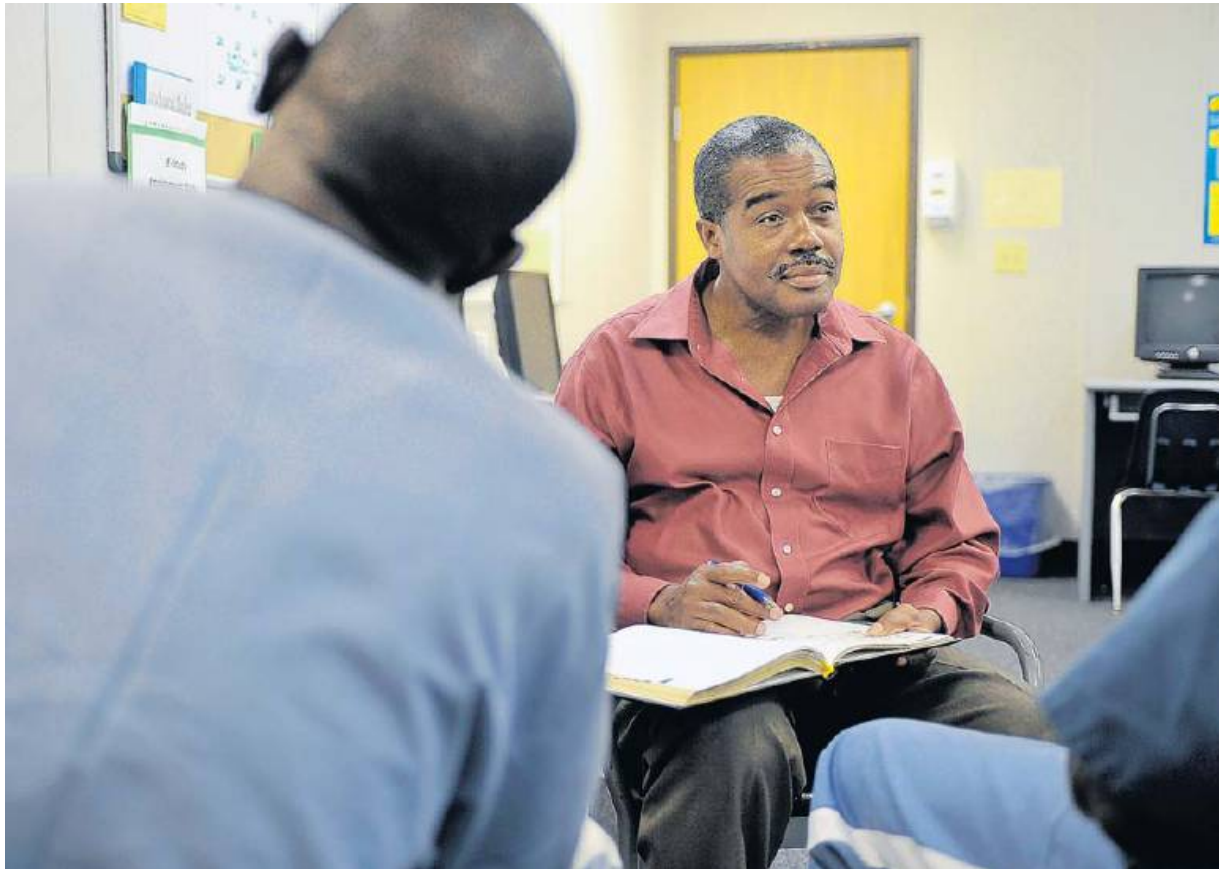


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FROM BEHIND BARS TO OWNING A BUSINESS



MICHAEL LAUGHLIN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

SCORE prepares inmates for life after prison

By Silvana Ordonez
SOUTH FLORIDA NEWS SERVICE

After serving more than four years in prison for DUI manslaughter, Lance Wissinger has a dream: to open a cafe in Fort Lauderdale by the end of summer.

Volunteers from the Broward chapter of SCORE are guiding him.

While Wissinger, 31, was at the Pompano Transition Center, he attended entrepreneurship workshops taught by SCORE volunteers and connected with his mentor, Michael Greenberg.

"Their work means a lot to me," Wissinger said.

Each Wednesday, volunteers from the Service Corps of Retired Executives teach hand-picked prisoners about marketing, social media, budgeting and product management. Each of the soon-to-be-released prisoners also is assigned a mentor. The all-male transition center is run by Bridges of America, a substance abuse program that prepares prisoners for life outside.

Wissinger said he wanted to open a business before his encounter with SCORE. The workshops and his mentor have given him the guidance and confidence to do it.

Greenberg, a SCORE volunteer for three

Dr. Kendrick Pierre works with prisoners at the Pompano Transition Center, teaching them how to start their own businesses when they finish their sentences.

The center is run by Bridges of America, a substance abuse program that prepares prisoners for life outside.

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years, said he has helped Wissinger develop a business plan.

"I helped him put together financial costs to see how much money he needs to start the business," Greenberg said.

"Financing is the real problem," said Greenberg. "Lance and I have talked about the importance of

financing. His business could be close to \$200,000 to get it started."

Wissinger said his family and friends have agreed to back his business, and he's trying to get bank loans.

Some inmates leave the transition center with money to help them get started. After seven months there, inmates work at paid jobs. Ten percent of their pay is put away in each inmate's personal savings, explained Cecilia I. Denmark, center director.

"Inmates are being released with savings accounts," said Denmark.

Just getting into the entrepreneurship program is tough.

Prisoners must have a high school diploma or GED, and no disciplinary problems after four months at the center. Of the 25 inmates interested, only 14 met the criteria.

Eric Thompson, chairman of Broward SCORE, said SCORE wants to help

prisoners make a living after they're released, not be a burden for taxpayers.

"If we can help them start their own business, they will be paying taxes, and they won't be claiming unemployment," Thompson said.

Andrew Lipschutz is completing his last year at the transition center. He said he had a computer repair business before being sentenced to six years in prison for burglary.

The SCORE workshops have taught him how to run his business, he said, and he plans to use money saved before prison to restart it after he gets out in January.

"I have a lot of confidence now thanks to SCORE," said Lipschutz.

"Many questions have been answered, and I am ready to start my own computer shop when I get out."

For more information, go to browardscore.org or bridgesofamerica.com