

Life Learning Academy Background

- Brief Description of Delancey Street Foundation
- Delancey CIRCLE'S Life Learning Academy Charter School

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DELANCEY STREET FOUNDATION

Dr. Mimi Halper Silbert, President

Delancey Street is considered the nation's leading self-help residential education center for former substance abusers and ex-convicts. We currently have about 2000 residents located in five facilities throughout the country: New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Los Angeles, and headquartered in San Francisco.

Our residential population ranges in age from 18 to 68; approximately 1/4 are women; 1/3 African-American, 1/3 Hispanic, and 1/3 Anglo. The average resident has been a hard-core drug addict for twelve years, abusing alcohol and multiple drugs, (e.g. heroin, methamphetamines, and cocaine in all its forms) and has dropped out of school at the 9th grade and has been institutionalized several times. Many have been gang members; most have been trapped in poverty for several generations. Approximately eighty-five percent (85%) come from the courts, either probated, paroled, or sentenced as an alternative to prison; about fifteen percent (15%) have been homeless prior to entering Delancey Street. Despite the violent and criminal backgrounds of our residents, gang members once sworn to kill one another are now living in integrated dorms and working together cooperatively and non-violently.

Although the average resident is functionally illiterate and unskilled when entering Delancey Street, all residents receive a high school equivalency and are trained in three different marketable skills before graduating. The minimum stay at Delancey Street is two years; the average stay is four years. During that time, residents learn not only academic and vocational skills, but also interpersonal, and social survival skills, along with the attitudes, values, the sense of responsibility, and self-reliance necessary to live in the mainstream of society drug-free, successfully, and legitimately. Over 14,000 men and women have graduated into society as taxpaying citizens leading successful lives, including lawyers, truck drivers, sales people, the various medical professions, realtors, mechanics, contractors, and even a member of the San Francisco Board of supervisors, the President of the San Francisco Housing Commission, a deputy coroner, and a deputy sheriff.

We have accomplished all this at no cost to the taxpayer or the client. One of the most unique features of Delancey Street is that we have never accepted any government funds for our operations, nor do we have any staff. The entire organization is run by its residents in the process of changing their lives. No salaries are paid, not even to the president of the Foundation. Instead, everyone is both a giver and a receiver in Delancey Street, which operates as an "extended family" rather than as a "program". The organization functions on an "each one teach one" principle where older residents help newer ones, and everyone works. The Foundation supports itself primarily through a number of training schools which provide vocational skills to all the residents, and which also generate the Foundation's income through pooling the monies earned. Training schools include a Moving and Trucking School, a Restaurant, a Café and Bookstore, and Catering Services, Digital Print, Sign & Silk Screen Shop, Retail and Wholesale Sales,

Paratransit and Private Driving Services, Christmas Tree Sales and Decorating, and an Automotive Service center, among others. Community friends have helped with donated products, financial gifts, utilizing our training schools, and by believing in us, against all odds.

Delancey's successes have been touted in the written media such as the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, the *London Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Reader's Digest*, *Parade Magazine*, *People Magazine*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and over 60 other publications; by visual media presentations such as *20/20*, *CBS Morning news with Charles Kurault*, *Street Stories with Ed Bradley*, *CNN Headline News*, *Oprah Winfrey Prime Time Special*, *This Is Your Life*, *Sixty Minutes*, and *Good Morning, America*. *PBS Special on Crime & Punishment in America*, several segments of *ABC World News Tonight with Peter Jennings*, Delancey Street's President, Mimi Silbert, was selected as the *ABC Person of the Week*. Delancey Street has been featured in an additional 50 news magazine television segments nationally and internationally.

Delancey Street has been viewed and reviewed by a wide variety of people. Dr. Karl Menninger, founder of Menninger's Clinic, conducted a long-term follow-up study on Delancey and stated, "Delancey Street is an incredible mixture of hard practicality and idealism. It is the best and most successful rehabilitation program I have studied in the world."

Numerous awards have heralded the Foundation's accomplishments. We have received over 100 commendations and awards from presidents, governors, mayors, legislative bodies, as well as from professional (e.g. American Psychological Association), religious (e.g. *the Muslim Humanitarian Award*, *Pope John XXIII Award*, *Jewish National Fund Tree of Life Award*), community (e.g. National Common Cause, National Caring Award), criminal justice (e.g. ACA, NCCD), housing (e.g. Urban Land Institute), educational institutions (10 Honorary Doctorates and Medals of Honor) business groups (e.g. Chamber of Commerce), in the areas in which we reside.

In 1990 Delancey pioneered a new neighborhood by completing construction of an expanded and centralized home on the waterfront in San Francisco. This 400,000 square foot complex was primarily built and supervised by Delancey residents. Silbert was the developer, and Delancey was its own general contractor for this unique development called "a masterpiece of social design" by Pulitzer Prize-winning architectural critic Allen Temko. Covering an entire city block, this four-story complex contains street level retail stores, a highly acclaimed public restaurant, a screening room considered one of the top three in San Francisco, and a well reviewed Café, Bookstore and Art Gallery, and housing units for 500 residents that overlook a Mediterranean-style courtyard which also holds a vast array of educational and recreational facilities for Delancey residents. This was also an unprecedented vocational training program providing 300 formerly unemployable drug addicts, homeless people, and ex-felons in Delancey Street every skill in the building trades (with the support of the unions), as well as training in purchasing, contracting, computer and accounting services. There is nothing else in the world like this self-built, self-managed, self-help complex.

This new home has received numerous commendations including awards from Gold Nugget, the American Architects Association, and Urban Land Institute. It has allowed Delancey Street to double its population, as well as expand services, educational and vocational opportunities. But

more than that, it is a tangible representation of the Delancey Street principle that ordinary people can transform extraordinary -- even impossible -- dreams into reality by pooling their resources, supporting one another, and living lives of purpose and integrity.

Additionally, beginning in 1999 Delancey Street redesigned and implemented a new juvenile justice system for San Francisco, which independent evaluators for the state reviewed as “phenomenally successful” with statistically significant results vis a vis comparison groups in every category. Through six new programs that Delancey Street developed and instituted in high crime neighborhoods, over 2000 youths have been successfully served. The programs, which range from early intervention for at risk youths and safe havens, through a central assessment and referral center and a charter school for juvenile justice youths, all have followed Delancey’s basic principle of each-one-teach-one. Our charter public high school, Life Learning Academy, has over a 90% graduation rate despite the fact that 90% of the youths came to the school having been complete school failures. Of our graduates, over half have gone on to college and half to career fields and vocational training programs.

We are incredibly excited about the phenomenal successes we have had in a field fraught with failure, particularly because we have developed a model that has empowered the people with the problems to become their own solutions. We have pioneered new models of education; we have pioneered pathways out of violence, bigotry and hatred. We have pioneered programs out of homelessness moving thousands of homeless people into permanent housing. And we have pioneered an entrepreneurial pathway out of poverty. The stories of the thousands of people who have transformed their lives through Delancey Street demonstrate that against all odds, hitting bottom can begin the climb to new heights.

DELANCEY CIRCLE'S LIFE LEARNING ACADEMY CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

Life Learning Academy (LLA), a diploma granting San Francisco Unified School District Charter School founded in 1998, serves 75 high-risk youths, 14 – 18 years old, who have not been successful in traditional school settings for a variety of reasons. LLA's goal is to create a safe learning community characterized by high expectations and standards for mental and emotional growth, the development of structure and a value system, use of the latest educational and technological tools and strategies, community service and cross cultural understanding. Life Learning Academy utilizes project-based learning to motivate youths, engage them in learning and provide opportunities to develop responsibility, judgment, and the skills necessary for productive adulthood.

Life Learning Academy is modeled after the guiding philosophies of the Delancey Street Foundation, the nation's leading adult self-help residential education center for former substance abusers and ex-convicts. LLA operates as an 'extended family' where everyone is both a giver and a receiver. Older students help newer ones and everyone works together. Students are held to high expectations and standards and the underlying premise is that everyone has unique talents and strengths that will be discovered and developed. Also integral to LLA philosophy is the principal of 'reciprocal restitution.' Students make restitution to society through community service and personal accountability, and society restores to them genuine opportunities to enter mainstream society successfully and legitimately.

Located on Treasure Island, a former Naval Base that sits in the middle of the San Francisco Bay, LLA is uniquely situated to remove youths from their neighborhoods while remaining proximal to the City and all it has to offer. Students are regularly exposed to the rich cultural resources of the San Francisco Bay Area through both off-site excursions and on-site performances and programs by community-based organizations.

Life Learning Academy students participate in rigorous academic and vocational learning. The school operates from 9:00am to 6:00pm, affording students the time they need to hone their academic skills and engage in a wide variety of classes. Curricula and course requirements are aligned with school district requirements. The current class offerings include mathematics, laboratory science, English, history, Spanish and physical education as well as ecology, culinary arts, gardening and a variety of performance and fine arts. A small class size of one teacher to six-to-eight students ensures that each student receives the individual attention that he or she needs. Life Learning Academy employs a rich mix of teachers, vocational trainers, mentors, a special education consultant, and support staff to meet the intensive needs of its students and the demands of an extended day program.

Life Learning Academy's curriculum is organized around academic and vocational projects that span disciplines to demonstrate the integration of learning required in the real world. For

example, Life Learning utilizes a commercial kitchen where students work under restaurant and catering chefs to prepare daily meals for the school, as well as the commercial Crossroads Café by the Bay, a café built and operated by LLA students. The café and academic classes teach computer programming for inventory control, advanced math for bookkeeping and communication and speech for sales along with the culinary arts. Researching the history and traditions of a given culture to determine menu and ingredients becomes a lesson in history and cultural diversity requiring literacy skills and research skills including library and the internet. Students learn to grow and harvest herbs and vegetables and plan meals with an emphasis on health and nutrition.

In addition to Crossroads Café, Life Learning Academy has a range of other entrepreneurial and school-to-career components that involve students in real-life projects integrated with academics. These include:

- Building Trades: students have an extensive and immediate opportunity to develop contractor skills through the design, renovation and repair of their school site and Crossroads Café by the Bay, as well as the construction of school furnishings.
- Photography and Digital Imaging: a professional photographer teaches the photography curriculum and students benefit from an on-site darkroom.
- Computer Literacy and Professional Skills: students have access to a state-of-the-art computer lab and internet access. Computer training includes word processing, web design, and PowerPoint presentation.
- Youth Fire and Police Science Program: designed to imprint in the students a sense of citizenship, civic pride, discipline, responsibility, self-esteem, confidence, self-respect, and an appreciation of the importance of community service. The San Francisco Fire Department's Regional Training Center located on Treasure Island is utilized for site visits and demonstrations. Curriculum also utilizes the local full-use San Francisco Fire Station located on the island, Students also learn about various careers in law enforcement, the criminal justice system, emergency response methods, and common criminal statutes (Street Law). Upon completion of the Youth Fire and Police Science Program, students have gained experience that will be helpful in applying to a variety of jobs in the Fire and/or Departments.

All of Life Learning Academy's courses and activities fall within one of the four environmental majors. The majors are focused around the elements, fire, air, earth, and water. Within each major is a set of vocational and academic activities that become a student's area of focus. For example, students who chose the water major spend a percentage of their time participating in lessons in which water is a central theme. They participate in swim class, scuba diving and other water sports while studying marine biology and oceanography, and the importance of water to California's development is covered in history class. Students majoring in fire study the past, current, and future technological uses of fire. They learn fire science and apply it to their culinary training. In English class, students examine the mythological and symbolic uses of fire in world literature. Earth majors spend their time working on landscape architecture projects, including the cultivation of the LLA's urban mini-farm that produces much of the fresh vegetables used in LLA meals and is home to 10 chickens, one turtle and two wayward ducks. Students in the air major study astronomy in the LLA's portable planetarium and have the opportunity to go on

stargazing camping trips where, outside in the night sky, they observe the constellations they studied in the classroom using a high-powered telescope.

One of Life Learning Academy's main goals is to provide students with life skills, including accountability and responsibility, the ability to trust and be trusted, and the skills necessary to be a contributing member of their family, community and society. LLA has a Student Council that holds students accountable to the rules established for LLA under the supervision of the Principal. Council students also act as mediators and role models in their classes, teaching classmates the importance of personal accountability. LLA encourages peer leadership to help new students adjust to its culture and programming, as well as an emphasis on community service, both at school and in the outside community as well. LLA's faculty and staff are available to spend time with students on a one-to-one basis to address personal and behavioral issues that arise throughout the day. Interpersonal issues are addressed in groups that meet weekly and facilitated by Student Council members and the Principal. Moreover, each student has an assigned mentor who spends tutoring, recreational and personal time with that student.

Since Life Learning Academy students present a wide range of abilities, it is essential that teachers are able to create a positive learning environment that is also academically challenging. LLA teachers boldly create cross-curricular activities and learning tasks that support conceptual understanding for students. Teachers participate in personal academic enrichment and staff development trainings throughout the year. They have been selected on numerous occasions to present their innovative curricular advancements to other interested educators at seminars and conferences across the state.

Support for Life Learning Academy has come from public sources at the federal, state and local level, as well as private corporations, foundations, and individual donors. Support has included both capital and programmatic support, and has helped to provide LLA with the school site, equipment, and unique programming and curricular development necessary to realize its mission.

Feedback from students supports that Life Learning Academy is a positive experience. Kids who had previously dropped out of school altogether now come every day ready to participate in their education and become contributing members of their school and home communities. They are proud of their work and their success.