

Fresh Start Participant Story 2021

April 12, 2021



T. came to Fresh Start Training Program with an unstable and unsuccessful work history. She had never been in a positive employment environment and was having a challenging time entering the workforce. Juggling single-parenthood and employment felt overwhelming to her. T. did not have a plan or solid goals, she had given up on herself and was resigned to remaining dependent on government support until she saw the Fresh Start flyer offering free training to work as a paraprofessional in New York City charter schools.

T. was wary about calling Fresh Start, but the warmth and honesty she heard during the initial call encouraged her to give the program a try.

When T. came in for orientation, she was met with support and validation for her efforts to overcome her challenges and she left feeling empowered with a newfound confidence. Fresh Start conducted a series of workshops during which we helped T. develop a resume, set both short term and long term goals, and coached her for job interviews and professional presentation in the workplace. Above all, the counselors were open and honest in our sessions with her and provided a job referral, with a reference, to a partnered agency. T. committed to the employment process and successfully met her challenges.

Fresh Start continued to work with T.. After she was hired as a 1:1 paraprofessional and was assigned a difficult student, Fresh Start encouraged her to stay with the student which resulted in a loving relationship as well as a positive school experience. Later, she contacted us,

proud and excited, to inform us that she was chosen Teacher of the Week.

T. is grateful to have found this program and said, “I am thankful for the job and opportunity. Your warmth and sincerity inspired me to believe in myself.”

Fresh Start: Agudah’s Parnassah Program Gives People a Second Chance

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Was it depression? Did she have family issues which were distracting her? Medical problems? Chana’s instructors and counselors at Agudah’s Fresh Start program were at a loss. Chana, a mother of three, had seemed like one of the most

promising students in the digital literacy class. Always early, staying after class to practice, but she just did not progress at the same rate as her classmates. But Fresh Start’s staff, dedicated to each student’s success, needed to get to the bottom of it so that Chana had the best possible fresh start.

“Chana - not her real name - was a typical student in many ways,” says Mrs. Nechi Berman, Program Director for Fresh Start. “She and her husband struggled to pay their bills. He had a job in a business, and she was an assistant for a daycare during the day and babysat at night.”

Many of Fresh Start’s clients realize that they need to upgrade their skill sets to enable them to be more employable. Some have never held any sort of job before; others have held minimum wage positions and barely know how to turn on a computer. With pressures for providing for their families, they are overjoyed to see the advertisement declaring, “Free Computer Classes for Beginners.”

“It’s a lifeline,” says Mrs. Berman. “In Chana’s case it was going to make all the difference - get her out of a dead-end job, and move her to somewhere she could progress up the pay scale. That’s why we were so troubled when she didn’t seem to make progress.”

Fresh Start’s coordinators went from reason to reason, ruling one out after the other. But they finally figured it out - Chana had an undiagnosed learning disability. She had been promoted from grade to grade based on her age, not learning necessary skills along the way. Digital literacy was something she needed, and wanted, but was not playing to her strengths.

“We try to match people with the skills they need to earn a living. Chana loved kids, she was caring, conscientious, and smart,” says Mrs. Berman. “We recommended that she work as a paraprofessional, shadowing special needs students in school. We helped her get into a training program, and were thrilled when she got a job paying over twice what her previous job paid.”

It is that sense of fulfillment that keeps Mrs. Berman - and the other dedicated professionals at Fresh Start and COPE - going. “Helping people regain their independence and self-esteem makes my job so satisfying,” she says. “And, guess what? Chana called me recently - she feels she has room to grow and she’s coming in for a Career Counseling session!”

This February, the Agudah is celebrating the accomplishments of COPE and

PCS, Agudah's employment programs. Fresh Start, one of the Agudah's hidden gems, provides education to men and women entering or reentering the workforce who lack the skills they need to work in professional environments. The Agudah also offers free classes in digital literacy, workforce preparedness, English as a second language (ESL), and career counseling. Fresh Start gives people the chance to start again.

Fresh Start, one of the Agudah's employment readiness programs, is pleased to announce that with the installation of new classrooms in Agudath Israel's Community Services building, they will be adding cohorts in the coming year.

To sign up for a digital literacy, English as second language, or other course, please use the following contact information:

Digital Literacy (718) 506-0500 extension 217 or 219

English as a Second Language (212) 809-5935 extension 301

Or, email info@copeins.com