



## N.J. at-risk youth education programs receive \$6.25M

By David Giambusso/The Star-Ledger

October 21, 2009, 7:24PM

With millions of dollars in state and federal grants already going to bullet-proof vests and surveillance cameras, Attorney General Anne Milgram today announced \$6.25 million for another major crime prevention initiative: education.

The grant will be split among **YouthBuild programs** across the state, including those in Newark, Trenton, Camden and Paterson, which help high school dropouts earn their general equivalency diploma and provide job training. Law enforcement officers have praised the program for reducing crime.

"We are providing the resources necessary to help young people who are living at risk," Milgram said. "The alternative is to not support these efforts and pay for the costs associated with prison, emergency health care, public assistance, and much more."

Creighton Drury, director of Gov. Jon Corzine's Crime Prevention Initiative called YouthBuild, "one of the most effective gang and crime prevention programs" out there.

Of the 104 students enrolled in 2008 and 2009, 71 percent earned their high school diploma, 91 percent received construction certificates and the recidivism rate for YouthBuild grads has been less than 5 percent since 2003, according to Drury.

The program takes in high school dropouts — usually age 16 to 24 — assesses their educational and skill levels and tailors individual programs for each student. By assessing strengths and weaknesses, the programs can concentrate on what students need to earn a high school diploma, while also providing training in construction, and electrical work, according to YouthBuild Director Robert Clark.

"Everything they're doing in the classroom is related to the world of work," Clark said after today's event.

Clark, who grew up in a tough area of Boston, graduated from the program. He said his mentors inspired him to devote his life to youth development.

"When I went to YouthBuild, I knew exactly where I wanted to be," he said. Had it not been for the program, Clark said he likely would have fallen into the "vicious circle" that faces city teens with limited resources.

"You drop out of school, you end up selling drugs, you go to jail, you do drugs," Clark said today after the announcement was made at a YouthBuild site in Newark's Central Ward.

After attending Rutgers University's Newark campus and traveling the country with the YouthBuild program, Clark returned to Newark earlier this decade and used a grant from Prudential Insurance Co. and start-up money from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to open the Newark branch.

The Newark program will share \$2.6 million of the allotment to expand existing YouthBuild chapters in Newark, Trenton, Camden and Paterson. Another \$3 million will go to developing new YouthBuild programs in other cities throughout the state, and \$650,000 will go to the Rutgers University's Bloustein School to evaluate the job training programs.

"Its really going to the population that's most likely to end up leading a life of crime," Drury said. "We're trying to show them another way."

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A December 2008 photo of Hassan Childs , a participant in the Youth Build program in Newark.