



Case Study: Networking Academies at Prisons

New Jersey: Fort Dix and the Camden Dream Center

Putting the Pieces Together for Successful Employment After Release

Pastor Keith Davis, president and CEO of the Camden Dream Center, a community-based organization (CBO) providing a wide range of services to the Camden, NJ region, has launched a comprehensive approach to supporting inmate reentry. He has proven that an end-to-end support system works best, providing job training to help offenders learn new skills from within prison, then through a furloughed learning environment away from prison, next at halfway house residences, and finally at full reentry. 'Wraparound services' also include support with housing and transportation, and peer-to-peer counseling.

If any link in this complex chain is missing, recidivism is impacted. Creating and strengthening partnerships between the many organizations providing these services can be a challenge. But Keith and his team continuously strengthen the chain. He also travels the country sharing the model. Now other states call him to learn how to replicate his solutions. When talking with them, his motto is: "If it can happen in Camden, it can happen anywhere."

The Camden Dream Center has been active for over 35 years. In 2009, it went through a 2-year restructuring to recraft its vision, including prisoner reentry. At its heart was the recognition that incarcerated individuals need to rebuild their whole life, not just the ability to make a decent living after release.

This led to the decision to incorporate technology career training into the existing wraparound services at Camden. Keith reached out to the Cisco Networking Academy to join the program, which has significantly added to the success of this nonprofit organization.

Relationships build trust. Trust fosters more relationships.

Trust is an important component in creating successful partnerships around prisoner reentry. In the past three years, Camden Dream Center's expanded ecosystem of prestigious partners has helped bring new partners on board.

One of the best examples is the Camden Dream Center's partnership with the Federal Correctional Institution at Fort Dix (FCI Fort Dix).

The warden at FCI Fort Dix has a technology background, and he had a very positive view of Cisco training and certifications. The warden initiated a meeting with Keith at the Camden Dream Center, toured the facility, and sat down for an in-depth discussion about how inmates might be able to enroll in Cisco Networking Academy courses. This led to a program with the federal prison that is unlike anything the Camden Dream Center has undertaken previously. Participating inmates come by bus to the Camden facility every Saturday for classes. These are furloughed inmates, which means they are being given the freedom to participate in activities outside the prison during the day, and return to sleep at night. Some inmates eventually earn the right to drive themselves back and forth.

Halfway Houses

Trust was also a major factor in securing a partnership with Volunteers of America (VOA) Delaware Valley, a national, nonprofit faith-based organization that runs Hope Hall, one of three halfway houses in Camden run by the VOA. Residents of Hope Hall are adult males, close to their parole dates, who are approved by the New Jersey Department of Corrections to transition to a halfway house.

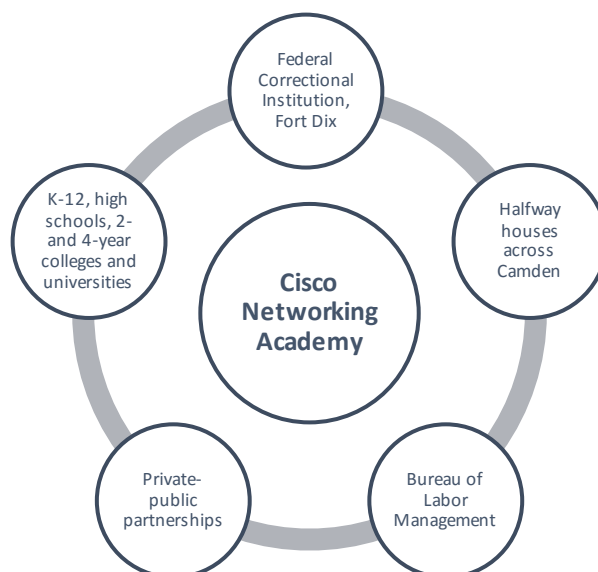
When the partnership with the VOA was first proposed, Keith arranged for the organization's senior director to speak with the superintendent of the School District of the City of Camden, a representative from Rutgers University, and local government officials. As trusted sources, their praise played a big role in the VOA's decision to give the Camden Dream Center the contract to set up and run a technology education program on site at Hope Hall.

One of the Camden Dream Center academy instructors travels to Hope Hall once a week to conduct classes for residents. Initially, the "Get Connected" course will be offered, but Keith is already planning to expand the curriculum to include more advanced Cisco courses. He has faith that the academy program will play an important role in helping halfway house residents find real hope for employment in a respected, well-paying field.

Cisco credibility helps Camden build additional partnerships

The credibility of Cisco and its training program brought new attention and created new relationships that were not possible before. The Cisco connection opened new doors to develop high-powered, high-value partnerships that provide even better services to the inmates. For example:

- Becoming a Cisco Networking Academy program led to a prestigious contract with the Department of Labor Management to provide workforce training for prisoner reentry programs.
- When the Camden Dream Center achieved its status as a Networking Academy Support Center (one of only about 500 globally providing support to other academy locations), as well as an Instructor Training Center, it led to new relationships with numerous schools from K-12 to universities, including Rutgers.
- As a way to prevent incarceration for at-risk youth, instructors from the Camden Dream Center are now teaching IT Essentials and all CCNA courses at Rutgers for teenagers in the community who have dropped out of high school. This is an example of an initiative Keith calls "destroy the demand for prison reentry systems" -- creating positive programs and opportunities that disrupt the cycle of crime that fills prisons in the first place.



Keith strongly believes that building this kind of expansive ecosystem—relationships at the state and local levels, with corporations and nonprofits, and with educational institutions—is essential for creating reentry programs that can achieve something extraordinary. “It’s hard to find a program that has delivered a high-impact, high-quality prisoner reentry program like the one we’ve achieved here in Camden. Without question, we couldn’t have reached this level without the Cisco Networking Academy.”

More Information

Learn how Cisco Networking Academy’s flexible learning program can support your training goals:

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