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## TheOmahaChannel.com—Omaha, NE

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# High School Dropouts Paid To Go To School

TheOmahaChannel.com  
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OMAHA, Neb. - A unique program which pays high school dropouts to go to school and train for jobs is now accepting applications, and there's virtually no excuse they'll accept. Need childcare? No problem.

Have a criminal record? It's OK.

Fighting addiction? They'll help you fight it.

The Partnership for Youth Development just opened a new office in north Omaha. The program is run by Goodwill Industries and the Boys and Girls Club through federal grants.

Jesus Rodriguez was one of the program's first participants. He said getting out of jail was a turning point in his life. His former gang buddies said they'd be there for him.

"When I got out, there was nobody there," he said.

He realized that his mother was the only one in life who'd stuck with him, and he wanted her to be proud of him.

The former gang member never finished high school and was working a seasonal construction job when he met with a gang counselor at the Boys and Girls Club. Rodriguez was a talented artist, but didn't feel he was using his skills toward a worthwhile career.

"I wanted to work and at the same time, I like drawing. I found out about air-brushing and that you can paint cars," said Rodriguez.

The partnership lined him up for on-the-job training at Jobash Automotive Repair, a north Omaha business at 24th and Hamilton Street. He's worked there for a full year.



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Rodriguez is now trained to prepare and prime cars for painting, and he's slowly honing his air-brushing skills hoping to eventually custom-paint cars.

"He's on time, here when I need him. He stays late. Everything works out real well with him," said Richard Jones, owner of Jobash Auto Repair.

His co-workers said Rodriguez has a special talent for matching paint colors.

Rodriguez also worked at Boys and Girls Club during his training and took classes to obtain his General Equivalency Diploma. He was required to attend leadership class had personalized guidance and counseling at every phase of job training.

"He was my first student and I look back now and he was this kid, confused about life," said Ramon Hernandez, Rodriguez's case manager.

Hernandez said Rodriguez is an excellent role model for kids at the Boys and Girls Club, where he continues to mentor young people. Hernandez also said Rodriguez a very good father. Rodriguez and his fiance are new parents of a baby boy.

"I know the potential of all kids can be like Jesus. Turn their lives around and be role models for their peers," said Hernandez.

And Rodriguez's mother now brags about him.

"It makes me happy that my mom is talking about me," he said.

The partnership is now enrolling participants in the program. Ages 16 to 21 are encouraged to apply. To learn more call 402-342-2200 or visit [www.goodwillomaha.com](http://www.goodwillomaha.com).

There are classroom locations in Bellevue, Blair, north and south Omaha.

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