

Brooke House Has Positive Impact

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by Seth Andrea McCoy Courant News Writer

Inmates at Brooke House, a Fenway pre-release center, may be anonymous in the neighborhood, but their impact in the community is not.

Now in its second year of operation, Brooke House serves as transitional housing for inmates from Suffolk County jail to complete release. A key component of the facility is the community service residents are required to do in the Fenway and throughout Suffolk County.

"Part of the program here is that the guys are required to do four hours of community service a week," explained Margarita Winnell, Case Manager at Brooke House. "That is done all over the city and beyond. They've helped out [in the neighborhood] for different community events. For example, setting up chairs in the Rose Garden for picnics, helping with the car wash at Cathedral Grammar School [in the South End] and during the holiday season we had some kids come here to see Santa Clause and get some presents."

The Boston Courant spoke with three inmates living at Brooke House about their community service involvement. For reasons of confidentiality, only the first names of the inmates are used.

"I've done a lot of my community service at the Chelsea Veterans' Hospital," said Christopher, a Roslindale native who has been at Brooke House for five weeks. "I have a lot of respect for the Vet's and I like talking with them."

Wilfredo and Pedro, two inmates from Lynn and Charlestown, respectively, fulfill their community service obligations working with Community Servings, an organization that provides meals to homebound HIV or AIDS patients in Boston.

"It's good to help people," said Wilfredo. "I don't like seeing them sick because it's hard to see, but it is rewarding [to bring them meals]."

Pedro added, "It's an opportunity to meet new people, do something with your day and better yourself."

Ed Burke, Executive Director of the West Fenway Business Association, said he sees the pre-release center as a benefit to the neighborhood because of the inmates' involvement with community service projects. He also said that the tools the men are given while at Brooke House are instrumental to

their success when they are released.

"They help out in the neighborhood, clean up parts of the Back Bay Fens, that sort of stuff," he said of the community service. "But it's more than that. We are really getting some bang for our buck. I

know pre-release works because I've watched it for 20 years [in this neighborhood]."

"The guys take ESL classes, learn how to access benefits and find job placement," he added. "Brooke House gives [them] the footprints to work from."

Located at 107 Park Drive, the Suffolk House of Corrections facility can accommodate up to 50 men in dormitory-style rooms. Residents at Brooke House have committed "minor" offenses for crimes such as robbery or selling drugs.

Prior to operating as a pre-release center for Suffolk County, the building housed inmates from the Massachusetts House of Corrections. Community Resources for Justice, a Back Bay-based non-profit organization, operates the facility for the county.



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