

Prisoner re-entry program gets new digs

Robin Hood Foundation donates office improvements to Fortune Society

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Fortune Society president JoAnne Page addresses an audience of program participants, employees and nonprofit partners at a ceremony celebrating the ex-offender reentry program's newly-refurbished headquarters.

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Ex-offenders at the Long Island City-based Fortune Society have a gleaming new facility for their education, work and housing programs.

The 6,000-square-foot Northern Blvd. headquarters has new flooring, work stations and common areas through a \$275,000 donation from the anti-poverty Robin Hood Foundation.

"It looked very unwelcome, very unfriendly and very dark," said JoAnne Page, president of the Fortune Society, during a ceremony Tuesday. "You make a very powerful statement to people by the quality of the space you offer them."

The nonprofit, which launched in Manhattan in 1967 in order to help ex convicts reenter society, provides vocational training and counseling to 4,000 former prisoners annually.

Bronx resident Karriem Simmons, who left prison in January after serving eight years for cocaine possession, plans to pursue a social work degree from CUNY thanks to Fortune.

“I firmly believe if you give someone an alternative and show there’s extra help out there, they’ll use it,” said Simmons, 43. “I try to give back to the community I helped destroy, basically.”