

## **STRIVE and the Problem of the Long-Term Unemployed**

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Two weeks ago, the Community Service Society (CSS) issued a report that highlighted a new reality for New York City that may very well shape much of the city's economic, social and political climate for the next decade. As a result of a confluence of factors, chief among them the Great Recession but also poorly performing public schools and growing income inequality, New York City now has [380,000 people](#) out of work, fully half of them for more than six months. That's the equivalent of the entire population of Cleveland, Ohio.

Nor is this joblessness spread evenly. African Americans have been particularly hard hit because of their concentration in public sector jobs. In less than two years, New York has shed nearly 20,000 city jobs, most of them paying middle income salaries. But the thing that's the game changer for the city is the enormous numbers of long-term unemployed, 160,000 of them, who have been out of work for six months or longer. This group is the serious challenge facing a new mayor elected next year.

The city's unemployment rate remains extraordinarily high at [10 percent](#), the schools continue to churn out tens of thousands of dropouts despite "school reform," and less than 30 percent of [community college](#) students graduate with either an associate or a bachelor's degree within six years of enrolling. The city -- with or without federal and state support -- is going to have to figure out a strategy to reconnect those disconnected from work for long periods of time.

One of the "home grown" programs that works particularly well for [those most disconnected](#) from the labor force -- black and Latino men without a degree, many with criminal records and problems of past drug addiction -- is [STRIVE](#), a program founded by Rob Carmona in 1984, which has become a national (and international) model with 21 affiliates across the country.

STRIVE is a job training program that starts with a focus on soft skills, i.e., being on time, working in teams, job interview preparation; and then moves on to occupational skills training. It has helped nearly 50,000 people get jobs, with over 400 businesses employing STRIVE graduates. Given the fact that they've targeted the hardest to employ individuals from urban settings, this is an extraordinary accomplishment.

Unless programs like STRIVE are brought to scale, New York City is going to be shackled with such rampant problems -- more taxes, higher crime, a diminished lifestyle for all of us -- that the rebirth of the city after the recession will be wiped out under the weight of a legion of people with no visible means of support.