

For Immediate Release

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Wanted: Older Adult Volunteers 55 + Who Want to Help Individuals with Conviction Histories in their Communities Receive “A Second Chance” not a “Second Sentence”

New York, NY, April 25, 2012 – Each week retirees Rosalie Taylor and Irwin Wolin leave their homes to work as volunteers helping to increase the chances of a formerly incarcerated person becoming a self-sufficient contributing member of their community. They are part of a group of volunteers at the Community Service Society’s (CSS) Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) who serve as Record Repair Counselors.

CSS Record Repair Counselors work with one of the most marginalized populations in New York City – the formerly incarcerated or people with conviction histories. The clients they encounter often believe their criminal history is “the end of the world” only to find out that their convictions are not as serious as they thought. In some instances, clients discover that they don’t have a RAP sheet at all, and become educated on how they can challenge barriers preventing them from seeking employment, housing and educational opportunities.

CSS is looking for volunteers who want to help people in their community with conviction histories receive a second chance, not a second sentence. Long after paying their debt to society, many individuals still experience discrimination because of their conviction histories. CSS/RSVP has volunteer opportunities for adults aged 55 and over who are concerned about mass incarceration and recidivism, and would like to serve as record counselors and help people take control of their conviction histories. To learn more about this opportunity please call **Hazel Beckles Young Lao, Project Director at 212 614 5556**. Training begins on May 23rd, 2012, at the **Community Service Society 105 E 22nd Street, 4th Floor, Conference Room 4B**.

An estimated one in three New Yorkers have a criminal record, and 58 percent of those records have at least one error. Nearly 70 percent of convictions are for low-level crimes—misdemeanors and violations—not felonies. Counselors are trained to help individuals request, read, and repair their NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services rap sheets and their criminal records maintained by risk information consumer credit reporting agencies. If eligible, individuals can apply for Certificates that remove barriers to employment. Armed with the same information an employer has, as well as the knowledge about how to handle questions about their record in a job interview, clients can accurately disclose their conviction records and avoid being fired for accidentally failing to disclose a conviction.

With instructions and ongoing support from CSS RSVP Record Repair Counseling staff and a CSS staff attorney, volunteers will gain a basic understanding of New York criminal law; discover how to spot and fix mistakes on rap sheets; learn the truth about the real-life consequences of criminal convictions; and educate individuals so that the words in their records are not the story of their lives.

Since 1970, RSVP’s 7,000 volunteers have contributed more than 1.5 million hours of service annually to 500 organizations in New York City. RSVP is a program of the Community Service Society of New York, a nonprofit organization which advocates on behalf of the poor in the areas of education, affordable housing, health care, and income maintenance. RSVP is part of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and receives funding from CSS, and other government agencies, foundations, and individuals.