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Ex-Felon Programs Excited About City's New Initiatives

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JACKSONVILLE, FL -- "I'm also working on getting my G.E.D. and they found me a job after I completed the class," says 23-year-old Michael Harding.

It's been a busy two months for Michael Harding, but that's not something he's complaining about.

"You've got to want to change and that's what I wanted to do," says Harding.

A change that's not always easy to make when your labeled an ex-felon. It's a title many throughout society struggle with and a problem some say refuel the city's cycle of crime. Harding found his chance through Ready For Work, a non-profit organization that helps convicted felons find jobs.

"I got out thinking I couldn't find work or nothing like that, resorting back to what I used to do and that's not what I wanted to do," says Harding. "I just wanted to make an honest living,"

Organization founder Kevin Gay says the program underwent a lot of belt tightening and even had to turn people away applying for the program in order to stay functioning. After Mayor John Peyton's recent announcement about more partnerships with organizations like this, Gay says there is hope.

"Jobs is the answer, jobs stop bullets I really believe that and so at the end of the day this is going to be the best investment the city ever made. There's a new wind blowing and that new wind of hope is going to be a real important message in our community and will begin to change the tide on the crime," says Gay. "If your wanting to get your life together and wanting a change, just give the program a chance. If you come everyday and do what your supposed to do, they'll find you a job," says Harding.

The Ready For Work program is under Operation New Hope. The organization evaluates ex-felons on a case by case basis. The program works with felons between the ages of 18 to 45 years old. To find out more information about Ready For Work go to their website at operationnewhope.com.

Mayor Peyton will discuss more of the proposed initiatives to city council on July 14th.

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