

Hello! How are you? I'm Jim Tedder in Washington with another edition of As It Is on the Voice of America. Today we do not have to travel far from the VOA studios to find out about a program designed to help young people in trouble. It is called Fresh Start, and I think you will like what you hear. Then we'll talk about flattops, jumbos, and six strings and maple and spruce...yes ...guitars ...and a special group of women who once made them while the men were away at war. As It Is ...a ten minute tune-up to help you learn English!

Many young people who get into trouble with the law are expelled from school. They may even go to jail. Helping these teens change their way of life takes a lot of effort. But it is not impossible. There is a program in the Washington D.C. area that takes young men, sent there by the courts or social workers, and gives them a new chance at life.

Twelve young men, 16 and 19 years old, attend classes at the program, which is called Fresh Start. Each one has made some bad decisions. But they want to turn their lives around, to live a different way. One young man explains how he got into trouble.

"I got into a couple of fights or something and that led to me actually getting detained."

Terrence Sinclair was 17 at the time. But instead of being sentenced to prison, as an adult might have been, he was sent to this special program. He spends his days studying to get his high school diploma, while also learning an occupation.

“I want to come out and get my education. You got to do it for yourself because I know at the end of the day, if I want to get mine, I have to still sit down and do my work. ”

Carpentry instructor Kenneth Talley says that is difficult for some of his students to recognize. He says they sometimes start a little reluctantly, not putting all their effort into it. Then they get creative and start to make their own products. And that is when they start to get really interested.

Mr. Talley says working in the wood and metal class teaches them other lessons, like following directions and making a plan for whatever they are building. And they feel good when they finish.

“It gives them patience. It teaches them how to follow directions and make a plan for constructing whatever they are constructing. And it also gives them gratification after they finish and complete ...they see the end of their work.”

Fresh Start Director Toni Lemons says once they get into the spirit of the work, these young men are eager to learn.

The program also helps them find their way in the job market. The Workforce Development class, for example, teaches students how to write a resume and prepare for a job interview. Ms. Lemons says the young men learn basic skills like how to respond to interview questions and how body language is important when speaking to a possible employer.

Fresh Start's director says another class, called Life Skills, teaches other things they need to succeed, for a career and in personal life.

"How to tie a tie, which is very important when it comes to going on a job interview. They learn how to budget, how to be able to maintain their finances."

Outdoor classes are as important as ones that are held inside. So are community events where Fresh Start students help guide other young people. Toni Lemons says that helps them gain a better image of themselves. Then they can pass on what they have learned -- and help others.

Women Were Very Instrumental During World War II

During World War Two, as American men went off to war, women filled the jobs they left behind. Women worked in factories, stores and shipyards. There was even a famous painting of a woman rolling up her sleeves and preparing to become "Rosie the riveter." It was the kind of job that only men had done in the past. But one group of women worked with wood and steel, building Gibson guitars. Christopher Cruise picks up the story from there.

John Thomas is a writer and a lover of guitars. He was surprised when he saw a wartime photograph of the Gibson guitar factory in Michigan. Nearly all of the 75 people in the picture were women. Irene Stearns, now age 90, spent several of the war years working at the factory.

"I got out of high school and everybody is looking for a job, and there weren't any jobs. Then one day, they called and I started at Gibson. I suppose it was because of the war."

Irene Stearns is one of the former Gibson factory workers who John Thomas found in the Kalamazoo, Michigan area. She made guitar strings for some of the thousands of instruments the factory produced in the 1940s.

"All the celebrities and people who were buying the guitars would come. And they would be on the other side of the wall from where I sat making strings. So, it was really nice in that part. I could hear them playing all these beautiful guitars."

John Thomas calls the women who worked at the Gibson factory, the "Kalamazoo Gals." That is also the name of his new book about the female guitar makers. He believes the company kept their work secret because it did not think guitar buyers of the day would use instruments built by women.

Mr. Thomas collected three of the World War II Gibson guitars and borrowed several others to help tell the story. Then a friend told him about Lauren Sheehan, a professional musician who agreed to help.

"Certainly I'm a champion for a story about women excelling at work that is traditionally a man's domain."

Lauren Sheehan bought a restored Gibson guitar for herself. She says she wanted to own a piece of America's musical heritage.

I'm Christopher Cruise.

And I'm Jim Tedder in Washington. Thank you for being with us on this Thursday, the 18th day of July. My, my, how time flies.

Today is the birthday of a fellow from the Bronx, New York, by the name of Dion DiMucci. He has 74 candles on his birthday cake this year. Back when rock and roll was young, Dion and his band the Belmonts could be heard on AM radio stations across America.

More Learning English programs are just ahead, as is world news at the beginning of the hour on VOA.

