

## **Virginia Program Helps First Time Parents; Homeboy Industries helps kids quit Los Angeles gangs**

Hello, and welcome to the Monday edition of As It Is, our daily show for people learning everyday American English.

I'm Christopher Cruise in Washington.

Today on the program, we talk with a Roman Catholic clergyman about a unique program that helps young people get out and stay out of criminal gangs in a large American city.

"Convincing people to give us money to fund this place, that's hard. Convincing law enforcement and others not to demonize anybody, that was hard."

And we take you back 162 years to the beginning of a new way to make clothes and pay for products. What happened then changed economic history and is having an impact on us today.

"You can have it delivered to your home for just \$12 down, and you can pay the balance for as little as a dollar twenty-five a week with the Singer Budget Plan. See it -- the sewing machine for young homemakers."

But first, we report on a program that teaches first time parents how to help their children be healthy and happy.

## **Making Happy, Healthy Babies**

A program in the American state of Virginia is helping tens of thousands of new parents and their babies every year -- even before the children are born.

"Healthy Families" works with the parents during pregnancy through the first three years of the child's life -- a time when the brain develops the most.

Julie Taboh visited the program and tells us about it.

"Good job!"

Vijan is a happy baby. He likes to explore. He is very sociable and developmentally right on target.

“Good Job! Look at you standing! Awesome!”

Tina Fontaine is one reason for his successful development. Ms. Fontaine is a family support worker with Healthy Families. She has been visiting Vijan and his mother, Bhawana, before he was even born.

“One, Two, and Three!”

She uses books and everyday objects to teach the first-time mother how to support her baby’s development.

“The purpose is to build a bond between the parent and the child and to help the child get ready for pre-school.”

During this visit, Ms. Fontaine urges the new mother to read to her son.

“How about mommy read the book to you? Can mommy read the book to you? Yeah? You like that idea?”

Bhawana recently moved to the United States from Nepal. She enjoys Ms. Fontaine’s visits.

“She’s like my sister. She’s come, always coming and play[s] with us, play[s] with my baby and I like, she’s like my family member.”

Ms. Fontaine also helps 19-year-old Eboni Vaughn. She is five months pregnant with her first baby. Ms. Vaughn has been meeting with Ms. Fontaine every two weeks for the past several months.

Like Bhawana, Ms. Vaughn likes the help the program gives her.

“Miss Fontaine’s visits mean a lot to me because I don’t have someone I can come home to and talk to daily about what’s been going on. So with Miss Fontaine coming, I can express ‘this is what I’m going through, this is how I feel.’ She won’t judge me or the situation. She just gives me the best, best advice.”

Healthy Families is part of a national network of home visiting programs throughout the country.

I’m Julie Taboh.

## **Homeboys Help Kids Leave Gang Life**

Some Los Angeles police officers have called their city the “gang capital” of the United States. They say Los Angeles is home to hundreds of active criminal gangs.

But the city is also headquarters to a program called Homeboy Industries. It has helped thousands of young people reject a life of crime and choose a better path.

The program is so successful that other countries with crime problems are looking to Homeboy Industries for help.

Mario Ritter reports.

There are more than 450 gangs in Los Angeles. Gang members try to control neighborhoods, or blocks, in the city.

But downtown LA, near Chinatown, is gang-neutral territory. That is where you can find Homeboy Bakery. Nineteen year old Kevin - - who only uses his first name -- is taking part in the program. He has chosen to spend his days making pastries instead of walking the gang-controlled streets of East Los Angeles.

“Seeing my best friend die, seeing other family members dying because of this gang life, you know, that’s what opened me, opened my eyes.”

The bakery is part of Homeboy Industries, a safe place for former gang members and prisoners to prepare themselves for a job in the real world. They take part in an 18-month-long program that includes job training, education, advice on careers and even tattoo removal.

Father Gregory Boyle, a Catholic clergyman, created Homeboy Industries. He says former gang members find they have much in common after they enter the program.

“Everybody wants to feed their kids and pay their rent honestly and nobly. Everybody just wants their mom to be proud of them and their kids not to be ashamed. So that’s your common interest.”

Father Boyle launched the program 25 years ago. At the time, he was working in a neighborhood with the highest level of gang activity in the world. He says many young people wanted to leave gang life, but it was hard to get support from the community.

“Convincing employers to hire them, that’s hard. Convincing people to give us money to fund this place, that’s hard. Convincing law enforcement and others not to demonize anybody, that was hard.”

Father Boyle says the community eventually discovered that sending gang members to prison did not stop the violence. What helped was giving former gang members education, training, and mental health care. Last year, 8,000 former gang members came to Homeboy Industries for help. Father Boyle says 70 percent of those in the program do not return to prison.

Kevin says he has no plans to return to gang life. He has moved away from his old neighborhood and is now going to college. He dreams of working in law enforcement when he graduates.

I’m Mario Ritter.

## **Making Clothes and History**

Finally, on August 12th, 1851, the United States government approved a request from Isaac Singer for a patent. What was his invention? A sewing machine for home use.

Sewing machines were costly. But, Mr. Singer and his partner Edward Clark permitted buyers to pay for the machines on a monthly basis. This made the machines available to a wider group of people. And the I.M. Singer company was the first to permit people to return old machines for money toward the purchase of a new one. Today, stores and manufacturers still use these marketing methods.

I.M. Singer Company became the top maker of sewing machines in the world.

I'm Christopher Cruise, and that's As It Is on The Voice of America.





Contact information for VOA Learning English

Voice of America  
VOA Learning English  
Room 3400  
330 Independence Ave SW  
Washington, DC 20237  
United States of America

Email us at: [LearningEnglish@voanews.com](mailto:LearningEnglish@voanews.com)

Or go to our website -- [learningenglish.voanews.com](http://learningenglish.voanews.com) -- and click "Contact Us."

Follow us on Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, iTunes and Twitter at  
*VOA Learning English*

<http://learningenglish.voanews.com/>