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# PROMISING PRACTICES



## Program offers at-risk youths a second chance for education and careers

For nearly a century, [MERS/Missouri Goodwill Industries](#) in St. Louis has helped persons with barriers to employment enter careers and live more independently in the community. Over the decades, the organization's programs have served diverse populations, including persons with disabilities, refugees, older adults, persons facing long-term unemployment, individuals receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and, most recently, adjudicated youths in the juvenile justice system.

Adjudicated youths face considerable barriers to achieving their educational and career goals. Recognizing that these at-risk youths need extensive supports and resources if they are to succeed, MERS/Goodwill formed the Innovative Concept Academy (ICA) in partnership with the St. Louis Juvenile Court.

Dedicated to educating and rehabilitating delinquent teens, the ICA provides services to reengage youths with:

- Diploma-focused education programs.
- Increased high school and GED completion rates.
- Assistance in securing jobs through employment-focused case management.
- Mentoring opportunities.
- On-site group therapy supplemented with behavioral health referrals when necessary.

A recent [CARF International](#) survey report said that the ICA

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### About the ECS Promising Practices newsletter series

An organization receiving exemplary recognition in its CARF survey report stands out because of its professional and strategic response to a service or business need. CARF presents these ECS Promising Practices articles to encourage dialogue among service providers and to offer examples of creative solutions for improving service quality.

Find current and past issues of ECS Promising Practices at:

[www.carf.org/ecspromisingpractices](http://www.carf.org/ecspromisingpractices)

Issues are categorized by topic: Business Practices, Community Services, and Employment Services.

offers adjudicated youths “a second-chance opportunity to obtain the education and life skills they need to get on the right path and build successful, purposeful lives.”

*Below: A handshake between Lewis Chartock, Ph.D. (left), and Judge Jimmie Edwards (right) in 2007 sealed the founding of Innovative Concept Academy and marked the beginning of a partnership between MERS/Missouri Goodwill Industries and the St. Louis Juvenile Court. Dr. Chartock is the president/CEO of MERS/Goodwill, and Judge Edwards serves on the 22nd Judicial Circuit Court of Missouri.*



### **Program growth spurs opportunities for greater community involvement**

When the ICA outgrew its space in the MERS/Goodwill headquarters, the St. Louis Public Schools (SLPS) offered to provide space in a former middle school building. Several community organizations also joined the effort to support the many needs of these youths.

At present, the ICA serves more than 230 youths each year who have been adjudicated by the family court, recruited from neighborhoods, or expelled or removed from SLPS classrooms. Always eager to expand its outreach, MERS/Goodwill recently launched a Neighborhood Expansion initiative to serve an additional three-dozen at-risk youths in the community.

The ICA has been acclaimed locally and nationally. In 2013, Chief Justice of the United States John G. Roberts Jr. presented the William H. Rehnquist Award for Judicial Excellence to Judge Jimmie Edwards for his dedication to keeping students in school and out of the courtroom.

The success of the ICA and the Neighborhood Expansion



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demonstrates the positive impact of MERS/Goodwill in enabling at-risk youths to achieve their goals and rejoin the community as responsible citizens.

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[www.carf.org](http://www.carf.org)