



Graduates of the School of Hard Knocks program stand with Roads Consulting Group CEO Jose Perez. From left, Wilfredo Alexandro Encarnación Gonzalez, Dayana Martinez, Evelyn Javier Fortuna, Perez, Idelky Ramirez, Margarita Cabrera, Florentina Taveras, Leandro Perez, RP Damel, and Omar Garcia. (Courtesy)

# Nine graduate from School of Hard Knocks

Brianna McCadden

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LYNN — The first nine graduates of the School of Hard Knocks course, which is designed to empower people affected by incarceration to open businesses, each left the program with a completed business plan and a \$1,500 stipend.

Hard Knocks Program Director Andrea Perez, a senior consultant at Roads Consulting Group, explained the purpose of the course.

“This program is dedicated to those affected by incarceration in some way, whether it be someone who was incarcerated or had a family member who was,” Perez said. “We give an opportunity or a new perspective on what they can do from this point.”

The course was made possible by a state Community Empowerment and Reinvestment Grant, which was directed toward aiding and training those aspiring to open businesses.

The Economic Development and Industrial Corporation had applied for the grant in partnership with Roads Consulting Group, the North Shore Latino Business Association, the Essex County Sheriff's Department, and the Lynn Police Department.

Perez explained how the 12-week course is split into a group session and a one-on-one session.

“The program started with group sessions, where we give them information about business strategy, operation, finances, and how they need to prepare to open their business, and how to prepare for that,” Perez said.

She said that for the one-on-one section, students meet with Perez and Roads Consulting Group CEO Jose Perez for feedback on their business plans, with the goal of pitching their ideas to local vendors after the program.

Andrea Perez said that she was so proud of all the work and effort she saw from the students.

“We're very proud of them for achieving their business goals,” Andrea Perez said. “It shows they demonstrated what we tried to achieve during the course. It was a proud moment for us to see those plans completed.”

The second of three cohorts for 2024 is now underway, and Andrea Perez said another 13 graduates are expected to graduate from it

The graduates from the first cohort and their businesses are Wilfredo Alexandro Encarnación Gonzalez and W' Perfect Paints, Dayana Martinez and Beauty Glow Shop, Evelyn Javier Fortuna and Dias Felices Adult Day Care, Idelky Ramirez and IM Decorations, Margarita Cabrera and D'Johnny Multi-Services, Florentina Taveras and Grow Up Family Day Care Inc., Leandro Perez and Underrated Bag Chasers, RP Damel, and Omar Garcia and Car Care Solutions.



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