
Good News Department

Helping Americans Get The Job Done

(NAPSA)—A national Urban League training program has helped people who want to work help themselves.

For example, Philip Mezza of Los Angeles, California, went from being unemployed and struggling to survive, to earning a professional's salary—with plans to return to school and buy a house.

Mezza was helped by Opportunity Works!—one of the Urban League's many workforce development programs. Since January, 2000, the program has trained unemployed and underemployed adults, former welfare recipients and high school seniors to work in jobs that can improve the quality of their lives.

Opportunity Works! training programs are tailored to meet the needs of the communities they serve, with special notice of the job industries in that area. The initiative has helped people who were qualified only for minimum wage jobs work towards full-fledged careers.

The program has trained financial service representatives, automotive technicians, high-tech cable and telephone installation experts and construction workers—and has a job placement rate of 70 to 90 percent. Many people who earned \$5.50 an hour before the program, started at \$8.50 an hour after—some eventually earned as much as \$20 an hour.



A work-force training program may help level the economic playing field in America.

“Our goal,” says Zoraya Lee-Hamlin, who oversees the League's economic self-sufficiency unit, “is to economically empower underprivileged groups, particularly African-Americans, by bridging the gaps between high- and low-wage jobs and career development.”

Currently underway in eight cities and planned for 40 more, Opportunity Works! programs range from the highly-skilled Los Angeles Urban League's training in automotive repair, to training at the Financial Services Academy in economically hard hit, Roxbury, Massachusetts. Denver's Project Connect nurtures careers in telephone installation. And Minneapolis' Hollman Project offers training in building trades.

In addition to actual hard skills training—which can range from 12 to 19 weeks—the programs give clients tips on how to

dress, fill out applications and respond to interview questions.

To be eligible for most of the programs, applicants must be at least 18 years old, hold a high school diploma or GED, and be drug and alcohol free.

Most important, program directors say, is that participants display a desire to improve their lives.

In addition to helping individuals, Opportunity Works! offers civic-minded companies the chance to partner with the League, service low-income communities and create employee diversity.

In Denver, Qwest Communications provides the majority of funding for Project Connect. “Qwest and the Urban League are committed to diversifying a field (high-tech installation) that has traditionally been closed to our community,” says Bonnie Freeman of the Urban League of Metropolitan Denver.

Project Connect has graduated 129 students. It's estimated the graduates have had a \$2.5-million impact on the Denver economy.

Opportunity Works! is funded by a \$1.5 million grant from The Prudential Foundation, in addition to supplementary grants from various local partners. Through the Urban League's numerous programs, approximately 2 million individuals are served annually.

For more information, e-mail info@nul.org.