

News

Job Readiness Training- With an Australian Twist

As seen in the Telegram & Gazette

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The Central Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board has brought in an Australian company to help low-income young people find jobs — and more importantly, to keep them.

Bounce Consulting, founded in 2006, has employed its unique brand of life-coaching and social skills training only in Australia. Worcester is Bounce's first attempt to translate its success there to the U.S.

This week, Worcester youths age 17 to 21 met with Bounce trainers for a week-long orientation program. The youths will be placed in jobs throughout the community for seven weeks, to be coached by Bounce trainers before and after work. Eventually, 100 young people in Worcester will go through the Bounce program.

According to Bounce CEO Maria Smith, about 85 percent of the participants in Australia have gone on to get jobs, she said. In Australia, the program is not limited to youths but is available to job seekers of all ages, she said.

I asked her about job-retention rates, that is, how long those job seekers kept their jobs, but she did not have those figures at her fingertips.

"We are really bringing in a layer of emotional intelligence," said Ms. Smith, who has been in Worcester for the past week. "This is a buzzword in terms of corporate America. Anyone can learn a skill, but it's hard to teach social awareness, to show how to act in all kinds of social interactions."

The program, she explained, first works with job seekers to get them to "engage" with the Bounce trainers. The trainers work with the job seekers to build their confidence, to clarify their employment goals and to develop realistic next steps to make those goals happen. That is in addition to the basic job-finding techniques of how to look for jobs, how to write résumés and how to act and dress in job interviews.

Bounce is a for-profit company that is funded by federal tax dollars in Australia, she said. Here, at least in Worcester, it will be funded with state money.

Jeff Turgeon, the executive director of the Central Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board, said the

Bounce program came to his attention at a workforce conference held in Central Massachusetts, where Ms. Smith was a speaker. He was "blown away," he remembered.

"It's a new approach on delivering very old material in a totally new way," he said. "There is a whole new level of focus with this program. They build up a rapport with the job seekers, they talk to them about verbal and nonverbal communication. It's a completely different take on job readiness training, and I'm really excited about it."

Bounce Consulting "offers life-changing courses and products designed to help job seekers build confidence, break down mental roadblocks and hone skills, changing the lives of countless executives, at-risk teens and even the homeless, as well as the broader business and professional community with ongoing training contracts in sales motivation, business planning, and community and personal development programs," according to its press release.

Ms. Smith has published a book, "The Guide to Getting the Job You Want," and has been in Worcester with two Australian trainers, getting the program here up and running. Eventually, American trainers will take over from the Aussies.

Helping young people find jobs has been a particularly vexing problem for as long as state government has been trying to help them.

While unemployment nationwide for all age groups hovers around 7 percent, for young people, the rate is usually double that rate.

According to data provided by Generation Opportunity, a conservative nonprofit organization advocating for economic opportunity for young adults, the overall U.S. unemployment rate for youths age 18 to 29 was 15.9 percent in December 2013.

For African Americans, the rate was 24.2 percent, and it was 16.7 percent for Hispanics.

If Bounce can turn some of these numbers around, perhaps it will be implemented elsewhere in the U.S.

Worcester, it seems, is the test case.