

Building New Careers: Construction Trade Training Program

Location: Des Moines, Iowa

Host Organization: United Way of Central Iowa

Partner Organizations: Iowans for Social and Economic Development Ventures (ISED), Iowa Department of Labor, Central Iowa Building & Construction Trades Council, Central Iowa Re-engagement Center, Central Iowa Apprenticeship Coordinators Committee

Target Population: Low-Income Minorities and Women

Program Innovations

- Individualized approach to screening and assessing trainees' interests and skills
- Deep focus on community outreach and recruitment for union apprenticeships

Program History

In 2003, Iowans for Social and Economic Development Ventures (ISED) received a U.S. Department of Labor grant to create the Building New Careers: Construction Trade Training Program to help Central Iowans attain self-sufficiency through entry into a construction apprenticeship. The United Way of Central Iowa joined ISED in the third year of the program, and now funds and operates the program out of the United Way office in Des Moines. The Iowa Department of Labor continues to offer strategic advice and consultation to the United Way, in areas such as data collection and legal requirements, to assist the Building New Careers program. The United Way's long-standing collaboration with the AFL-CIO helped generate the program's collaboration with the Central Iowa Building & Construction Trades Council, which accepts the program's qualified participants into available apprenticeship opportunities.

Program Summary

The Building New Careers program serves to identify, screen, assess, and recruit low-income adults for entry into one of 18 apprenticeships with the Building and Construction Trades. A primary priority of the program is community outreach and raising awareness about the construction apprenticeship opportunities

present in the area. Staff members from the United Way speak at area high schools, prisons and other community venues to inform the local population about opportunities in the trades.

“One of the taglines of apprenticeships is that they are ‘The Best Kept Secret.’ We’re trying to get away from that here in Des Moines. We don’t want it to be a secret.”

--Bob Brown, Director of the Building New Careers Program

The outreach events are now paying dividends in 2009 and 2010 as many program participants typically arrive at the United Way office through word-of-mouth. To qualify for the program, participants must be within 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines and show a strong interest in the construction trades.

The Building New Careers Program offers individualized services and runs uninterrupted throughout the year. Participants are served by Bob Brown, Director of the Building New Careers Program, at the United Way office in downtown Des Moines. Walk-in and scheduled participants receive individual services from Mr. Brown, which include:

- An overview of the 18 construction trades, including training and job descriptions, working conditions, and qualifications and requirements necessary to enter the apprenticeship
- Career counseling and assistance with choosing a trade
- Advice and assistance with apprenticeship applications and entry tests
- Referrals for **support services**, such as driver’s license reinstatement, housing, or math skills remediation, to partnering organizations such as the Central Iowa Reengagement Center
- Job interview coaching and resume development

This individualized approach to each participant is central to the program’s focus. Once Mr. Brown has screened and assessed the participant’s potential for entry into an apprenticeship, and they have completed their application, he often accompanies them to the training center to submit their application.

Participants usually apply for apprenticeship opportunities, but the recession eliminated many of these positions. Now participants are often applying for helper positions with one of the trades. Through a helper or apprenticeship position, participants referred from Mr. Brown at the United Way can gain the training, skills and knowledge they need to climb the career ladder within the union system.

“You just have to work with the individual as an individual. You can’t group anyone together because I could have 50 different people walk through the door with 50 different barriers.”

--Bob Brown, Director of the Building New Careers Program

Program Funding

The Building New Careers program initially began with U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) funding. After three years, the DOL funding was eliminated and the United Way stepped in to fill the role. Currently, United Way funds the entire program, which consists mostly of salary and travel expenses for the sole staff member, the Director of the Building New Careers Program.

Industry Engagement

The National United Way and the national AFL-CIO have a long-standing relationship and history of collaboration. Similarly, the South Central Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO (SCIFL) and United Way of Central Iowa also share a history of partnership and cooperation on community service projects in Iowa. As a result, prior to assuming leadership over the Building New Careers program, Mr. Brown, of the United Way, had many relationships and contacts with the Central Iowa Building and Construction Trades Council.

Mr. Brown’s contacts were instrumental in helping build a bridge between the Building New Careers program and the construction unions in the area. Moreover, once Mr. Brown assumed his role within the program he continued to build on these relationships and contacts within the construction industry. He regularly attends industry events, such as monthly meetings held by the Central Iowa Apprenticeship Coordinators Committee in Des Moines, which are instrumental to the success of his program. The Committee helps Mr. Brown keep abreast of job demand, and also helped him gain valuable knowledge of the apprenticeship application process, apprenticeship training guidelines and requirements, and the career ladder that exists within the unions. With this knowledge, Mr. Brown and the Building New Careers pre-apprenticeship program are better suited to serve and prepare Building New Career clients for entry into the field.