

Beyond Bars: Program trains offenders for green jobs

A King County jobs program that helps those who have been incarcerated move beyond the stigma of jail time and into living-wage “green jobs” focused on environmental cleanup is a 2010 winner of the Governor’s Workforce and Economic Development Best Practices Award.

Partners

TRAC Associates
Center For Career Alternatives
YWCA
Refugee Resettlement Office
King County Housing Authority
Environmental Coalitions of
South Seattle
King County Solid Waste
Program
King County Work Training
Program
King County Department of
Adult and Juvenile Detention
Seattle-King County Workforce
Development Council
Department of Social and
Health Services
South Seattle Community and
Technical College
Worker Center, AFL-CIO

The King County Jobs Initiative is a long-standing program with a proven track record. Previously, the program served a general population of low-income adults, in South King County, helping them become certified workers in toxic and hazardous clean up work through an Environmental Protection Agency funded Environmental Job Training grant. This program has combined careful attention to employer needs with a comprehensive approach to supporting program participants.

Since 1998, this county-operated workforce development program has placed over 1,200 low-income, disadvantaged residents of South King County into full-time employment. The majority have worked in environmental clean up related jobs. As a 12-year recipient of U.S. EPA Job Training Grants, the King County Jobs Initiative (KCJI) is highly regarded nationally and was chosen to represent the success of EPA’s Green Jobs strategy at the “Good Jobs, Green Jobs National Conference” last May.



In 2007, KCJI took on a new challenge by focusing exclusively on those with recent criminal records. This population is among the hardest to serve, as employers are often reluctant to hire those with a prior conviction. At the same time, many ex-offenders have low education levels, limited work experience and major barriers that prevent them from getting jobs.

Currently, 90 percent of the program’s participants have a prior conviction. Focusing on the offender population has required KCJI to gain a deeper understanding of the criminal justice system and the many organizations that serve this population. Program staff developed relationships with Work Release and the Department of Corrections, King County Community Center for Alternative Programs, jails and other groups. The program also enhanced its job clubs, training and job readiness to focus on the barriers many former offenders face.

KCJI has been successful in overcoming employer hesitation to hiring workers with criminal records because of its close relationship with employers and its history of providing skilled workers in the past. KCJI works with community-based organizations, community and technical colleges, labor unions, employers and others to create customized training that meets employers’ specific job needs. Recently, KCJI held asbestos removal training and over 15 clients were placed into \$30-an-hour jobs.

In 2009, of 115 program participants, 62 were placed in permanent jobs with 48 still working the job one year later. Average starting wages were just over \$20 an hour.

“We were able to get our work accomplished in a cost effective manner and the workers were provided with viable skills for future employment. The KCJI combines work training in the pivotal industries of the future, while providing opportunities that significantly change the lives of individuals.”

Leslie Miles
King County’s Facility
Management Division

Key Contact:

Carolyn Bledsoe
206.263.9022
Carolyn.bledsoe@kingcounty.gov

Governor’s 2010 Best Practices Award Winner