

CASE STUDY:

¡YOUTHWORKS! — SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO



Program and Training Information

¡YouthWorks! is a nonprofit organization in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The organization was formed in 2001 with the mission to address the lack of alternative education and employment opportunities for at-risk youth in the Santa Fe area. ¡YouthWorks! offers programs in job training and placement, life skills, counseling, education, and leadership development to inspire youth to realize their full potential. In 2008, ¡YouthWorks! received funding from the City of Santa Fe Economic Development Division to develop the Green Collar Jobs Apprenticeship Program.

The Green Collar Jobs Apprenticeship Program has developed several community-based partnerships with Santa Fe Community College, local businesses, and organizations in order to educate at-risk youth about environmental issues and provide job-skills-development training and access to employment opportunities. Each apprenticeship placement lasts three months, and apprentices are paid a living wage that is subsidized by ¡YouthWorks! The target population for this program is youth ages 16-25 in the Santa Fe area who face various barriers to employment, such as having a criminal record or not having a high school

diploma or GED. The program also targets youth who have participated in the organization's other work programs, such as the River Restoration Project or Santa Fe YouthBuild.

The Santa Fe Green Collar Jobs Apprenticeship Program is marketed largely through word-of-mouth. Each year, they partner with employers to place apprentices in sustainable fields that offer hands-on job experience. The program is in demand; more youth apply each year than there are jobs available. Selected participants are introduced to key issues regarding sustainability and the emerging green economy and are engaged in critical thinking around renewable energy technology such as solar panel installation, the importance of water conservation through water audits with the Water Conservation Division, and xeriscaping from the Railyard Stewards. In addition, the program provides job-skills services, assistance with resume and cover-letter building, interview preparation, and a 36-hour program to help trainees to receive their GED. The many facets of the apprenticeship training program are intended to prepare students for occupations in the green economy and other sustainable industries: for example, participants have been placed with solar companies, a company that developed products made from recycled items, and green construction.

The program focuses on these types of occupations because the green economy is a growing industry with available jobs, whereas many industries outside of the green economy have generally been scaling back.

Employment Outcomes and Program Evaluations

Relationships with employers such as the Water Conservation Division and the Waste Water Treatment Center in Santa Fe are maintained in order to connect trainees to jobs after they have completed the apprenticeship program. About 35-40% of participants who complete the training program find jobs. If trainees do not find a job, the ¡YouthWorks! Apprenticeship Coordinator continues to work with them to search for jobs, fill out applications, and find work placement. Graduates of the apprenticeship program have jobs in landscaping, water treatment, horticulture, plumbing, recycling, culinary, and residential and commercial water auditing. The typical wages for such positions start at \$10.29 per hour, which is the living wage in Santa Fe. The program subsidizes this wage (\$3.79 is paid by the organization, and \$6.50 is paid by the employer) for three months. Generally, the ¡YouthWorks! organization has

found that many of its trainees for the apprenticeship program are staying within the green economy; trainees do not necessarily view the industry as the green economy but are highly aware of the many new job opportunities. Some trainees have gone on to earn two-year degrees or are attending four-year universities to obtain specialized jobs within the field.

Program Challenges, Strengths, and Weaknesses

Finding and maintaining partnerships with employers is a challenge for the organization. Furthermore, employers sometimes doubt the reliability of some of the program's trainees based on their looks or backgrounds: trainees may have tattoos, may not have completed high school, or may have been previously incarcerated. Incentives are needed for employers to be willing to hire at-risk youth. Along with challenges with employers, trainees also face issues with securing transportation to and from job and training sites. Some trainees do not have consistent living spaces. In addition to causing difficulties for the trainees, these types of challenges make it harder for the organization to keep track of the trainees and to make sure that they are showing up and doing well with their training and job placements.

The biggest challenge that ¡YouthWorks! faces is being able to diversify funding, and the program is looking to secure private funding in addition to public funds in order to continue. If contracts with employers and grant programs

are renewed and/or new funding sources are secured, the organization would like to extend the program and expand into areas of entrepreneurial development for youth so that they can create their own opportunities, such as starting a sustainable landscaping company or creating a private water auditing firm.

Opportunities in the Water Sector

¡YouthWorks! is aware of the opportunities for green jobs within the water sector concerning river restoration, water management, and water conservation. The organization is extending its work on river restoration and green landscaping opportunities through partnerships with Railyard Stewards, Newman's Nursery, and other employers in Santa Fe who use water-conscious techniques for their landscaping.

www.santafeyouthworks.org

Read the full report *Sustainable Water Jobs* at www.pacinst.org/reports/sustainable_water_jobs