The Computerworld Honors Program

Honoring those who use Information Technology to benefit society

Final Copy of Case Study

YEAR:
2012

STATUS:
Laureate

Organization name:
Urban Ed, Inc.

Organization URL:
www.urbaned.org

Project Name:
IT Help Desk Apprenticeship

What social/humanitarian issue was the project designed to address? What specific metrics did you use to measure the project's success?

The social issue addressed by Urban Ed is chronic unemployment and poverty. Within our communities, east of the river in D.C., unemployment is holding steady at nearly 30%, and with the working poor, the number increases to over 40%. The need to create sustainable job opportunities for those with limited education is critical. Urban Ed has developed an Information Technology Help Desk Apprenticeship, an approach that will change the face of unemployment for a disadvantaged population who struggles to compete for solid jobs, not only in the District of Columbia, but throughout the Washington region. Our workforce development model provides this segment of the population with high-end education for skills that are in demand and that will permanently provide opportunities for economic security. Our specific metrics for measuring success is a minimum of three industry-approved certifications and long-term job placement. Our model has a 90% pass rate for global technology certifications and an 80% placement rate for those who complete the program as a certified technician within a 4-month period. Our students are not just placed in any job, but are landing great career starts within the U.S. government, local government agencies and major corporations, including the Department of Homeland Security, the U.S. Department of Commerce, Unisys and the Department of Justice. This powerful technology-based model holds much promise for changing how to train minorities and the poor from urban cores for sustainable information technology careers that will break the poverty cycle. Our model is scalable, as throughout the nation, computer support is in demand.

Please describe the technologies used and how those technologies were deployed in an innovative way. Also, please include any technical or other challenges that were overcome for the successful implementation of the project.

Surprisingly, apprenticeship programs in technology do not exist in our region and are very limited throughout the United States, yet technical skills are a necessity for competitive functioning in the workplace of today. Urban Ed has devised a method to take highly technical content and deliver it to a grassroots population who has never experienced the power of technology for employment. In fact, their low literacy and limited work experience has, for the most part, qualified them only for janitorial or retail jobs at best. With careful planning, testing and retesting of our strategies and assumptions over the past two years, we have a model that includes a blended learning approach that takes ideals from traditional construction apprenticeship programs and combines associate-level technical education and corporate-level professional development to help low-income minorities excel in technology jobs that pay nearly twice the housing wage. Starting on average at $17-$19 per hour, our job training has raised the bar on what employment programs can and should do to sustain families. We have built our new model from our years of experience with our population, the Employment and Training Administration's Competency Building Blocks in technology, and classic apprenticeships. We use e-learning, multimedia tools to support training and classic instructor-led training to educate the most chronically unemployed with the goal of making computer technicians out of an uncommon group. We extend beyond and challenge our population to not just learn basics such as Microsoft Word, but to learn how to be first responders to address the needs of end users. This powerful training and educational model will set the stage for a whole new level of apprenticeship training programs.

Please list the specific humanitarian benefits the project has yielded so far.

No other help desk training exists in this country that targets the chronically unemployed and has the level of success we have had, setting the stage for Urban Ed to establish a new precedent. A few pre-apprenticeship programs exist, but they do not bring the national credential that a fully registered apprenticeship brings, nor do they bring on-the-job training during the program, nor do they bring the expectations that are required by the federal government and the local government for registered apprenticeships. The unemployed are getting certified industry credentials in an uncommon field. The unemployed are getting jobs that have lifelong career options that will leave them employable for decades. With the average family size of three, the impact of changing the financial status of a single parent changes the norm and expectation that poverty and public assistance is no longer the only way of life. The unemployed are evading homelessness, reducing the stress of making ends meet, establishing bank accounts through direct payroll deposits, and building an incredible sense of pride and hope that a future is still possible. Their children feel the joy of their working parents and are gaining excitement around education, success and improving their focus in school. The children are no longer hungry while at school because food is now affordable and on the table. The impact of our program is life-changing and offers a new approach to workforce development. It also changes the face of traditional Department of Labor apprenticeships, establishing a new trajectory for what 21st century training and education should begin to look like and how to reach those most in need.

Please provide the best example of how the project has benefited a specific individual, enterprise or organization. Feel free to include personal quotes from individuals who have directly benefited from the work.

Participants exceeded our goals, securing not just one technology certification but three, and got good jobs with major IT firms and the federal government within 3 months of completing our training. Stephanie is a young single mother of three living in a rough neighborhood where on more than one occasion her home has been the target of attempted burglary. She receives public

housing and financial assistance from the District. She enrolled in our IT Apprenticeship program in Feb 2011 with no technical background whatsoever and no formal vocational training or secondary education that would enable her to move her family out of poverty. To date, Stephanie has acquired four global IT certifications: A+ IT Technician, Microsoft Certified Professional (MCP), Help Desk Institute Customer Service Representative and Microsoft Certified Desktop Support Technician. Because of Urban Ed, Stephanie will move off the rosters of public assistance and move into lifelong employability to sustain her family, setting an example for her children. Kevin Whitley, Desktop Support Analyst, Arlington County Government: "To me, Urban Ed is a means to a career, not a dead-end job, because there is a lot of mobility in IT. So Urban Ed to me means there is a chance for the people in our community to improve themselves without going into debt; especially during this recession, this is some very needed help. Today, I work for a government agency and I have choices and opportunities because Urban Ed and I took the time to educate me and now I'm a certified professional. Being thankful that Urban Ed gave me this chance that at any time they need some assistance with anything, such as someone to share their knowledge or experience, I'm always available. Now I'm considered a professional. This has lifted my spirits immensely."