

impact

of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences



Economic Development and Quality of Life for People and Communities The Extension Connection—Life and Job Skills Training

Issue

There is a need in the Phoenix metropolitan area for “welfare-to-work” type programs. The Extension Connection is a major part of the “Project S.T.R.I.D.E.” (Successful Training Resources for Individual Development) program, a job linkage demonstration project. S.T.R.I.D.E.’s mission is to assist unemployed, low skilled, and disadvantaged Phoenix Enterprise Community (low-income) residents with training that promotes job readiness and self-worth. Participants learn how to overcome barriers to entering the world of work, to achieve job stability and advancement, and job placement. It is one of the first projects directed at employment for the very hard to employ.

What has been done?

The Extension Connection offers a six-week life-skills program that includes job development skills, nutrition education, and money management. The program helps enhance other life management skills

that provide structure within the family, and helps families be productive in their community. Participants overcome barriers to enter the work force, achieve job stability and advancement in life for themselves and their families.

Participants in the program have ranged from former gang members to newly arrived immigrants to the United States whose lack of English and American job skills caused significant barriers to employment. Ninety-five percent of the program graduates are members of racial or ethnic minorities, 40 percent have had less than a high school education; many have criminal records.

Impact

Over 300 hard-to-employ participants have completed the program. Forty people participated in 2001. The participants showed up for classes everyday for six weeks with the provision of bus passes. Half of all participants showed improvement in

working with others in a positive manner. All participants set goals at the beginning of the program and 60 percent of them completed their goals by the end of the program; 50 percent report learning at least two skills that boosted their self-esteem.

For some participants, this was the first time they were free of drugs, free of gang affiliations and showed up daily for classes. Among the participants who have completed the program, 41 percent of the participants who had started jobs were still working in the same job six months later; 146 have been employed for over a year. Many have returned to the site to help as volunteers and mentors. Some are now employed at the site as staff.

“The Extension Connection helped me to bridge the gap in society for me, to make the transition to a new life smoother.” –former prison inmate who wanted to improve his life with skills for living and get a decent job.

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