

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN LOW-SKILLED WORKERS AND HIGH SKILL JOBS

By Jason Perkins-Cohen

The following is an excerpt from JOTF's paper "Bridge Programs in Maryland: Helping Low-Skilled Residents Access Postsecondary Education and High Wage Jobs." The full paper can be found at www.jotf.org.

In recent years a strategy has emerged to address the mismatch between the skills of the available labor force and the skill level required on many jobs. Community colleges and businesses have formed partnerships to create programs that teach basic reading, writing, math, English language, and technical skills in the context of a particular occupation. These programs are called "bridge programs" because they are a bridge to post-secondary education and higher skill jobs.

JOTF conducted a study of bridge programs in Maryland. The following programs proved particularly interesting.

Magna Baltimore Technical Training Center initiated a machining and tool and die program that is a 5-day a week, 36-month registered Maryland apprenticeship. The program teaches reading comprehension and writing in the context of these courses as well as algebra, geometry and trigonometry. Upon completion of the program, students become journeymen and they may have earned certification in as many as 28 metalworking competencies. Graduates are qualified to be machinists and tool and die makers making approximately \$30,000 per year to start and are also qualified to enter an Associates degree program in Manufacturing. They may even have 15-17 credits that they can apply toward the degree.

Good Samaritan Hospital partners with various universities and community colleges to offer training and education for its employees. Listed below are the training programs and the schools/universities associated with Good Samaritan.

TYPE OF PROGRAM	-	AFFILIATED PROGRAM
Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)	-	Good Samaritan Hospital
CNA to Registered Nurse (RN)	-	Coppin State University
CNA to Licensed practical nurse (LPN) (in development)	-	Essex Community College
LPN to RN	-	Prince Georges Community College
RN to Bachelor of Science in nursing (BSN)	-	College of Notre Dame

Employees interested in the CNA-RN program must have a high school diploma or GED and must pass the Nurse Entrance Exam (NET) that requires 10th grade reading and math skills. Good Samaritan and the Abell foundation jointly fund the program. The hospital also provides on-site childcare and 24-hour access to a computer lab. Program directors credit the initiative

with raising staff morale, contributing to elimination of the job vacancy rate that once stood at 24 percent, and reducing the hospital's need to use staffing agencies.



Montgomery County Refugee Training Program provides training and education to political refugees and asylees residing in Montgomery County. The program combines ESOL instruction with basic workplace skills training and prepares individuals for jobs in healthcare and hospitality. The Office of Refugee Resettlement in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services funds the program. Started in 1979 as part of Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), it was transferred to Montgomery College (a community college) in July 2005.

The pre-CNA began in 1996 and teaches medical and nursing terms to those with limited English skills. There is no minimum education requirement, but students must be able to read, speak and understand English, i.e. a "high beginner" ESOL level.

The CNA program also has no minimum education requirement, but students must have college-level skills and must be able to speak and read English well. Ten percent of the CNA students have a healthcare background — some were nurses or doctors in their home country. The program provides education and skills training in areas such as infection control, patient care procedures, patient sensitivity, and professional and ethical behavior. Class work is followed by a 40-hour practicum at Manorcare nursing homes. Graduates of the program work in hospitals, nursing homes and homecare, and make \$8-9 per hour and receive benefits after 90 days.

While graduates of this program are not qualified to immediately enter a postsecondary training program, the program raises participants' basic skills, moving them closer to postsecondary training.

Prospects for the Future

Bridge programs are an exciting concept because they improve the employment prospects of workers and job seekers and meet the high-skill needs of employers. Current services only scratch the surface of satisfying the need of residents and the demand of employers. Learning from the experience of the programs already implemented and addressing early on the key issues suggested above will go a long way to ensuring the effectiveness of future bridge programs.

BLACK MALES LEFT BEHIND

By Joanne Nathans

A current stream of books and articles, including a front page New York Times article dateline Baltimore on March 20, 2006, describe the steadily worsening plight of less-educated black men in the U.S. It is a major national tragedy, a crisis of stunted lives and untapped, undeveloped talent and productivity that we dare not ignore.

Among the new books is Black Males Left Behind, edited by Ronald B. Mincy, Professor of Social Policy and Social Work Practice at the School of Social Work, Columbia University, and published by the Urban Institute in 2006. Contributors include well-known writers/experts Harry Holzer, Paul Offner, Rebecca Blank, Wendell Primus, Elaine Sorensen, Alford A. Young, Jr., and others. Chapters provide background and data on the roles of the economy, availability of blue-collar jobs, child support enforcement policies, the criminal justice system and the rates of incarceration, as well as the willingness of employers to hire welfare leavers, less-educated women, less-educated men, job seekers from specific racial and ethnic groups, and individuals with a criminal record. The greatest reluctance to hire is directed at young, less-educated black men, because the high rate of criminal activity and incarceration among this cohort has a "chilling effect" even on young black men who do not have a criminal background. Most chapters include recommendations for action.

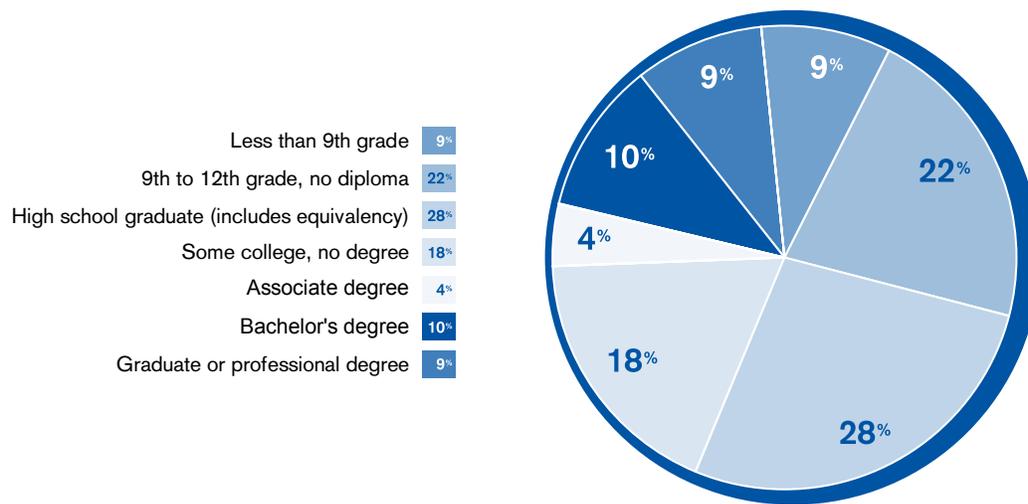
One of the most interesting chapters examines the views of 26 young, black, male job-seekers in Detroit, ages 18-24, about jobs generally, desirable jobs, wages, the men's assessment of the skills needed for the desirable jobs and their own qualifications, and their prospects and aspirations. These young men were all participants in job training and placement programs that provided them with job information, counseling and emotional support. Because of their youth, they had short work histories, mostly in low-wage jobs with high turnover, and still had hopes for their economic future. Nevertheless, their

experience had been that employers resolved workplace problems by firing the bothersome employee and hiring a new one, rather than by investing time to solve the problems. As a result, the men felt little commitment to many of the workplaces where they could be hired - where jobs paid poorly, where they were not treated with adequate respect, and where they were considered expendable and replaceable if a problem arose. Their career aspirations were for a middle-class blue-collar or white-collar job, or their own business, which would provide economic stability and support for a household that would include a wife-partner and children.

Many of the men felt that any job worth doing had to pay at least \$7-8 an hour. But they often took a lower wage job because it was the only one available. They also knew that better jobs require a level of education and training that they did not have; they knew that as unskilled, young black men they were not attractive candidates for jobs, and they also thought that black women have an easier time in the job market. The author of this chapter recommends points to consider for effective programs: 1) make the value of training and placement programs more apparent to more men who would benefit from them; 2) address the need for a "meaningful wage" in lower tier employment; 3) provide more opportunities to acquire the education and credentials needed for better jobs.

Amid the grim data presented in this book, the authors offer several reasons for optimism: low-income minority men want an economically decent life for themselves and their families; policy makers and Americans in general are increasingly aware of the problems faced by young minority men and the need to take action to address the problems; and, perhaps most important: so few serious, sustained efforts have been made that we do not yet know our true capacity to solve the problems.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF BALTIMORE RESIDENTS 25 YEARS AND OVER



Source: Census 2000, www.factfinder.census.gov

SESSION 2006 – WINS & LOSSES

By Melissa Chalmers Broome

Even amidst turbulent election year politics, JOTF and our advocacy partners were able to score wins for Maryland's working families. We are proud of the areas where our efforts paid off, and look forward to returning to Annapolis next January to tackle areas where they did not.

Adult Education

Nearly 1 in 3 adults in Maryland need adult education services – high school diploma, GED or English as a Second Language. JOTF supported a bill that would create a funding formula that would produce a reliable funding stream and increase the state's investment in adult education. The Governor increased the appropriation for adult education by \$2 million in '07 and the legislature added an additional \$1.5 million in '08 but the legislature failed to pass the funding formula. While this funding increase is promising, Maryland still lags far behind most other states and without a formula, future funding is very much uncertain.

Child Support

Many low-income parents accrue huge amounts of state-owed arrearages that they cannot pay. Facing large debt and severe wage garnishment, many non-custodial parents are discouraged from entering mainstream employment and from becoming involved in their children's lives. JOTF advocated for a bill that would have established the child support incentive program. This program would forgive state-owed debt for parents who pay their full support to their children. Although the House voted unanimously for it, the bill did not make it out of the Senate.

Minimum Wage

The General Assembly voted to override the Governor's veto. Effective February 16, 2006 Maryland's minimum wage is now \$6.15 per hour.

Economic Development

Every year Maryland gives millions of dollars in tax credits to businesses in the name of job creation. The state however, does not collect information to determine whether the businesses actually created the jobs for which they were given the tax break. JOTF actively supported legislation that called for the Department of Business and Economic Development to increase its reporting and disclose the number and quality of jobs created by public subsidies. The bill failed in committee.

External Diploma Program

Currently, over 600,000 Maryland adults lack a high school diploma. This represents approximately 20% of the adult, working-age population in the state. The External Diploma Program allows adults to acquire a high school diploma by demonstrating mastery of certain prescribed competencies. The bill passed unanimously in the House and Senate and ensures continued funding for the Adult External High School Program.

EX-OFFENDERS

With more than 12,000 people returning from Maryland prisons to our communities each year, it is more important than ever to work toward reducing the many barriers



On May 2nd Governor Ehrlich signed a bill that increases adult education funding by \$1.5 million. Melissa Chalmers Broome, JOTF's new Senior Policy Advocate, was among those present for the bill signing.

faced by this population. JOTF advocated for legislation that would reduce the barriers to work for ex-offenders.

Pilot Program for Ex-Offenders

A bill calling for the creation of a pilot program to promote the long-term employment of ex-offenders was signed into law on May 2, 2006. The program encourages the hiring of ex-offenders by providing federal fidelity bonds and a state tax credit to employers willing to hire from this group.

Maryland Correctional Enterprises & Construction Training

A bill that would authorize Maryland Correctional Enterprises to develop construction training programs for inmates failed in the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee. Studies show that persons who learn a trade while

incarcerated have a significantly better chance of becoming employed once they return to the community.

Arrest Without Charge – Automatic Expungement

In Baltimore City alone, approximately 1,600 individuals are arrested each month and then released without ever being charged. Although they have committed no crime, the arrest appears on their criminal background report, and remains there until it is expunged. Currently, in order to expunge the record of arrest, applicants must wait three years or else waive their right to sue the state for damages. Because employers are often reluctant to hire persons with criminal backgrounds, this presents a real barrier to employment. There were six bills introduced during the legislative session that called for the automatic expungement of such arrests. Unfortunately, none passed.

Project RESTART

Project RESTART provides education and drug treatment to nonviolent offenders so that they do not become repeat offenders. The legislature approved an additional \$500,000 that the Governor put in his 2007 budget to expand Project RESTART services to the pre-release centers. The funds, however, can only be used for inmates who received RESTART services in one of the current facilities (MCTC and MCIW) for at least a year.

JOTF would like to thank the partners that joined us in fighting for Maryland's working poor and job seekers during this legislative session. Thanks to the Homeless Persons Representation Project, National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence–MD, MD Alliance for the Poor, Greater Baltimore Committee, and all the other organizations and individuals who advocate for improved economic opportunities for working families.

We are also grateful to the legislators who championed bills and budget measures supported by JOTF, especially Delegates Joan Cadden, Kathleen Dumais, Keith Haynes, Sheila Hixson, Adrienne Jones, and Senators Patrick Hogan and Verna Jones.

For more information on JOTF's advocacy work during the 2006 session, visit www.jotf.org/advocacy/annapolis.htm or contact Melissa Chalmers Broome at melissa@jotf.org or (410) 234-8046.

Job Opportunities Task Force

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Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes



On May 4th, JOTF hosted an asset development forum: **Building and Protecting Wealth for Baltimore's Vulnerable Families: Opportunities and Challenges**. The discussion emphasized the importance of programs that help low-income individuals gain financial stability and independence.



Speakers included **Deborah Owens** (pictured), host of Moneyworks on WEAA 88.9F; **Diane Bell McKoy**, Senior Fellow with the Casey Foundation; **Lisa Evans**, Deputy Director of St. Ambrose Housing Aid Center; **Robin McKinney**, Assistant Director of the East Harbor Community Development Corporation and **Christopher Tan**, Program Officer for Local Initiatives Support Corporation in Chicago.

JOTF is a 501c(3) non-profit organization. If you would like to support our efforts to help low-income workers and job seekers please contact jessica@jotf.org or call **410-234-8040**.

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