

MOBILE RESOURCE CENTER ADDING LEVEL 2 COMPUTER CLASS

First implemented in March of 2007, the Mobile Resource Center (MRC) has for over two years offered computer literacy training, through it's Level 1—Basic Computer Class, to participants enrolled in Job Club as well as other Wilder SHES services and housing sites. Thus far, we are pleased to report that 29 Job Club participants have graduated from the MRC program.

From start-up to shut-down, the Level 1 section of the MRC course has focused on all the basic computer functions essential to daily use, including operation of tools such as internet browsers, email programs, and Microsoft Word. Development of these basic computer skills has in turn allowed participants to utilize resources that offer significant advantages in successful workforce reentry, such as public transportation schedules, as well as job banks and other employer listings.

However, some of the more advanced job-hunting tools, such as resumes, cover letters, and online employment applications, have previously been left for program graduates to complete without specific training.

This fall, the MRC will expand to include a second level of training for all qualifying participants. With the addition of this Level 2—Job Search and Resume Writing course, participants will be taught how to utilize some of the most essential job-searching tools, which can be utilized

throughout MRC graduates' professional careers. The course will walk participants through an online job search and application process and provide tutorials on how to create professional documents on Microsoft Word as well as spreadsheets using Microsoft Excel.

In order to expand knowledge and experience with these two computer programs even further, each participant will begin working on an individual project that can be taken away from class, with the option of building a budget using an Excel spreadsheet or developing a resume using a Word document. During each class session, participants will have time to apply the learned material towards both personal and work-related endeavors.

In order to enroll in either course offered by the Mobile Resource Center, participants must be enrolled in either the JobsFirst Job Club, Wilder ROOF or Project Quest programs, or they must reside at one of the many Wilder housing sites. Additionally, all participants in the Level 2 course will be required to have previously graduated from the Level 1 MRC course.

The first occurrence of the monthly class—which will include a total of four weekly sessions—begins on Tuesday, September 15th. The JobsFirst staff is excited for the expansion of the MRC program and we hope to see many participants continue to utilize these services to further develop their computer literacy and job-searching skills. For more information, please contact Abdul Hakim As-Siddiq at (651) 288-5191.



Employment VISTA Peter Muellerleile works with Job Club participant Alicia Bryant on her computer skills. The Job Club computer space was recently expanded to include eight computer stations for participant use.

JobsFirst Contract With Minnesota Department of Corrections Renewed

The new contract between the Wilder Foundation JobsFirst program and the Minnesota Department of Corrections was recently renewed to cover the time period that began on July 1st of this year through June 30th of 2010. As a result of the renewed contract, the JobsFirst program will be under obligation to conduct 180 pre-release classes and 185 days of Job Club, as well as two Employment Seminars at the Minnesota Correctional Facility in Togo.

We anticipate that our steady increases in participants served each year will continue for the fifth year in a row. The JobsFirst team looks forward to the continuation of our services to those incarcerated as well as the ex-offender population.

Increasing Number of Job Club Participants Pursue Education

With many ex-offenders feeling discouraged by the difficulty of obtaining steady employment with only a high school diploma or an equivalent degree—especially during a recession—an increasing number of Job Club participants have turned to higher education in their efforts to successfully transition from incarceration back into the workforce.

From January through June of this year, 8.6% of participants who attended Job Club during that time were enrolled in school either part-time or full-time. In contrast, 2.7% of participants were enrolled in school during the same six-month period in 2008, and only 1.9% of participants pursued further education between January and June of 2007.

JobsFirst Staff Emphasize “Skill Recognition” in Interview Trainings

Since Job Club first implemented its mock interviewing services in January of this year, dozens of participants have received professional interview training from members of the Wilder Human Resources Department. Provided in Job Club on the third Wednesday of every month, these services have allowed participants to sharpen their interview skills by developing familiarity with the professional interview setting and gaining confidence, as well as competence, in the process.

In this setting, however, one of the major challenges for many job seekers is attempting to recognize and articulate the breadth of their skill-sets without resorting to cliché terminology, predictable phrasing, and other common practices that do little to impress experienced hiring personnel.

Many job seekers, at some point during or prior to their job searches, are given the impression that they need to employ such common self-descriptors as “team-player,” “people-person,” or “quick-learner,” unaware that empty labels such of these mean little to employers until they are successfully demonstrated in a work setting.

As a result, the JobsFirst staff has increased its emphasis on the process of “Skill Recognition,” both in Job Club and in the JobsFirst Pre-Release Classes taught in all Minnesota Correctional Facilities.

In Job Club, staff sit down with participants, discuss their individual work histories, and implore them to recognize all the concrete tasks that have been completed during each of their previous jobs.



Employment Counselor Abdul Hakim As-Siddiq, conducting a “Conviction Response” training at Job Club.

For example, a participant with experience in shipping and receiving will be asked to break down his/her job description into a number of task-specific skills, so that “warehouse work” instead becomes “inventory, forklift operation, order verification, product packaging, and quality control,” among many other duties.

JobsFirst pre-release staff conduct “Skill Recognition” training as well, however with incarcerated offenders in an institutional classroom setting.

In either situation, the objective is to teach participants about the importance of being able to talk, specifically, about the tangible skills that they can bring to different positions. Empty rhetoric is lost on most employers; in today’s job market—now more than ever—one of the greatest advantages an applicant can have is the ability to speak not only with confidence, but with authenticity as well.

JobsFirst Staff Attends MCF-Lino Lakes Transitions Fair

On Tuesday, July 21st, the Minnesota Correctional Facility in Lino Lakes hosted its annual Transitions Fair, a day-long opportunity for state and community agencies and social service providers to communicate with offenders and offer information regarding their various programs and organizations.

Over 300 inmates attended the “well-orchestrated” event, according to JobsFirst supervisor Kate Ellefson.

“The level of interest and participation from the inmates was impressive,” she said. “They were very engaged, very inquisitive, and well-prepared.”

Throughout the morning and afternoon, inmates from the facility were brought in consistently to browse the tables and meet with the broad assortment of community providers and representatives.

During lunch, presenters were greeted with an introduction from the new warden of the facility, who spoke briefly of the event’s significance.

In addition to Wilder, some of the many organizations in attendance were Amicus, RS Eden, 180 Degrees, Alcoholics Anonymous, Teen Challenge, SOAR Career Solutions, the Council on Crime and Justice, the Minnesota Department of Labor, and the Minnesota Department of Motor Vehicles.

The JobsFirst program is glad to have been a part of the event, with staff having spoken with dozens of offenders about their future plans and providing information to many about the use of various Wilder services and programs.

We all look forward to future participation in Department of Corrections Transitions Fairs and to our continued involvement in the reentry process for offenders.

The Wilder Job Club serves people who have been released from prison, not jail or workhouse, and are currently under Minnesota Department of Corrections supervision. Job Club is open Monday through Thursday, 9:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M. Intakes of new participants take place between 9:00 and 9:30. The Amherst H. Wilder Foundation Job Club is located at 1600 University Avenue, Suite #219, St. Paul, Minnesota 55104. We can be reached by phone at (651) 288-5191 or e-mail at JobsFirst@wilder.org.