

YOUTHtoday

August 2009

How To...

...Create Internships that Lead to Jobs

Seek business partners and focus on high-demand skills.

by Deborah Huso

Since its founding in 2000, Year Up, a national job training curriculum for at-risk youth, has managed an enviable record of getting young people into jobs that offer a promising future. The organization, which has six U.S. sites, sees almost 90 percent of its graduates receive full or part-time job placements within four months of completing their internships. The average starting wage: \$15 an hour.

While the idea of helping at-risk older youth get a leg up on the future by giving them on-the-job training sounds great, implementing it is something else. Surprisingly few organizations undertake the training of these young people for long-term careers or put them in internships that expose them to real-world job situations and income-earning opportunities.

Kweku Forstall, executive director of Year Up Atlanta, says perspective has a lot to do with success. "Year Up is not designed to be a charitable endeavor," he says. "We're about job training." Forstall says the key to Year Up's success has been the organization's high standards: "You've got to set the bar high. Hold youth accountable. Teach them consequences. And provide mentoring and support to boost self confidence."

Finding Partners: Central to Year Up's success – and that of other similar programs – has been its ability to establish relationships with corporations and agencies willing to provide internships to its trainees. Forstall says Year Up screens all its program participants, eliminating the cost of background checks and drug screening for employers, and provides the employers with well-trained interns who know how to behave in a business environment.

Year Up Atlanta | Atlanta, GA | (404) 249-0300 | <http://www.yearup.org/locations/atlanta.htm>

The Strategy: Train at-risk young adults in information technology skills, and hook them up with internships at local companies.

Getting Started: Atlanta is the sixth U.S. city to implement the Year Up program, which was started in Boston nine years ago by entrepreneur Gerald Chertavian. "We're part of a successful model looking to expand nationally," says the Atlanta program's executive director, Kweku Forstall.

How it Works: Youth participating in Year Up receive six months of training in IT skills on site in preparation for a six-month internship with a local company's IT department. In addition to learning the skills they will need to work in entry-level IT jobs, the youths also learn business skills like problem solving, working on a team, and taking the initiative in the workplace.

Youth Served: Year Up Atlanta recruited its first class in March and has 24 students participating. Forstall says Year Up will expand the program each year, until it is serving 300 youths annually. Participants must be between 18 and 24 and hold a high school diploma or GED. All have issues that have put them at risk, such as former incarceration for misdemeanors or homelessness. Once they begin their internships, students receive a \$200 stipend weekly.

Staff: Year Up Atlanta has six full-time staff members, all of whom are trained to serve youth in advisory roles.

Money: Year Up Atlanta operates on an annual budget of \$1.2 million. Some start-up capital was provided by Year Up headquarters, but most came from a group of Harvard Business School graduates in Atlanta, who each gave \$100,000 to support the program. In the future, Forstall expects the program to be funded largely by the fees of \$795 per week per student that local companies pay for the interns. Students receive a quarter of that stipend, while the rest goes to Year Up.

Results: Year Up Atlanta's first class won't graduate until next spring, but nationally, 86 percent of graduates obtain full or part-time employment after their internships.

What Works: Programs that offer wages or a stipend create demand. Allan Johnson, director of youth services for JobTrain in Menlo Park, Calif., says he has more applicants than internships because the program offers money, as well as training and job placement help. "We're putting money in their pockets in an honest way," he says.

Internships that train young people for jobs that will be in demand, particularly in this tight economy, are best. Michael Johnson-Chase says the interns from Solar One are well-positioned once they leave the Green Jobs Training Program. Year Up, in Atlanta, has a similar approach, training people exclusively for entry-level information technology jobs, which are always in demand. "Entry-level IT is a high turnover sector," says Forstall. "When we talk to partners, we frame it as a business proposition. There is always a need for entry-level IT workers, and our students come out of our program turnkey."

Lory Newmyer, executive director of the Hull Lifesaving Museum in Boston, says its Maritime Apprentice Program (MAP) for incarcerated youth has special advantages: "The Hull Lifesaving Museum is a small and flexible organization. We are able to serve kids until there is a positive outcome."

"By the time kids leave MAP, they will have a network of caring adults behind them," Newmyer says. "They will have lived and worked outside the criminal justice system and will have worked in an internship with an industry partner."

The Challenges: Money is hard to find right now for most nonprofits, and internship programs for at-risk youth are no exception. Johnson-Chase says Solar One faces extra challenges because it's pushing internships in green jobs, something he says private foundations haven't yet recognized the need for. "We're waiting for funders to catch up," he says.

These four organizations are not just turning out youth with resumes but youths with jobs.