

Collaboration for Education

Partnerships between charities and community colleges help steer low-skilled workers toward better careers

By Eman Quotah

MELISSA EDMANSON, 21, wanted to go to college after she graduated from her Centreville, Va., high school in 2005. But as the chief breadwinner for her parents, who are both disabled, and two younger siblings, Ms. Edmanson couldn't afford to quit her job at a local grocery store.

Then she learned about Training Futures, a program run by Northern Virginia Family Service, in Oakton, that prepares students for administrative jobs, particularly in health care. When Ms. Edmanson completed the program, in December 2007, she not only landed a better-paying job at Inova Fairfax Hospital, in Falls Church, Va., but also earned 17 credits from Northern Virginia Community College.

"I probably would never have started college without them," she says of Training Futures. "I probably would still be procrastinating."

The collaboration between the social-services group and its neighboring community college is part of a growing trend of partnerships between grassroots charities and community colleges to train unemployed people and low-skilled workers for jobs in fields including not only health care, but also auto repair, freight transportation, manufacturing, and retail. Since the national recession intensified last fall, such programs have experienced a surge in interest among people seeking training and job placement, staff members at the charities say.

Strengthened Résumés

The partnerships can help charities better serve economically vulnerable clients by giving them access to a fuller educational experience than a social-services organization alone can provide. College credentials can make résumés more appealing than those of people trained by a social-service group alone. And the charities, for their part, can provide a support system to low-income students that most colleges can't offer, like help finding child care or paying for transportation.

In a recession, notes Bob Tem-



EDWARD CARREON, FOR THE CHRONICLE

Gloria Moore's group, Community Career Development, works with Los Angeles Valley College and the county's transportation system to train students: "At the end of the rainbow, there's a job waiting for them."

plin Jr., president of Northern Virginia Community Colleges, workers who lack a college education or specialized training may find themselves back in the ranks of the unemployed. A degree or certificate from a community college can help such people get skills they need to find a job or serve as a stepping-stone to a four-year college.

"Nonprofits are successful at training people," he says, "but they don't have a plan after that."

But charities can help nurture prospective students who might otherwise fall through the cracks, says Ricardo Estrada, vice president for education at Instituto del Progreso Latino, a Chicago social-services group for Latino immigrants. "The students who are precollege level aren't being served by community colleges," he says. "If we don't start them and move them up, they will never be college-ready."

Last year the Aspen Institute, a nonprofit think tank in Washington, began a three-

year study looking at six collaborations between charities and community colleges, including the one in Northern Virginia.

The six participating pairs—chosen from among about 90 applicants—get \$100,000 a year to divide as they choose. The money covers administrative costs associated with the evaluation, and helps groups finance curriculum development.

Financed by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, in Flint, Mich., the three-year project, supported by three \$1.2-million grants, studies the ways working relationships between charities and two-year colleges can help so-called "non-traditional students"—self-supporting adults, including a large number of recent immigrants—to get better jobs, says Maureen Conway, who directs Aspen's work-force research.

Reciprocal Relationships

Students who are unprepared for college—high-school dropouts, or graduates who squeaked by with poor reading and math skills—make up a large part of the clientele at charities that serve the poor. And while community colleges allow anyone to enroll in their courses, certificate and degree programs that prepare students for specific careers often have strict admission criteria.

The practical-nursing pro-

gram at Wilbur Wright College, in Chicago, for instance, accepts only 100 students a year from among 400 applicants, says Madeline Roman-Vargas, dean of the college's Humboldt Park Vocational Education Center. "By being extremely selective," she adds, "sometimes the program was not as diverse as we wanted it to be."

In 2005 the college joined with two social-services charities—the Association House of Chicago, a Latino-immigrant center, and the National Council of La Raza, a Hispanic-advocacy group in Washington—and started a program designed to prepare more Spanish speakers for jobs as licensed practical nurses. (The program is another one of the six being studied by Aspen Institute.) Students take courses to enhance their reading and math skills and familiarize themselves with health-care terminology. Students without high-school diplomas get training to take the test for a General Educational Development, or GED, certificate.

Ms. Roman-Vargas says some of her colleagues in the City Colleges of Chicago, of which Wilbur Wright is a part, worried that the new program would harm the system's reputation for producing nursing students who passed the state's licensing exam. As it has turned out, she says, not only has the newer bi-

lingual track, called Carreras en Salud, or Careers in Health, admitted Hispanic students who had applied unsuccessfully to the nursing program or who had never before applied, it also has produced several valedictorians of the nursing classes.

"We were worried they were going to lower the standards," Ms. Roman-Vargas says, "and they just jumped in and met everything and surpassed it."

Shepherding Students

While community colleges offer educational opportunities for students, charities can provide the intensive support needed by students who have multiple jobs, families, and limited incomes. Such assistance includes career and mental-health counseling, child-care referrals, and vouchers to pay for transportation. Many students must reduce their work hours to enroll in training programs, and charities can provide them with financial help. In addition, charities usually offer educational programs at no charge.

Such intensive assistance is more than most community colleges are equipped to offer, but it is necessary to the academic success of many low-income and nontraditional students. "Usually when you go to higher education, you're basically on your own," says Joe Fredkove, direc-

Continued on Page 40

CREATING PARTNERSHIPS

Get tips for charities that seek to collaborate with community colleges to create job-training programs. Go to:

<http://philanthropy.com/extras>

Charities Must Navigate Colleges' Bureaucracies

Continued from Page 39

tor of training and business development at Hennepin Technical College, near Minneapolis.

Some would-be nontraditional students don't even get as far as enrolling or attending their first class, says Bill Browning, director of business development in Northern Virginia Community College's Workforce Development Group. "There are some people who give up in the parking lot," he says. "They get to the parking lot, they don't know where to park, so they get cold feet and drive away."

That's less likely to happen when a charity's staff members shepherd students through the process of enrolling—and staying—in college, says Dazzie McKelvy, deputy executive director of Capital Idea, a job-training organization in Austin, Tex., that works closely with Austin Community College and several other institutions. That partnership is also part of the Aspen study.

"A community college wants exactly the same things we do," says Ms. McKelvy, who estimates that each student in the joint program gets two to five years of services from Capital Idea. "They want the students to be successful. They want them to graduate. They want them to complete. They just don't have the resources to provide services to 30,000 students."

Untangling Red Tape

The bureaucracy of a community college can be a hindrance not only for some students, but also for charity leaders used to a quicker pace and smaller organizational size.

When possible, Ms. McKelvy says, charities can step in with an interim solution to a problem that needs to be fixed quickly. For instance, when she learned that some nursing students sponsored by Capital Idea needed help with their English, she began paying a tutor im-

mediately. "We just go out and hire one," she says. "If the college had done it, it would have been longer."

Maintaining close ties with businesses are another key to the success of collaborations between charities and community colleges, officials at both types of organizations say.

Hired, which is a job-training charity in Minneapolis, and Hennepin Technical College worked closely with manufacturers to design their shared metalworking and plastics-manufacturing programs. While the metal manufacturers wanted students to receive on-the-job training, the plastics makers preferred to hire trained workers more quickly, says Nancy James, Hired's employer-services director.

Even the timing of classes depends on suggestions from employers, says Hennepin's Mr. Fredkove: "We don't run a class until the employers tell us to, when the jobs are there."

Students in the bus-operator program run by Community Career Development, a Los Angeles charity, together with Los Angeles Valley College and the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority take their courses at Metro's downtown headquarters. Students are immersed in the transit authority's operations and culture, says Gloria Moore, executive director of the charity, whose program is in the Aspen Institute study.

What's more, she says, "they know that if they finish this program, that at the end of the rainbow there's a job waiting for them at Metro." That's the bottom line, she and others say: getting students employed.

Community colleges and charities need to agree on that basic goal and integrate education into a long-term plan, Ms. James says: "It's OK to have the goal of a two-year degree. But can we modulate the curriculum so they can get the job and get the degree down the road?"

That sequence worked for Ms. Edmanson, the Training Futures client in Virginia. In October she was promoted to a new position at Inova Fairfax Hospital, coordinating administrative processes for its effort to build a new facility. She expects to complete work on a certificate in information technology at Northern Virginia Community College this fall. Eventually she hopes to enroll in a four-year college. She credits the support she got from staff members at the job-training program, and from her fellow students, for her success so far.

"If I would have gone to community college without Training Futures," she says, "I wouldn't be as positive as I am now."

TECHNOLOGY



JENNA BOYER

Amanda Keppert has turned to the nonprofit Kiva.org to seek a loan from donors for her Mandy's Korner hot-dog stand, in San Jose, Calif.

International Charity Assists American Entrepreneurs

KIVA.ORG has been enormously successful matching entrepreneurs in developing countries with people who want to lend them money. In less than four years, visitors to the Web site have made loans totaling more than \$75-million.

Now the San Francisco charity is testing the idea of also including U.S. entrepreneurs.

"Most people think of microfinance as something that helps people in the developing world alone, but the impact of microfinance can be felt in any community that supports creative, industrious entrepreneurs," Premal Shah, Kiva's president, said in a written statement.

Kiva is featuring clients from Accion USA, a national organization that provides business loans to people who would not qualify for traditional bank loans, and Opportunity Fund, a community-development financial institution that makes small-business loans in the San Francisco Bay area.

Among the first American businesses to which visitors to the site can make loans: Mandy's Korner, a mobile hot-dog stand in San Jose, Calif.; a hair salon in Queens, N.Y., run by a single mother of four; and a board-game store in San Francisco, started by a veteran of the Iraq war and his childhood friend.

Several of the loans, which range in size from \$500 to \$10,000, were fully financed within hours of being posted to the site, including a \$10,000 loan to Island You a Hand, a business in Burlingame, Calif., that provides home health-care assistants who speak a variety of languages.

People who make loans through Kiva will still support entrepreneurs overseas, says Eric Weaver, chief executive of Opportunity Fund, in San Jose, Calif. But he thinks the ability to invest in local small businesses will also appeal to donors, particularly during tough times.

"This is a way to stimulate the economy and get the money repaid," he says. "So instead of buying a television, go make a Kiva loan."

TO GET THERE: Go to <http://www.kiva.org>.

Texas Donor Site Starts Off Strong

DONORBRIDGE, a new online giving site in North Texas, got off to a big start, raising more than \$4-million for 353 area charities in celebration of Dallas Giving Day.

While the site provides general financial information about nonprofit groups across the country, local organizations created detailed profiles that provide information about their programs, finances, and outcomes. DonorBridge was created by the Communities Foundation of Texas, together with the Center for Nonprofit Management and the Dallas Foundation.

The two foundations provided \$200,000 to match gifts from the public on May 20, and \$100,000 to encourage gifts from donor-advised fund holders on May 19, the site's "preview day."

Online grant recommendations from donor-advised funds were matched at 50 cents on the dollar, up to \$2,500 per fund. Credit-card donations made through the site on May 20 were matched dollar for dollar up to \$2,500, until the \$200,000 was gone.

Ninety-eight percent of the local nonprofit groups that created detailed profiles for DonorBridge received donations.

"The biggest thing Dallas Giving Day did was give people a reason to give," Brent Christopher, chief executive of the Communities Foundation of Texas, said in a written statement. "The nonprofit and donor communities took the DonorBridge launch and turned it into a regionwide celebration of giving. They are using this Web site to tell their stories and connect people's interests with nonprofit missions."

TO GET THERE: Go to <http://donorbridgetx.org>.

—NICOLE WALLACE



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