

WORKFORCE INITIATIVES

MAINTAINING TALENT AND BUILDING CAREERS

By Charlee Beasor

Guiding Adults Across the Finish Line

There are 40,000 adults in a five-county region of southern Indiana that have completed some college, but don't have a degree. (The statewide numbers are 700,000-plus.)

Those 40,000 adults might be the key to improving the economic quality of the region, says Bridgett Strickler, executive director of Education Matters Southern Indiana (EMSI).

"This is really about improving the economic advantages of our region by raising the educational attainment level of the workforce. Our mission is to make it easier for these adults to return and complete their college degree or a technical certificate. Our vision is on aligning that with the needs of employers in our area," she notes.

The community foundations of Clark, Floyd, Harrison, Scott and Washington counties developed the non-profit EMSI in 2012, and it was officially implemented in 2015. It is a local branch of a national network that targets various levels of educational attainment, though EMSI focuses solely on adults 25 and over with some college, but no degree.

EMSI operates as a liaison to connect students to the program in a way that is the best fit for the student's situation and experience.

"Each of the 40,000 is a different case, and as I speak to people, it's not a one-size-fits-all by any stretch of the imagination," Strickler explains.

"There are a lot of online programs that are a combination of online and in-person and many universities are now offering prior learning assessment (PLA) – earning college credit through your work experience."

A leadership table includes representatives of the regional higher educational institutions, the CEO of One Southern Indiana and the executive director of the regional WorkOne office. Volunteer ambassadors – from retired teachers to business leaders to those simply interested in the EMSI mission – are also an important part of the initiative. An initial goal of training 45 ambassadors to reach 45 people in 45 days was exceeded: over 60 ambassadors reached well over 2,500 people as of this writing.

A registration portal on the web site launched in November and Strickler says she's working with about 50 individuals so far.

There is excitement brewing around the program, she asserts.

"The people I've spoken to, when they hear about us, they're so excited because they say, 'I've been wanting to finish my degree and I think I'm ready to take the next step,'" Strickler concludes.

RESOURCE: Bridgett Strickler, Education Matters Southern Indiana, at www.educationmatterssi.org

Building Indiana's Construction Future

Similar to what manufacturers have experienced, the construction industry is battling an image problem: that construction jobs are hard. Dirty. Blue collar.

Only these jobs pay well. Really well, actually. Construction workers can make "twice as much as the average Hoosier," says Ali Brown, Indiana Construction Roundtable Foundation executive director.

"Our goal is, we want to get young people involved in construction, change the public's perspective of what construction is. These are great careers and hard work," she notes.

How is the conversation about construction being changed? That's where the Build Your Future Indiana program comes in. Based off of a national model, it utilizes a three-pronged approach: by making career and technical education a priority in schools; by providing a path for students from education to job placement; and by changing the public's perception of construction jobs.



Ali Brown says 60% of the buildings that will be needed nationwide by 2030 haven't been built yet. The goal of the Build Your Future Indiana program is to get more young people thinking about potential jobs in the construction industry.

"We know that to change people's minds, we have to tell our story. We're training ambassadors to go into schools and talk about the industry as a whole. It's really important that we engage students. When you talk to a group of high school kids, they think of their house – that's residential construction," Brown explains.

"I always say, if there's something you like to do, we can find that for you in construction. They're all hard work – these are construction jobs, but some of them involve working with computers as opposed to swinging a hammer."

The program kicked off in 2015 and is funded by a \$2 million block grant. The goal is to turn Build Your Future Indiana into a sustainable initiative. Determining the funding mechanism going forward is one of the Foundation's tasks.

"If you want to move things here, you've got to have a great commercial construction class that can build a building," Brown asserts. "Nationwide, 60% of the buildings we're going to need by 2030 haven't been built yet. Indiana is not the only one seeing this. There's a great deficit (of workforce) in this middle skills trade."

"Not everyone needs to go to college. We're not talking about college ... this is a great alternative, not a lesser alternative."

On the Build Your Future Indiana web site, students can learn about 24 trades (that number will grow) and utilize a directory of facilities in Indiana, such as union halls or trade organizations.

"The counselors and teachers that I've spoken to – they are very excited about this. No one has presented them this kind of information. These teachers and these counselors know it's not the best option for everyone. ... They know five or six kids – that this is the path for them."

RESOURCE: Ali Brown, Indiana Construction Roundtable Foundation, at Indiana.byf.org

For They're Jolly Good (Greater Fort Wayne) Fellows

Communities large and small are desperately trying to keep outstanding talent close to home. There is no manual, however, on how to prevent educated young people from fleeing after college – degree in hand – to the big city lights calling their names.

For Greater Fort Wayne Inc., part of the solution was re-evaluating and retooling its graduate retention program.

The result: the GFW Fellows, a year-long program for college students that includes a 12-week summer internship and personal and professional development workshops, along with community service involvement.

Fifteen students were in the 2015 inaugural class, offers Justin Clupper, director of signature programs for Greater Fort Wayne Inc. The 2016 class will have between 20 and 25 students, most of whom have already been selected.

“We interview every applicant to see if we feel they would make great fellows. We believe a great fellow has demonstrated on-campus leadership, commitment to community service in their campus and community at large, and a GPA of 3.0 or better,” he explains.

The selected candidates are shared with host employers and the employers decide which candidates to interview and ultimately the ones that are hired for internships become the fellows. There are eight host employers in 2016.



Among the factors that make the Greater Fort Wayne Fellows program stand out: professional and personal development, community service and a high-quality internship experience.

The application process begins in the fall (starting Sept. 1) and is open to any student seeking a two- or four-year degree.

Results from the first round are positive: Of the 15 fellows, four were given full-time employment offers. Another five earned the opportunity to continue working through the school year or continue on for a second summer internship, Clupper shares.

“The host employers know they can fill

their talent pipelines with fellows and they're working hard to do that. The fellows have a very unique internship experience. They're not just running around getting everybody coffee every day,” he notes.

“These are high quality students that want to get the work done and want to have a great experience. And these are host employers that want to give them an experience they're not going to forget.”

RESOURCE: Justin Clupper, Greater Fort Wayne Inc., at www.greaterfortwayneinc.com

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