

Basic Skills Bulletin

News for and about the largest network of alternative learning centers in the nation



A Basic Skills Model

Mass. Job Training, Inc.

“Providing skilled people for today and tomorrow”

This article is part of an on-going series about the learning centers and sponsoring organizations that make up the U.S. Basic Skills Network.

Mass. Job Training uses the U.S. Basic Skills Learning System to help adults and young people meet a wide range of needs with financial support from a variety of sources.

Mass. Job Training, Inc. (MJT), a private, non-profit organization, provides education, employment and job training services for adults and young people in Massachusetts and Texas. Celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, MJT has grown from a single office to a workforce development and education network with 10 locations in two states.

MJT opened its first U.S. Basic Skills center in Worcester in 1987, and now operates learning centers at its eight Massachusetts offices (Brockton, Fitchburg, Holyoke, Lynn, Quincy, Revere, Salem and Worcester) and its two offices in Texas (Brownsville and Harlingen). In Texas, the

organization does business as Training Resources of America. The specific offerings at each location are designed to meet the academic and occupational needs of the community.

In addition to its own operations, MJT also runs a private sector initiative, the Skills for Life Program, in partnership with school districts in Massachusetts, New York and Texas. In this school-based program, which is funded by the Saint-Gobain Corporation, MJT oversees learning centers in several high schools and middle schools.

According to Paul J. Gallo, MJT's Executive Vice President, "MJT is well known for its ability to provide high quality education, employment and training services to individuals with multiple barriers to employment. The U.S. Basics Skills Learning System has helped us earn this reputation. It has proven to be a wonderful vehicle for people who have not succeeded in a traditional classroom setting to achieve their academic and self-sufficiency goals in a minimal amount of time."

Education Programs for Youth

Young Parents Program

This program targets pregnant and parenting out-of-school youth, aged 14-21, who have not achieved a high school diploma. It provides a variety of services including: basic education, English as a Second Language and training in parenting, life, and work skills. Funded by the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance, Young Parents Programs are operating at the MJT offices in Worcester, Brockton, Fitchburg and Holyoke.

Participants attend the program Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. with a one hour lunch period daily. They spend a minimum of 15 hours per week in Basic Education, 6 hours in Parenting/Life Skills, and 4 hours in pre-vocational training. The program is currently serving a total of 145 economically disadvantaged out-of-school youth at the four locations.

The program directs young parents toward long-term

economic self-sufficiency. While full-time, un-subsidized job placement is the ultimate goal of the program, short term objectives include increased grade or MELT levels, achievement of a GED, return to high school, enrollment in a community college or certificate program or placement into skills training, on-the-job training or paid worksite experience. Extensive support services augment the program.

Life and Parenting Skills Training is taught through a variety of vehicles including individual and group counseling sessions, peer support groups, guest speakers, workshops, seminars, field trips, and structured activities with children.

Pre-Vocational Activities include: comprehensive career exploration/job readiness training, internships, and short-term skills training in computer, customer service and office skills. Participants who are entering employment are provided job development and placement assistance. MJT staff assists students in identifying job openings, scheduling interviews, providing follow-up with employer, and providing counseling/case management and other support services to aid in job retention.

YouthBuild Program

With funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, MJT operates YouthBuild programs in Worcester and Quincy. While studying for a GED, participants also learn construction skills by renovating housing in low-income areas. The MJT YouthBuild programs serve low-income youth aged 16 to 21 who

have not received a high school diploma or GED, and demonstrate a willingness to work hard to change their lives and their community. Program components include instruction in education/GED preparation, self-esteem/life skills and job readiness training, leadership skills development, construction skills training utilizing an actual housing rehabilitation project site in the community, counseling/case management, job development and placement assistance, and job retention/follow-up services.

The Worcester site is currently operating its third YouthBuild program. Each cycle serves 14 young people for up to 18 months. The participants are divided into two classes of 7 each, which alternate weekly between classroom training in the learning center and on-site construction training.

The program in Quincy, which began in January 2001, also serves 14 participants who are learning construction skills, in conjunction with local trade unions, through a large public housing rehabilitation project at the Quincy Housing Authority.

Youth Opportunity! Grant

When the Brockton Workforce Investment Board was selected by the U.S. Department of Labor to receive one of the 20 Youth Opportunity! Grants (YO!), MJT was asked to participate as a program operator. YO! calls for grantees to prepare youth for postsecondary educational opportunities or employment and to provide intensive placement services and follow-up services for not less than 24 months.

MJT-Brockton's Youth Education Program offers out-of-school youth between the ages of

14 and 21 comprehensive remedial education, GED preparation, and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) instruction. Additionally, the program provides an after-school component for in-school youth that assists students in completing their homework assignments, provides individualized tutoring services to help students improve skills in weak areas and provides instruction/access to computers for Internet research to assist students in completing school assignments and projects. A part of the Brockton Youth Network, the program is serving 42 young people this fiscal year.

Intensive Services for Youth

In Brownsville and Harlingen, Texas, MJT recently received funding from Cameron Works, Inc., the local regional employment board, to operate a youth program under the Workforce Investment Act. Targeted at young people with literacy skills at 7th grade and above, the new program combines academic instruction with job readiness and job skills training.

The Youth GED Program serves a total of 95 eligible out-of-school youth between the ages of 17 and 21. The program provides class-room training to improve reading, writing and computational skills to enable participants to attain a GED. Additionally, the program provides career identification and employment seeking skills including: resume writing, job interviewing techniques, communication skills, networking, use of labor market information, mock interviewing, and the proper way to complete

employment applications. The program also integrates a paid work experience component and vocational/occupational skills training. Students attend the program Monday through Friday, receiving classroom instruction for 3 hours each day and work experience for 5 hours each day.

School-Based Initiative

The Skills for Life Program began in 1989 to improve the educational levels of at-risk students. Today, three school districts participate in the program, which continues to serve at-risk students but now focuses on helping the young people prepare for their state graduation tests.

The initiative was originally funded by the Norton Company Foundation, the corporate foundation of a company headquartered in Massachusetts. When Norton was acquired by Paris-based Saint-Gobain Corporation, that company continued to support and expand Skills for Life. Plans are to open at least two more sites, during 2002 and 2004, in school districts where a Saint-Gobain subsidiary is located.

MJT provides training and technical expertise in the use of the U.S. Basic Skills Learning System. MJT also maintains student and teacher web sites. The student site includes a constantly growing catalogue of web links in categories such as English as a Second Language, grammar, writing, mathematics, literature, social studies and science. The teacher site contains links featuring lesson plans, discussions and a calendar of important events.

The school district partners select the sites for the initiative, and learning center staff are

school system employees. The dates in parentheses in the following descriptions indicate the year the Skills for Life program began operating at that site.

Worcester (MA) Public Schools. South High Community School ('89) and Worcester Alternative School ('94) are the sites for the initiative in Massachusetts. Each school has two U.S. Basic Skills Learning Centers, one used for remedial education and the other for English as a Second Language (ESL). For the remedial lab, students, primarily freshmen and sophomores, are selected on the basis of their language arts skills. Students attend the lab one period a day, gaining on average two grade levels a year. The lab serves 80-100 students a year.

Students in the ESL lab are those enrolled in ESL courses in the schools. They attend the lab one period a day and receive a combination of the Learning System and traditional group ESL instruction. Students average gains of over 3 Student Performance Levels a year, as measured by the BEST tests. Most students attend the ESL lab for two years. When they go past the three levels in the Learning System they concentrate on remedial language skills. This lab serves 80-100 students a year.

Brownsville (TX) Independent School District. The initiative operates Learning Centers in three schools in this district: Rivera ('94) and Lopez ('96) High Schools and Cummings Middle School ('94).

Rivera High School has both a remedial and an ESL learning center although the initiative is phasing out ESL and expanding

its remedial language skills instruction. At Lopez High School, the initiative concentrates on ESL instruction, while also offering low level reading skills and integrated language arts instruction. The learning center at Cummings Middle School provides ESL instruction for the students.

The students in Texas generally attend their learning lab for one year although the middle school students may continue into a second year. Between all labs, 160-200 students are served each year.

Niagara Falls City (NY) School District. This school district is the most recent partner in the Skills for Life initiative, and its participating school is LaSalle Middle School ('00). The initiative uses the U.S. Basic Skills Learning System to provide remedial instruction in reading, language arts and math.

The school district's goal is to improve students' chances on the New York State Regents Examination. Towards that end, MJT has modified the U.S. Basic Skills Learning System. Instead of using the TABE or other standardized tests for pre- and post-testing, students use a local test that is benchmarked to the Regents Exam. Although there are no results yet, the instructors and MJT expect some good advances. The learning center at LaSalle serves 10 students each period for a total of 50 students a year

Education Programs for Adults

MJT began over 25 years ago by serving disadvantaged adults. Its first U.S. Basic Skills Learning Center offered remedial

academic instruction primarily to adults on welfare. Today, MJT continues to provide education along with workforce development services, specific job skills training and job placement and retention support.

Massachusetts

The Massachusetts Department of Education, Adult Community Learning Services, funds adult education programs at the MJT learning centers in Worcester, Brockton and Salem. The programs include adult basic education, GED preparation and ESL classes for adults.

The State ABE guidelines require that instruction be organized into a sequence of three levels and that it incorporate the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework as well as technology. To meet these requirements, MJT uses the U.S. Basic Skills Learning System to offer basic, intermediate and GED preparation levels of individualized instruction. MJT also structures the session to include significant group instruction to address portions of the state framework such as problem solving and writing which are best delivered in a group setting.

The programs vary slightly in each city. The Worcester office provides adult education at night, primarily because its two labs are full during the day. The Brockton program provides three levels of ESL instruction for adults at night and the adult basic education program during the

day. In Salem, adults use the learning center at night for ESL classes and the first level of adult basic education. Under a community partnership, adults attend the intermediate and GED preparation sessions of MJT's program at the local high school.

Texas

In Texas, Cameron Works, Inc. funds two learning centers operated by MJT's Texas division, Training Resources of America (TRA). The funding is available through WIA. TRA offers comprehensive Adult Basic Education, GED preparation, and ESL training at each of its learning centers in Brownsville and Harlingen. Each learning center serves up to 100 participants, and can accommodate up to 50 students at any given time.

Both educational centers are open for participants from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., Monday through Thursday, and 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Friday. The education facilities function as drop-in centers to accommodate the varying educational needs and schedules of participants including those who are working both day and evening shifts.

In addition to the ABE, GED, and ESL curriculum, the program provides an Employment Seeking/Work Maturity Skills curriculum which is designed to improve participants' workplace competencies, cultivate their self-esteem, and increase their ability to access, secure and retain employment.

Tom O'Connor, MJT's Vice President, Education, believes that the U.S. Basic Skills model has made it possible for MJT to respond in many different ways. "Basically we find the same strategies work regardless of the location of the program or the age of the students. While we may update and add instructional material, using the model is an effective way to teach."

Congratulating MJT on their anniversary, U.S. Basic Skills president Dennis Clune said, "I consider Mass. Job Training one of our indispensable partners. Their input, based on their hands-on experience, has been invaluable to us in improving the curriculum and services we provide to the entire field."

For more information about MJT, contact Tom O'Connor at Mass. Job Training, 390 Main Street, Suite 806, Worcester, MA 01608. (800) 861-6667. Their web site is www.massjob.org.