

Precinct Reporter

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PAL Center Construction and Education Programs

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Not long ago, the U.S. Department of Labor gave the go-ahead to disperse another \$100 million in Green energy sector training grants, and Jacqueline White wants to be first in line to get her fingers on some of that money for her students.

Grant recipients nationwide will use those dollars to train with partners in getting workers ready in areas of wind, energy, solar panel installers, hybrid electric auto technicians, weatherization—all fields expected to lead national hires in the coming years.

White, who heads the

Workforce Investment Act program at the PAL Center in San Bernardino, currently works with over 100 students on internships and training programs, including the Center's new vocational culinary arts and construction programs.

Strongly focused on the construction, she said the program has a few more open slots for students to learn plumbing, wiring, and other basic skills.

Through the summer work program, eleven students worked on a 60-foot facility that they completely gutted and refurbished from the ground up. The building will serve as a PAL Center office, where eight students are now gaining hands-on experience as they finish up the

project.

Upon completion, most of those students, 19-21 years old, are expected to go right into an apprenticeship through a private construction company, she said.

The PAL Center is preparing for another group of students 19-24 years old who will also partner with the Community Action Partnership in warehousing and construction. There are some slots left for entry level students, and those who have already graduated from vocational training.

"Green is still being defined, but we're keeping a close eye on the colleges, local ROP [regional occupational programs] and adult schools," White said. "Our goal is to get the students voca-

tionally trained to enter those fields and classes on green technology."

Getting students ready has its challenges. Many have to work extra hard to reverse years of failure in the traditional school system. A number of students are dealing with partial literacy, and getting their GED is tantamount to getting a Ph. D.

But in the past few years on more than a few occasions, she sees the payoff.

"I went to the emergency room, and found one student that was working as a nurse. I just found another one at a store and he's now in accounting. And I found one that is going for a Ph.D now. These are our kids that are doing this stuff," White said.

On-site construction supervisor John Burks, a retired union carpenter at the PAL Center, said that the labor union is ready to hire students as soon as they complete the labor union apprenticeship program.

The teens have come a long way since they first started, he said. One of the students could "almost" read a measuring tape.

"Right now, they've done drywall, mud and tape, framing, minor electrical. Now they're putting up T-Bar ceilings, they're doing their own cutting," said Burks, who has supervised construction crews on up to 250 homes over the past 40 years that he's been in the field.

Students are learning their tools quickly, and it helps them get their lives back on track. Some have tickets to clear. Or, maybe they need to get their licenses, buy a car, pay their bills.

Recently, the labor union visited and couldn't believe the work the students achieved, he said. It gave students a boost to keep going.

"They walk out of the building and they look back, and they have a sense of accomplishment of looking at what they've done. They have pride in their work, and they have a good time doing it. They're learning," he said.

For more information on training, call 909.887.7002 or see <http://www.palcenter.org/>

For countywide training locations, see <http://sbcounty.gov/wib/>