

Employers give nod to training program SFWorks lifts hundreds into workforce

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Employers want highly trained workers who will give them a return on their investment. San Francisco's low-income residents need good jobs that will help lift them out of poverty.

So far, San Francisco Works has been able to deliver on both counts, say those affiliated with the organization.

SFWorks was created in response to a federal movement that emphasized job training as a solution to chronic unemployment.

In 1996, Congress instituted a new welfare law designed to move people from welfare to work. But many worried that this "work first" model would leave welfare recipients with low-wage jobs that would do little to improve their lives.

A year later, leaders in San Francisco's business and philanthropic communities founded SFWorks with the goal of encouraging the private sector to get involved in workforce development.

Today, the organization serves as an intermediary that connects low-income individuals with job training programs, and ultimately, jobs. In six years, about 365 people have graduated from San Francisco Works' training programs. Workers who graduate from the program make an average of about \$10 per hour.

SFWorks participants have worked for such firms as Bank of America, Pennzoil 10 Minute Oil Change, UCSF and San Francisco law firm Heller Ehrman White & McAuliffe LLP. The nonprofit has partnered with at least 18 training programs, and about 100 businesses have hired graduates.

Irene Agnos, vice chancellor for university relations at UCSF said about four SFWorks interns are working in laboratories at the Mission Bay campus.

"SFWorks stays engaged with the interns, making sure they're doing well and following up with them," Agnos said. "There's more oversight, and there's more guarantee of success that way. It's not, 'You've had your training, goodbye and you're on your own.'"

Julie Brandt, deputy director of policy and programs with the mayor's office of economic development, said businesses that partner with SFWorks are making the right choice for the city.

"It's just good business and it happens to have a tremendous impact on our city and county of San Francisco," she said. "Our people climate is as important as our business climate."

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