

**Please Touch Museum**  
**Interim Report to the Institute of Museum and Library Services**  
**Sparks Ignition Grant**  
June 2012

**Administrative Information**

Institution: Please Touch Museum

Project Title: Better You, Better Community

Award Amount and Total Current Expenditures:

Grant Start Date – Grant End Date: 06/01/2011 - 05/31/2013

Project Director: Judy Meyers, Director of Human Resources, Please Touch Museum

Formal Project Partner: The Philadelphia Zoo

**Project Summary**

Better You, Better Community is a job-training and retention program jointly presented by Please Touch Museum and the Philadelphia Zoo. Since moving to Memorial Hall in 2008, Please Touch Museum has remained committed to hiring individuals from our surrounding West Philadelphia neighborhoods. Over the course of our first year, however, our Human Resources department was forced to terminate more than 60% of these employees less than one year into their tenure. The causes of these terminations were found to be performance related, a lack of professionalism, inappropriate interactions with employees and the public, and inappropriate attire. We surmised that many individuals lacked the skills necessary to maintain steady, stable employment. We learned that the Philadelphia Zoo, located less than two miles from Memorial Hall, suffered from the same problem of job retention. The Zoo hires between 200 and 300 employees annually for seasonal work, of which 14% abandon their jobs or are terminated for poor job performance. The problem was not one of availability or eligibility, but of job *readiness*. These individuals' education and experience had not prepared them adequately for finding and retaining a job.

Our training program aims to help candidates improve their overall job readiness skills, increasing their marketability for other regional employers in the cultural sector. Participants receive advice, encouragement, and practical information about the job-application process, helping them prepare and build confidence for the future. Many job readiness programs focus solely on identifying job opportunities and placing individuals in them. What distinguishes our training program from these programs is its additional focus on how to succeed in the workplace and grow within an organization once employment has been obtained; the aim of the program is to address the individual's long-term career trajectory, not just to help them find a job. We want to ensure that individuals are not just employed but ready for long-term, successful employment.

Our program targets high school graduates between the ages of 18 and 25 who are looking for new or improved career opportunities. Small class sizes guarantee an intimate group learning experience as well as a high-degree of personal attention and one-on-one interaction. This variety of interactions allows the program to be adaptable and responsive toward the needs of the students.

## **Process**

The first step in implementing the program was to research a training module. We conducted extensive research on current available workforce training curriculums and chose the Peak Readiness and Peak Workforce programs from Pikes Peak Learning Company to form the basis of our program. These programs contained over 30 hours of step-by-step instruction that guides participants through all the stages of employment, from job searching through job retention. The Pikes Peak curriculum addressed the full needs of the individual seeking employment, encompassing not only professional skills but life skills as well. This program has the capacity to serve 50 individuals, 20 more than our projected goal.

The next step of the process required us to find a job trainer to implement the program. The job description was posted on the Museum and the Zoo's websites, as well as the Philadelphia Cultural Alliance's job bank. We received dozens of applicants and interviewed four candidates for the position before hiring Alexis Pugh as the trainer. Ms. Pugh is a Job Developer at Impact Services Corporation, a Philadelphia organization that provides employment and training services, housing, and community and economic development. Prior to joining Impact, Ms. Pugh worked as a Job Developer and Worksite Coordinator at the Urban Affairs Coalition, where she established or expanded job placement opportunities for youth and adults, forming relationships with more than 50 companies. Through her years of experience working as a job developer, Ms. Pugh is able to connect with the program participants, adapting the training curriculum to fit the individual needs and experience levels of each training group. Through Impact Services Corporation, Ms. Pugh brought additional supplementary resources to the program, including access to computers, career services, and job placement opportunities.

Before beginning the training sessions, Ms. Pugh worked in conjunction with Please Touch Museum and the Zoo to adapt the Pike's Peak curriculum, customizing it to fit the needs of our training program and audience. Elements of the training program were adapted, edited, or omitted to suit the job opportunities available to the participants in their residential area.

The next stage comprised recruiting participants for the program. We identified six communities in Philadelphia most in need of employment training services: Girard (19104); Strawberry Mansion (19121); Parkside (19131, 19132); West Philadelphia (19139); Southwest Philadelphia (19143); and Overbrook (19151). These communities were chosen due to their high rates of unemployment for citizens over age 16 and for the percentage of individuals living below the poverty level. Flyers advertising the program were circulated among the staff at Please Touch Museum and the Zoo, and were additionally posted in various local community organizations, churches, libraries, schools, and businesses. Prospective participants in the program were required to submit to a simple application process, administered by the Museum's Human Resources department. This process served the dual purpose of ensuring that the candidate was committed to participating and that the candidate possessed some basic skills. All participants were required to have either a High School Diploma or Graduate Equivalency Degree.

All training sessions were conducted at Please Touch Museum and were led by Alexis Pugh, with support from Judy Meyers, Director of Human Resources at Please Touch Museum, and Katherine McKenzie, Director of Human Resources at the Philadelphia Zoo. The first training cycle commenced in January 2012. Sessions are held twice per month, and take place over the course of two months. Each session is scheduled for three hours, totaling twelve hours of class time for each participant.

#### Session 1:

In the first session, participants are guided through a rigorous process of self-examination. The trainer leads the class through exercises which serve not only as an introduction to the training program, but also as a self-inventory. The goal for the first session is to have the students reflect on their aspirations and career goals, to set realistic, attainable goals for their employment. Ms. Pugh imparts to the participants the importance of education and introduces the Life Cycle, which allows students to think about their lives and careers holistically and comprehensively.

#### Session 2:

The second session encompasses the first stages of employment-seeking, including researching job opportunities, navigating the application process, creating a resume, and practicing interview techniques. This session teaches the essential elements of self-presentation and how to project a positive self-image to prospective employers. Each student is given the opportunity to conduct a one-on-one mock interview, after which their performance is assessed and they are coached in techniques to improve their interview skills. This session also teaches students to “dress for success”, reviewing how one should dress for a job interview. The students are further encouraged to seek employment that is in alignment with the goals they set for themselves in the first session.

#### Session 3:

The third session focuses on life skills. Students are given examples of how one can organize one’s life around a successful career, effecting a change of lifestyle that allows them to gain and keep stable employment. One of the most important lessons conveyed in this session is financial literacy. Students are educated in the fundamental concepts of personal finance, how to create savings and checking accounts, how to manage spending and saving, and other relevant topics. This session also focuses on how to stay with a job once employment has been attained. Students are trained to think of their career in the long term, to view their current job status as a bridge to new employment possibilities within their organization or at another.

#### Session 4:

The final session is both a cumulative review of the training program and an opportunity for the participants to begin planning for their future. Each participant submits their final resume and cover letter for review by the training facilitator and Human Resources representatives from the Museum and the Zoo. The goal for this session is to ensure that all participants at the end of the program have the tools they need to be successful in the workplace.

Writing and communication are vital skills in the workplace. To help develop the students' professional writing, students are given writing assignments to work on at home between sessions. The training facilitator reviews each assignment with the students at the next week's session.

Guest speakers are another integral part of the program. Individuals who work in a variety of roles and professional disciplines are invited to visit the program and counsel the participants. During the first session, a member of a volunteer organization visited and encouraged the participants to seek out volunteer opportunities, as both a bridge to paid employment with an organization and as a way to accrue valuable job experience.

### **Project Results**

As of June 2012, we have completed one full training cycle and are halfway through the second. Ten participants signed up for our first round of trainings; eight successfully completed the program. The two participants who were not able to complete the program withdrew for personal reasons: one enrolled in school, the other became pregnant and was not able to continue. Both individuals expressed a desire to return, retake the sessions they missed, and complete the program in a future training cycle. Of the eight participants who have so far successfully completed the program, three have gained full-time employment; five others have scheduled interviews for full-time employment. We will remain in contact with these individuals to ascertain the effectiveness of the program and the effect it has had on these individuals' long-term employability and job preparedness.

One of the stated goals of the program was to improve the job-retention rate and job performance of the Museum's own employees. As of this writing, four Please Touch Museum staff have participated in the program; two individuals completed the program in the first round of training and two more are enrolled in the current training cycle. All four individuals are still employed by the Museum and have been noted by their supervisors for excellent job performance. The Museum in general has experienced a decrease in employment turnover in the last year.

### **Future Activities**

Our current training cycle will be completed by the end of July 2012; all participants are on track to successfully complete the program. Our next training cycle will begin in October 2012. The final training cycle is scheduled for early 2013. We are currently on schedule to meet our goal of having 30 individuals successfully complete the program by the end of our grant period.