

Job Training Program Boasts Far-Reaching Benefits for Families, Community, and Volunteers

Booz Allen supports nonprofit effort that not only helps graduates enhance self-reliance, but also allows many to double their incomes and buy homes.

"Time and energy can make a tremendous difference in just 25 weeks," says Booz Allen Hamilton vice president [Ron Hodge](#). "Training Futures gives people help, so they have hope."



Ron Hodge

Training Futures is a comprehensive office administrative training program for unemployed and underemployed adults sponsored by the nonprofit Northern Virginia Family Services (NVFS). It's targeted to low-income breadwinners with an average income of less than \$8 per hour.

And it's one of the area's most successful career programs: Eighty-nine percent of Training Futures graduates get jobs using their new skills; 91% enjoy higher wages at their new jobs—on average, graduates double their incomes—and the rate of home ownership for graduates increases by 82%.

Much of the "energy" to which Hodge refers comes from Booz Allen volunteers. "The firm's involvement in the program started in 2003 as a way for the Civil IT team to contribute to the community," says principal Roberta Gosling, an NVFS board member and Training Futures sponsor. "Since then, our volunteer base has grown to more than 100 from across the firm who work as computer lab assistants, tutors, and workshop aides to help trainees learn office skills."

During the 2007 volunteer cycle from July to October, Booz Allen employees contributed more than 90 volunteer hours per month to the program. The firm also supplies space and equipment for the computer lab, which is located in the James Building on Booz Allen's McLean campus.

To date, over 1,400 Training Futures graduates have been instructed in computer skills, business English, business math, bookkeeping, filing, basic accounting, production keyboarding, medical terminology and medical office procedures, Toastmasters, business style and ethics, and communication: A total of 495 hours of core training.

Program benefits are numerous and wide ranging. "Training Futures is an opportunity for Booz Allen to give back to the community in which we live," says Hodge, who is also a NVFS board member. "Our staff can serve the community right here on campus and see the real impact on people's lives, as trainees build a stronger future through new skills, new opportunities, a new environment, and more stable life."

Several program graduates have interned at the firm or were hired for full-time positions, and Booz Allen presents an annual Leadership Award to recognize the achievements of one of the top trainees. Training Futures named Booz Allen as the Best Overall Volunteer at its 10-year anniversary in 2006.

NVFS is nonprofit human service organization that helps individuals and families strengthen their self-reliance through a variety of programs. NVFS started in 1924 as Alexandria Family Service to support the city's poor families by providing coal to heat their homes.

Many Roads Lead to Success

The career path of Booz Allen senior consultant Sanjeev Mehta started in India, where he worked in hotel management and as a graphic designer for an ad agency. Then he emigrated to the U.S., where he found the American job culture drastically different.

"I was employed at Air France when they started downsizing," Mehta says. "I wanted to find a better job in administration, but I was unfamiliar with the corporate world and didn't have experience in the field. A friend told me about Training Futures. After I was accepted, I immediately took an evening job so that I could devote my mornings to the program."

Training Futures participants often cite cultural differences as one of their greatest hurdles when trying to find a lucrative career in the American workplace. Administrative professional Yili Xia Ti, who manages the firm's offsite storage, said the contrast between the U.S. and western China—where he was born and lived most of his life—was enormous.

"It's not easy to learn both a new language and a new culture," Xia Ti says, who worked as a college professor in China and then as a teacher in Malaysia, before applying for political asylum at the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. The organization eventually resettled him in the U.S. "When everything is so dramatically different, you can't fit in easily. I also needed help expressing my ideas in English and improving my computer knowledge. I learned the professional skills, styles, and behavior that are acceptable in America from Training Futures, and these skills helped me get a job at Booz Allen."

Erin Madison is a senior consultant and Training Futures volunteer who assists in the computer lab and coordinates the volunteer effort at the firm. "Training Futures is a great way for Booz Allen volunteers to share our skills and help others in the community," she says. "Entering a professional environment for the first time can be daunting. We can help these trainees make the adjustment by using our own experiences to guide them."

It's easy for Madison to fit volunteer work into her busy schedule: "There's always something to do, whether I go for 15 minutes or 2 hours in the morning, during lunch, or in the evening. I can help by teaching something I do every day and take for granted, like using e-mail or Power Point, and it takes only a short time to improve peoples' lives in an immeasurable way. Interacting with the trainees also helps the volunteers—I learn more about the applications by teaching others. The feeling of being able to help is priceless."

Mehta says Training Futures "polishes" participants by smoothing their rough edges. "It's a platform for learning about and communicating in the corporate world. Most of my classmates and I were educated, and some were doctors and PhDs. But when you're trying to earn a living and you're unfamiliar with the protocol, you don't have the time or the network to learn what you need to know to about working in America."

Xia Ti credits luck, hard work, and the kindness of many strangers for the opportunities he has now. "I learned about Training Futures on the last day the applicant exam was being given for that cycle. After I passed the test, many people collaborated to make sure I got into the course." Xia Ti says his experience with Training Futures and Booz Allen reminds him of a line in a popular song: "You raise me up." "I found that people are willing to help you if you try," he says.

Mehta agrees. "When I graduated from the program, Booz Allen honored me with its Leadership Award. I gave a short speech and asked for a chance to prove myself. Shortly after that, the firm's director of learning and development hired me and gave me that chance."

Since then, Mehta has been promoted to a Level 2, and he's striving for Level 3. "I wouldn't call Booz Allen as much a happy ending as it is a happy beginning—a happy start to my new career."

A Cooperative Project to Transform Lives

Two-thirds of Training Futures trainees are parents supporting children, and NVFS statistics show that the program benefits children as well as adults: By helping parents overcome the hardships of poverty, such as dependent housing and lack of health insurance, 1,500 children of the first 1,000 trainees indirectly benefitted from the program.

After graduating, NVFS says the number of trainees receiving employee benefits such as health insurance and 401Ks more than doubles. In addition, graduates were projected to earn \$13.5 million more in 2007 than they would have if they remained in their previous low-wage jobs.

To support Training Futures, Booz Allen volunteers serve as lab assistants, tutor trainees one-on-one, or provide development services by assisting in workshops that address topics such as time management, dressing for success, small group communications, and respect in the workplace. Volunteers also offer support with resume writing and interviewing.

Training Futures applicants must first take a two-hour reading, language, and math test. If they score at a 7th-grade level or above, they stay for an interview. If they don't, they're given a list of resources to help them improve their skills so they can test again later.

"Applicants are assessed for their employment viability, such as whether they can understand questions, whether they're committed to developing skills, and so on," says Teri Harbour Vito, a representative of Training Futures. "Many trainees have college degrees from their countries of origin, but those degrees often do not transfer into American workplace qualifications. All trainees must have at least a high school diploma or GED, and meet government guidelines for low-income status."

About 55 people are accepted into the semi-annual program, and about 50 graduate after each cycle. Training Futures also accepts a limited number of applicants with criminal records.

Launched in 1997, the program is free to trainees, but they must pay about \$300 for books. It costs Training Futures about \$4,000, however, to put one person through the program, which is funded by the Fairfax County Government, United Way, foundations, companies such as Booz Allen, and individuals. Partial funding is sometimes provided by agencies working with a trainee or federal education scholarships; Northern Virginia Community College can provide up to 17 college credits for trainees' office technology and healthcare office training.

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