

Northern Virginia Family Service's Training Futures Program

An Overview of the Imaginal Education Model

Imaginal Education

Training Futures' transformational learning model is called *Imaginal Education*. This holistic approach to learning is the primary driving force responsible for NVFS Training Futures graduates' remarkable 15 year history of 85-90% employment outcomes that have nearly doubled their earnings and transformed their lives.

The model is adapted from a unique approach to workforce development originally pioneered by the Institute for Cultural Affairs (<http://www.ica-usa.org>) and a nonprofit workforce development program called Training, Inc. (<http://www.traininginc.org/Home/index.htm>). This approach is unique in the field of job training and very different from typical college-level career education. The difference can be traced to a compelling theory of personal change which addresses both skills and self-image and results in a life transformation encompassing the whole person.

Imaginal education grew out of the work of Kenneth Boulding, author of *The Image: Knowledge in Life and Society*. In his book, Boulding sets forth five simple principles for transformational learning:

1. People operate out of images.
2. Images determine behavior.
3. Images are created by messages that can be intentionally designed and communicated.
4. Images can change.
5. When images change, behavior changes.

At Training Futures, the predominant self-images among entering trainees are often negative:

- Lack of skills and/or a U.S. college credential
- Little confidence in their ability to learn after years of doing repetitive, low wage work
- Competency struggles, marked by a feeling that "I'm not good enough" for a better job
- An inability to fit in a professional workplace

These images often combine to leave trainees feeling "stuck" in a life controlled by others. Given this starting point, the program has been designed to enhance the trainees' skills, to build a vision of their place in the world of business, and to enable them to focus on a successful future.

Business Center Location

Training Futures utilizes a "total immersion" approach to workplace learning. Trainees are placed in a polished office setting in a central business district with up-to-date equipment. Training Futures is located at the heart of Northern Virginia's business community in Tysons Corner, in an office building mainly occupied by our prestigious corporate partner, SAIC. The message to trainees is -- "*You are worth this quality investment.*" Training Futures intentionally runs its program to resemble the ways that many businesses run their workplaces. The business center location delivers a total experience of being part of the business world.

Training Methods

Northern Virginia Family Service's Training Futures program uses an integrated curriculum that teaches basic, business and life skills simultaneously, not sequentially. The hands-on, learning-by-doing approach wakes up minds that have been dulled by boredom, despair or a failure syndrome. Work-based basic skills training gives a new reason to learn because of relevance to a real job. Self-paced incremental success builds an "aha, now I understand" excitement and overcomes past failure.

College Enrollment:

Since 2003, Training Futures has offered its participants a unique opportunity to earn 8 to 18 college credits towards a higher education credential through a co-enrollment agreement with Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA). Trainees traditionally fall into two categories regarding college: they have never seen themselves as college material, or they have given up because of failure in navigating the complicated college entrance and financing processes. Training Futures has been able to incorporate these processes on-site and accomplish them in carefully calibrated steps, with individualized support. The message is “as a TF trainee, you are also a college student.” By realizing that they are already succeeding by taking college-accredited courses, trainees’ confidence as adult learners increases, and perceived barriers to college education diminish.

These initial college credits help to expand trainees’ visions of longer-term career goals, many of which are achievable only with a college credential. They know the impact it will have on their children and their long term career success. After graduation, graduates can immediately continue their college advancement by signing up for NOVA business-oriented night courses, held at Training Futures.

In summary, Training Futures creates a highly-intentional, planned cycle of success which involves a quality of environment that instills positive thinking to re-build one’s self-image and results in confidence and courage to continue the process.

Changed lives are the credibility of Training Futures. Ask any graduate.

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