



URBAN ED, INC.

IN THE DISTRICT of Columbia, nearly 50 percent of students never graduate from high school. On average, 2,500 people between the ages of 16 and 25 are on probation or parole, and unemployment is at 6.7 percent (more than 30 percent among working-age young people under the age of 21).

These statistics might sound grim to most people, but the board and staff at Urban Ed, Inc., see it as their calling to work with the District's hardest-to-reach populations. Based in southeast D.C., this progressive nonprofit organization tackles the grim realities faced by many low-income and at-risk working-age youth, giving them hope for a productive future.

The group's current focus is the technology sector. They train and create employment opportunities in this field for low-income individuals, most of whom are women and minorities under the age of 25, preparing them for such jobs as PC technicians, fix-and-break technicians, help desk support and desktop support positions. All are entry-level positions that in the D.C. area start at double and triple the minimum wage. "In addition to placing our graduates in jobs with higher starting wages, our program increases the pool of minorities in the technology field, where they currently make up only 6.2 percent of the workforce," said Roxanne J. Williams, Urban Ed's founder and president.

The organization offers several programs to carry out its mission of providing education, information and skill development to foster economic independence to low-income youth between the ages of 13 and 25. Its TechnoForce Development program creates entry level, A-certified technicians and places them in paid internships and ultimately full-time employment. The TechnoAcademy targets teens that are still in school, offering leadership skill development and technology skills as an alternative to drugs, crime and violence. The Juvenile Justice campaign works

to stimulate more equitable public policies around the criminalization of youth.

Urban Ed's programs teach business management skills, organizational leadership competency, improved basic education/literacy skills and enhanced workforce readiness, in addition to technological proficiency. "Many young people turn to the streets to pay the bills," says Williams. "This organization trains those that are dropouts, not working, hanging on street corners, coming out of the justice system or committing crime for fun, and provides them an avenue to obtain high-wage jobs in legitimate places."

A true visionary in every sense, Williams herself overcame an underprivileged upbringing to earn multiple degrees and start this dynamic organization. She believes that low-income youth are entitled to economic opportunity, physical infrastructure and social stability in their personal and community arenas. She also believes that strong urban neighborhoods add value to overall local economies.

Dozens of partners from the public, private and nonprofit sectors contribute to Urban Ed's success. Bank of America provided seed funding; the D.C. Chamber of Commerce provided linkages to corporations and small businesses and serves on the organization's Advisory Committee; Manpower, Inc. provides job placement; and Howard University's Center for Urban Progress provides evaluation services to measure outcomes. These are just a few - Urban Ed has many other partners that provide case management services, lab space and equipment, volunteers and financial investments.

"Working together with our partners, we can maximize our collective impact in lower-income communities," said Ms. Williams. "We share a vision of a level playing field for all members of society, and together, we can achieve our goal." ■

**IN ADDITION TO
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GRADUATES IN JOBS
WITH HIGHER STARTING
WAGES, OUR PROGRAM
INCREASES THE POOL
OF MINORITIES IN THE
TECHNOLOGY FIELD.**

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