



INCARCERATED

YOUTHS

GET A SECOND CHANCE WITH CTE

By Patricia Moreno

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For juvenile offenders across the state, the Arizona Department of Juvenile Corrections (ADJC) is the last resort. Faced with limited academic and technical skills, these incarcerated students face a future that is very uncertain. The state recognized that educating this population is a key not only in reducing the dropout rate, but providing the community and businesses with students who have job and academic skills for immediate employment. So it shifted its focus to a hands-on learning approach through career and technical education (CTE). Students are empowered with skills and knowledge they can use in the real world, which they will re-enter within an average of approximately seven-and-a-half months.

Many Challenges

Prior to incarceration in one of the secure care facilities, most youth have a history of committing crimes, have spent time in detention facilities, dropped out of school, and have myriad emotional and mental disorders. A significant number of youth have been homeless—living on the streets or with friends—and many come from extremely unstable home environments. Sadly, for the youth who call any one of the state's four facilities home, ADJC is the most stable environment they have known since childhood.

For the vast majority of these students, a traditional public school setting has not met their needs. Educating ADJC's wards poses significant challenges, including the fact that the majority of them have severe gaps in basic math, reading and language. In fact, 32 percent have special needs. In addition, due to the state's close proximity to the Mexican border, a significant number of students are English language learners.

Shift in Focus to CTE

ADJC's focus on education shifted in 2004 to CTE with class offerings at the four sites. These classes include automotive technology, the building trades, computer refurbishing, and culinary arts. Students must meet strict criteria for admittance into the various programs, and they receive high school elective credit. All teachers have state certification for teaching, and they integrate reading, math, language arts and job skill training into the CTE programming. Students see the direct relevance of learning, and they learn how to apply skills in a real-world setting. Since the program's inception in the summer of 2004, teachers report that the hands-on learning approach has had a positive influence on students' behavioral problems. CTE classes are now among the most popular and in demand at all four facilities. And ADJC's CTE program was named Innovative Program of the Year in 2006 by the Arizona Correctional Educators Association.

Collaboration with Partners

ADJC works to obtain input from external partners in program development. When the Arizona Builders' Alliance provided a connection to the National Center for Construction Education Research (NCCER), automotive and building trades teachers received training in six modules in the fall of 2006 (safety, construction math, hand tools, power tools, blueprint reading and rigging) through an in-house NCCER master trainer. Students are now working with the modules and receive credits that are recorded on a national database. This enables them to obtain employment in the construction trade, in any state, upon completion of the modules.

Arizona Students Recycling Used Technology (AZ StRUT) is another



partner. AZ StRUT, which partners with Motorola and Intel, provides the hardware and internal components used in computer refurbishing classes. While at the facility, AZ StRUT pays the fees for students to take the A+ certification test. So far, the Eagle Point School, located in Buckeye, west of Phoenix, has refurbished the most computers in the state and AZ StRUT has donated them to schools and agencies in low-income areas in Phoenix.

The Black Canyon School, located in Phoenix, partners with Rio Salado College for its culinary arts program. (None of the other three facilities offers culinary arts.) The program was modeled after one at a local women's correctional facility, but modifications were made to cater to adolescents. Black Canyon's program consists of four to five weeks of classroom instruction and a six-week cooking rotation. Lunches prepared by the students in a commercial-style kitchen are served at the Pink Diamond Café in the school. Students receive dual credit for their participation, and can earn a food handler's card after passing a test offered off-site.

Linking to the Community: Workforce Development

ADJC has a workforce development committee consisting of agency staff, business partners, community and state agencies that meet monthly to keep apprised of CTE programs at the schools. In addition to obtaining input from the various groups, ADJC forges partnerships with the business community so that students have employers who will hire them and continue to provide them with training upon their release from secure care. Partners include the Arizona Builders' Alliance, Subway, Tri-City Mechanical, Arizona Restaurant

Association, and Phoenix Workforce Connection. Community agencies also offer assistance with the needs students have upon release, including applying for financial aid and getting into apprenticeships. Students' parole officers and education transition coordinators assist students with placement in school and employment.

Getting Students Involved with SkillsUSA

Recently, ADJC worked with the Arizona Department of Education's CTE unit to initiate SkillsUSA clubs at all schools. Students become club members and its curriculum is used to teach them leadership skills such as employability and participative and attitude development. Students got furlough to attend a local employment workshop October 2006, and teachers will continue to encourage participation in both in-school and off-site furlough activities offered by SkillsUSA.

Looking Ahead

Two students landed jobs with Tri-City Mechanical before they were even released. And the company, an ADJC partner, has requested more students be referred for employment. With the skills students receive by participating in CTE programming, they are employable in the high-wage, high-demand construction trades immediately upon leaving the facilities. To meet the state's workforce needs, ADJC plans to continue increasing the number of business partnerships it forges. The agency will also collect data regarding student outcomes to determine how many successfully complete CTE classes, the NC-CER module, get food handler cards, and obtain employment in the various areas where training is offered. ■