

MICHAEL BARLOW CENTER UPDATE

A Program of St. Leonard's Ministries
Providing Education, Training, and
Employment Services



January to June 2011

Employer Spotlight: Chicago Transit Authority

One of our most successful employer partnerships has been with Chicago Transit Authority. Since 2008, nearly 100 MBC participants have been hired as Apprentices with CTA. This 9-month transitional employment program was established through a collaborative effort between CTA, Chicago Department of Family & Support Services and a host of community-based organizations throughout Chicago.



The apprentices gain increased skills, valuable work experience and an opportunity to work for the 2nd largest transportation system in the United States. During their employment, apprentices are responsible for deep-cleaning CTA buses and trains. Apprentices operate power-washing machines while safely using commercial chemicals.

The work performance of apprentices is evaluated by several senior CTA staff members every month. The Apprenticeship Program Monthly Evaluation rates participants on their ability to: display a positive attitude, demonstrate initiative, use professional communication skills, maintain an excellent attendance rate, follow directions, use sound judgment and conduct themselves appropriately at all times.

Since the program started, some of our former apprentices have gone on to work for Marriott Hotels, U.S. Cellular Field, McCormick & Schmick's Restaurants, Soldier Field and social service agencies. This opportunity has been what every MBC participant seeks when looking for employment; a chance to be judged on their work performance and not mistakes that were made in the past.

Thank you CTA!



Hats Off to Kimberly!

Kimberly Swiecki has been a friendly face in the Michael Barlow Center this past year. You have probably seen her working on resumes, helping develop job leads, staffing the front desk, and anything else that needs to be done – that’s Kimberly! Last year, after she graduated from the University of California-Riverside with a degree in psychology, she started looking for a full-year volunteer position that involved living in a community of like-minded people. She came upon Episcopal Service Corporation which offered the type of opportunity Kimberly was seeking. After spending some time with her brother who lives in Chicago, she decided that the Windy City would be her target. A class on the prison-industrial complex and our philosophy that “a second chance is not a number” piqued her interest in the Michael Barlow Center, and the rest is history. As she reflects upon her year, she described her most cherished memory as watching people join the training programs as individuals but leave as team mates. After a brief break, she will be working with another agency as a volunteer, then moving on to further studies towards a master’s degree in social work. Good luck Kimberly and thanks for your hard work!



MBC Grads Move on Entrepreneurship

On May 17, twenty-two students gathered on the fourth floor of the U.S. Bank in Chicago’s Englewood neighborhood for training to start their own businesses. The students, all formerly incarcerated individuals, have been referred by organizations such as the Michael Barlow Center and other organizations that work with ex-offenders in the re-entry process. The class meets once a week for ten consecutive weeks for three hours each session. The goal is to help students gain the knowledge and confidence to put together a business plan, and to understand the importance of planning and having sufficient capital when starting a business.



ACCION Chicago, which helped launch this project in September 2010, has organized five similar classes since last fall, with 99 participants in those first five classes. ACCION Chicago also provides microloans to those that qualify. With the training, access to capital, and available one-on-one technical assistance counseling for each student, it is hoped that many will begin to realize their entrepreneurial dreams.

