

Overview of Report, Entitled “Environmental Justice and Hazardous Waste Worker Training Programs: 15 Years of Investment in Environmental Justice”

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Deep South Center for Environmental Justice



Goal of Research Study --

To Evaluate Environmental Justice
Implications and Benefits of
Hazardous Waste Worker Training
Programs

Study Methodology

- Conducted interviews with key training program stakeholders, current NIEHS-WETP officials and awardees, and current EPA brownfields job training officials and grantees (25 interviews).
- Conducted literature review of existing training program reports and other relevant research documents.
- Gathered and assessed available statistics on Federally funded hazardous waste worker training programs and trainees from EJ communities.

Relationship Between Worker Training and Environmental Justice

- Worker training programs emerged at the same time as the EJ movement.
- EJ advocates recommended the creation of federal worker training programs.
- Training programs have evolved to reach out to trainees from disadvantaged communities.
- Empowered trainees to transform their lives, benefit their communities, and protect health and the environment.

NIEHS Worker Training Programs serve as national models of EJ

- Help provide for fair treatment and meaningful involvement of low-income and people of color residents in the decision-making process.
- Life skills and other support (mentoring, etc.) provided will last participants a lifetime.
- Program provides for job creation, protection of workers on the job, and support for healthy, sustainable communities.

Program graduates have provided support in aftermath of:

- World Trade Center disaster (2001)
- Hurricane Katrina (2005)
- BP Gulf Coast Oil Spill (2010)



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Resources Obligated on Hazardous Waste Worker Training Programs (HWMTP) by NIEHS

- \$307 +M over the past 15 years by HWMTP
- More than \$45M has been awarded to Minority Worker Training Program (MWTP)

Results of Minority Worker Training Program

- More than 7,800 workers have been trained in MWTP and BMWTP
- About 70% (5,400 workers) have been placed in jobs

Major Research Findings

- Federally funded minority worker training programs were established as a result of recommendations from environmental justice stakeholders regarding local job opportunities associated with the cleanup of these sites.
- Partnerships between communities, government agencies, academia, non-profit organizations, contractors, and labor unions are extremely important for the success of worker training programs.
- Most minority worker training programs work with faith-based or community-based organizations to recruit, pre-screen, and evaluate potential candidates before admitting them to the training program.

Major Research Findings

- Life skills training is an extremely important training program component that helps to prepare trainees for the work environment and culture. Similarly, social support and networking is also an important component of the worker training program.
- Ways to measure the performance of the success of worker training programs include the following:
 - number of trainees completing the training,
 - number of reduced injury and fatality incidents at the worksite, and
 - numerous success stories on how worker training programs have transformed the lives of individuals and their communities.

Major Research Findings

- Hazardous waste worker training programs are the embodiment of environmental justice by providing for the fair treatment of low income and minority residents of environmental justice communities by providing the residents with the knowledge and training necessary for workers to meaningfully participate in addressing the environmental concerns in their community.
- Worker training programs have completely changed the lives of the participants of the program, many of whom were underemployed, unemployed, or ex-offenders that live in low-income and minority communities.

Major Research Findings

- Worker training programs provide residents of low-income and minority communities the knowledge and skills to prepare them for long-term career opportunities in environmental assessment and cleanup, emergency response, construction and other careers.
- The majority of the trainees participating in worker training programs are African Americans. African Americans represent 86% of the trainee population in the Minority Worker Training Program and 68% of the population in the Brownfields Minority Worker Training Program.



Major Research Findings

- Depending on the geographic location of the training program, the number of minorities entering apprenticeships may vary greatly. In some areas, e.g., New York and New England, the number of minorities entering this program has increased substantially.
- The approach and technique to incorporate “green jobs” into the curricula has varied from program to program. The majority of the programs adjusted their training curricula to include course components on “green jobs,” such as weatherization, retrofit, and alternative energy.
- Graduates of the worker training program have used their newly gained knowledge on health and safety to improve the public health and environment for their family, relatives, and community .

Major Research Recommendations

- To better support the federal worker training programs and address environmental justice needs in more communities, there is a consensus that more program funding is needed.
- In order to better support the connection between the hazardous waste worker training program and environmental justice, NIEHS should consider strengthening awardee application criteria to place more weight on awardee applications that have training populations who are residents of communities that have documented environmental justice concerns (e.g., contaminated properties, waste transfer stations, or manufacturing facilities).



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Major Research Recommendations

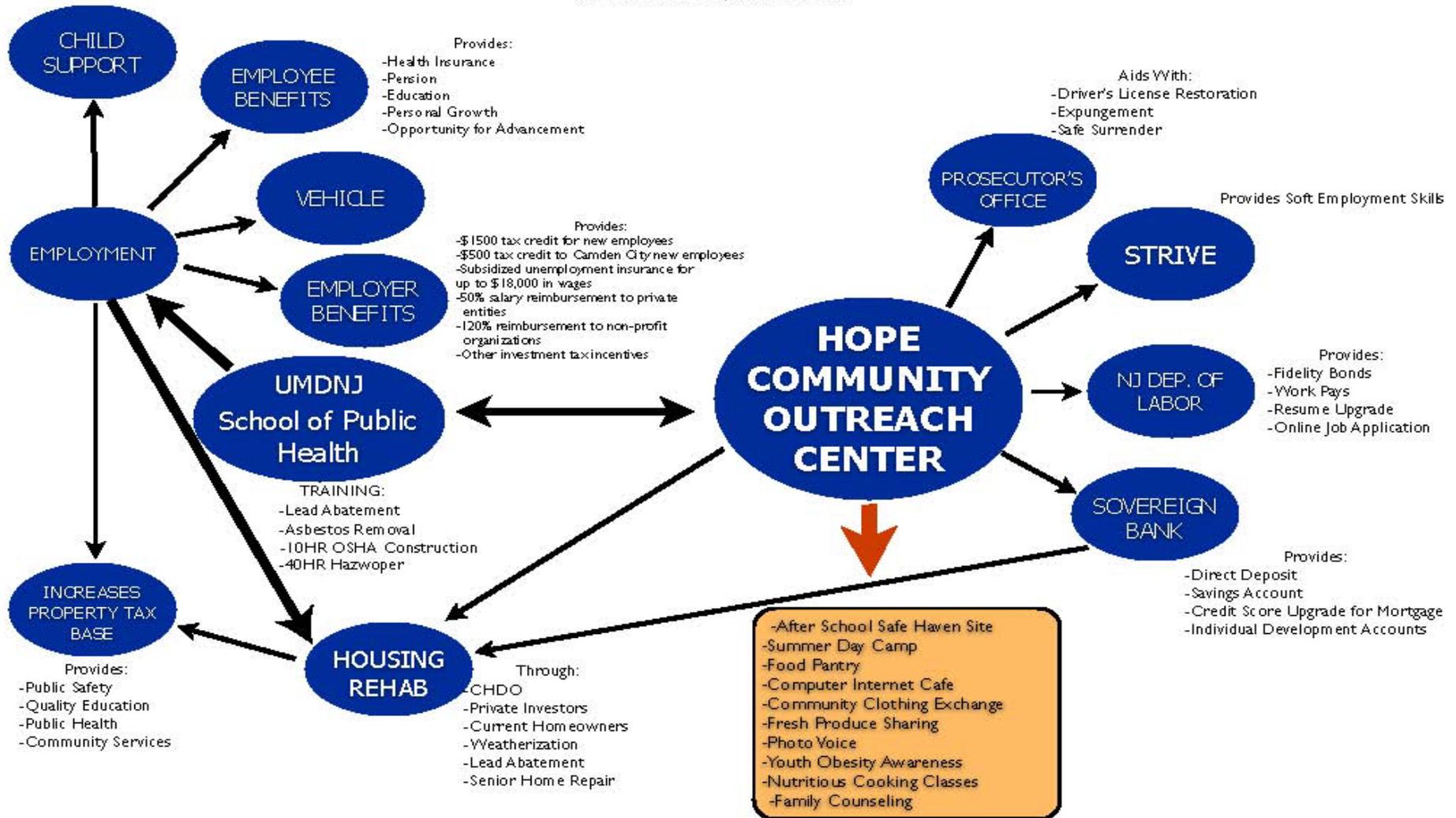
- Worker training programs should have a screening mechanism built into their recruitment process as a method of ensuring student quality. Individuals who want to be a part of the program should have the commitment necessary to succeed in the program.
- More effort should be made by NIEHS and its awardees to recruit greater percentages of other minority populations, such as Native Americans and Pacific Islanders, into the program.
- Federal government agencies should consider adding quantitative and qualitative performance measures in their evaluation process for the worker training programs in order to better assess the progress the program has made in achieving its environmental justice goals (e.g., NIEHS has certain performance measures in its recent Request for Applications).

Major Research Recommendations

- Training programs should leverage partnerships with local communities, government agencies, employers, academia, private contractors, and labor unions. Federal agencies should do more in promoting partnerships by providing technical guidance and incentives to facilitate such partnerships.
- More effort should be devoted to involving additional Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and other minority academic institutions in worker training programs.
- As Federal agencies and training providers direct more focus to green jobs training, priority should be given to recruitment of residents in communities facing environmental justice concerns.

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 Pastor Odessa Edmond, Executive Director



"It Begins With Educating Ourselves and it Ends With Educating Our Children"

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Major Research Recommendations

- Federal program administrators should clarify the level of flexibility available within its training program in order to accommodate the changing economic situation and job market. For instance, NIEHS WETP has been accommodating the rebudgeting and changing needs of awardees due to unforeseen circumstances, such as diversifying the training to include “green construction” training so that trainees can remain competitive in the job market.

Major Research Recommendations

- Federal, state, and local government should strongly encourage employers contracted to conduct environmental cleanup to hire local residents who have gone through hazardous waste worker training programs.
- Local governments should encourage and provide incentives for small businesses and local entrepreneurs to locate in proximity to low-income and minority communities as small businesses are more likely to hire a local workforce.

Major Research Recommendations

- Life skills training or pre-employment training should be a fundamental component of worker training programs that target low-income and minority residents in order to effectively address environmental justice concerns.
- Environmental justice should be taught as a component of worker training programs, either as a module on its own or integrated into the training.

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Major Research Recommendations

- Mentoring is an important part of the training program as it provides a social support network for the trainees.
- More support should be considered for language training, due to the increasing immigrant population.