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## Motivation gets paid up front in Year Up

Program offers high school graduates and GED recipients a paid year of training and apprenticeship.

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"It sounded too good to be true," said Lewis Adams, 20, of Rehoboth.

"I checked out the Web site, and it seemed too good to be true," said Kendalyn Phillips, 21, of Providence.

Phillips and Adams were among 22 local graduates of Year Up, a program that offers high school or GED graduates six months of classroom training and six months of job apprenticeship. The most recent crop of Year Up grads were honored at a ceremony at the Westin Providence hotel this month.

Participants get paid while they're in Year Up, \$170 per week for the first six months, \$225 for the remainder of the year.

Adams went to Dighton-Rehoboth Regional High School. After graduation, he worked for Cumberland Farms, a job he didn't like. What he did like was computers, but he lacked the "piece of paper" to prove he had the expertise to get a job. Then he heard about Year Up from a friend who had already been through the program.

"It seemed perfect. I'd get paid to go to school, and get an apprenticeship to prove myself," Adams said. He worked for Fidelity Investments in Boston in computer network engineering, and has had his internship extended until December.



Luis De La Rosa and Kendalyn Phillips smile at the Westin hotel festivities.

Phillips, 21, was born and raised in Boston but moved to Providence during high school. She dropped out of Hope High School, but got her GED at CCRI. She went on to study for a cosmetology degree, but financial problems forced her to leave school, and she lost her part-time job at a salon.

Then her mother saw an ad for Year Up on a RIPTA bus. Phillips checked out the Web site, and applied just three days before classes were due to start. She worked for Textron Financial Corp., and will start a new job at a Bank of America call center.

"They made sure we were ready," she said of Year Up. "They don't just throw us out there."

Year Up was started in Boston in 2000 by an entrepreneur named Gerald Chertavian, who had been active in the Big Brother program during the '80s. Chertavian sold the company he cofounded, Conduit Communications, in 1999.

Now there are Year Up programs in Providence, New York and Washington, and the program is eyeing expansion to San Francisco, Dallas, Atlanta and Chicago.

Sara Enright, a Harvard Business School grad who is executive director of Year Up in Providence, said the local program started at the beginning of 2005. Providence was the second city where Year Up established a program.

Enright said Year Up is growing in Rhode Island. The class that just graduated had 22 members. The upcoming group, now in the apprenticeship phase of their training, has 28 members, and the following class has space for 36 people. (There is still time to apply for that group; for information, call Year Up at (401) 421-7819.

Enright said the national budget for Year Up is about \$13 million annually;

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Brian Burke, Northeast director of government affairs for Microsoft, speaks at the Year Up graduation.

# Year Up

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the Providence program's budget is about \$1.8 million. The money comes from a variety of sources, including state grants, foundations, and corporate financing. (In May, Microsoft announced it was offering \$10 million in financing, software, and technology training to Year Up nationally over the next five years).

Providing apprenticeships opportunities for Year Up's local participants are the Bank of America, Citizens Bank, Bank Rhode Island, American Power Conversion, Collette Vacations, Hasbro Children's Hospital, Family Service of Rhode Island, Providence Equity Partners, the City of Providence, CVS, Fidelity Investments, GTECH Corp., Gilbane, Lifespan, Perot Systems, the State of Rhode Island, the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation and the Textron Financial Corp.

Enright said Year Up in Providence has about a 75-percent graduation rate. Getting into the program, she said, is mostly a matter of motivation. The program deliberately doesn't make the process too simple — candidates must

undergo three interviews, and provide an essay, resumé, high school transcript, and a letter of recommendation." We're not looking for the most skilled people in Providence, or the smartest people in Providence, but the most motivated," she said.

Year Up participants have some compelling stories to tell, and several of them spoke at the graduation ceremony at the Westin.

Daniel Yem, 23, is a first generation Cambodian-American whose parents fled the killing fields. (During his speech at the ceremony, he briefly switched to Cambodian to thank his family). Yem was born and raised in Philadelphia before coming to Rhode Island, where he found himself trapped in a dead-end job.

Now, he said, he is working at GTECH and is "ready to take my piece of the American pie."

Barry Fenn, 20, was a high school athlete who grew up on Long Island and then moved to Pawtucket. As a teenager, he said, he led a double life, a well-mannered young man around his family, a tough kid when he was on the streets. After injuries ended his athletic career — and his hopes of a college scholarship

— he was unemployed and depressed.

Year Up, he said, gave him the new opportunity he was looking for. "I wanted to show I was more than just an urban youth," he said, his fingers making big quote marks in the air around the phrase urban youth.

Enright said the first six months of Year Up provide intensive classes in three areas, professional skills, technical skills and communications.

Professional skills begin with such simple matters as being on time and shaking hands, and then moves into subjects such as teamwork, time management and conflict resolution.

The technical skills are in computer troubleshooting, and the communications classes concentrate on writing and public speaking.

Stephanie Liddy, 20, described herself as shy, and told the audience at the Westin graduation ceremony that when she started Year Up, she never thought she would be comfortable speaking to a large audience.

The main speaker for the ceremony was Brian Burke, a Brown University graduate who is Northeast director of governmental affairs at Microsoft.

Burke told the graduates that joining Year Up involved taking a chance on their futures.

"You opened yourself up to a new world of opportunity.... As graduates of Year Up, you have an opportunity to demonstrate further leadership. Don't shy away from that," he said.

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prove myself."  
Lewis Adams



Humberto Fernandez gets a kiss from fellow graduate Stephanie Liddy before the graduation ceremony on August 1 at the Westin Providence hotel. Among Liddy's accomplishments was gaining confidence in public speaking.

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