

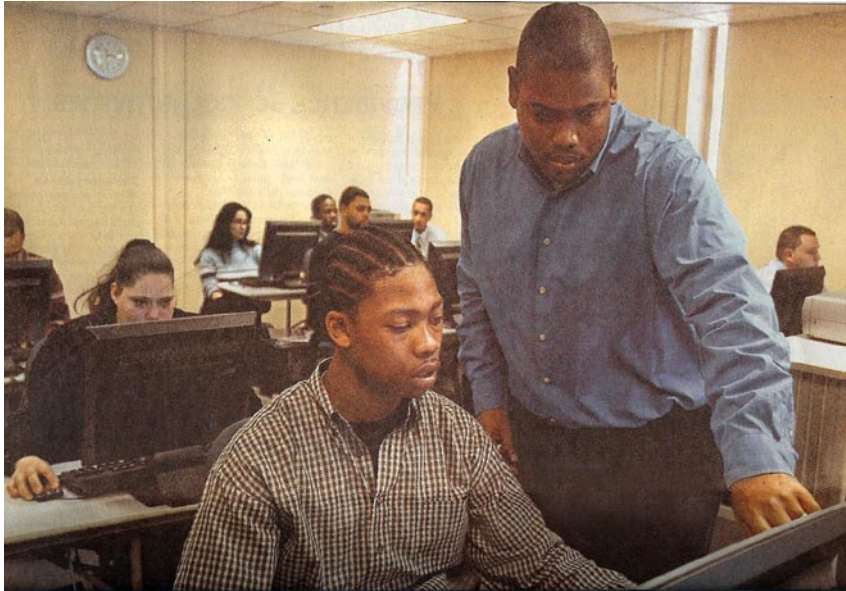
The Providence Journal

METRO EDITION

WEDNESDAY
APRIL 27, 2005
50¢
\$2.40 per week by carrier

SIGNING ON TO THEIR FUTURE

SERVING PROVIDENCE AND EAST PROVIDENCE



Richard Dubuisson, an instructor in a technical skills class, helps David Harmon, of Woonsocket, during class. The 20 Providence students receive one year of technical training and a salary. Sara Strammiello, below, is the Executive Director of Year up, which started in Boston and expanded to Providence in January.

Year Up helps students gear up for careers

The program, which began in Boston in 2000, teaches students information technology skills while paying them to participate.

BY KAREN A. DAVIS
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE -- In a small classroom, 11 stories above the Financial District, the students of Year Up have lofty goals and real expectations.

David Harmon wants to make an entrée into higher education so that he can play college basketball, earn a degree and make a decent living.

John Delgado wants to get a post-high school education for a price that he can afford.

Deborah Rodriguez just wants to build the skills she'll need to make a better life for herself and her 4-year-old daughter. The trio are among the 20 students who are building their futures, thanks to a new program that came to Providence earlier this year.

Year Up, based at 10 Dorrance St., is



designed to prepare urban young adults for careers in information technology by allowing them to earn salaries, go to school and get support and training.

The innovative year-long program "transforms the lives and economic prospects of high school graduates and GED recipients" by providing one year of technology training, according to Sara Strammiello, executive director. The goal is to prepare the 18- to 24-year-old students for technical careers or further schooling.

During a recent mathematics lesson, the students analyzed financial reports on computers and worked to solve problems under the watchful eye of instructor Richard Dubuisson.

"I think I get it . . . but not really," Rodriguez said dubiously.

"OK, let's go back and try it again," Dubuisson said.

After spending awhile applying filters to sort information on a spread sheet, Dubuisson pushes the students to try harder. "You're tech support people; figure it out," he tells the students, who are required to attend class dressed in clothing suitable for business or the workplace. "You have exactly 30 seconds!"

The Year Up program was created in Boston in 2000 by former dot-com executive Gerald Chertavian. Chertavian sold his London-based company, an Internet strategy consulting firm, and invested \$500,000 in the initiative.

Since then, the program has expanded to Cambridge, and served more than 100 students each year.

With the help of dedicated staff, corporate support and 150 volunteers, the program has an 89-percent retention rate.

The program, which opened in Providence on Jan. 31, provides six months of classes followed by a six-month paid internship.

"This great program helps build the bridge between our young people and the 21st century jobs that will become increasingly available as the Providence economy grows," Mayor David N. Cicilline said at an opening celebration.

Delgado signed up for the program after realizing that not only would it give him a jumpstart toward higher education, but would pay him to participate.

Harmon, of Woonsocket, was accepted in the program the day he became a father.

"Looking back, I realize that the day was a turning point for me," Harmon said. "I was given a chance to better my life and pursue a positive future for my daughter."

In Rhode Island, the Year Up program is run by a staff of four coordinators and instructors. It has received support from Citizens Bank, the city and state, CVS, Fidelity Investments, Gilbane, IBM, Channel 10 (WJAR), The Salem Foundation, Textron Financial and the United Way of Rhode Island.

IBM signed on as the technical partner by donating the computers and hardware, coordinators said.

It includes workshops on personal financial management, networking, time management and other topics that will be an asset to students in their careers and personal lives, organizers said.

Strammiello said the program has trained and helped 250 participants find permanent jobs in the Boston area. Chertavian's vision is to capitalize on the need for a technology-saavy urban workforce, while helping participants move from minimum-wage positions to higher-paying careers, she said. The same success stories in Boston are expected to be realized in Rhode Island.