

YOUTHBUILD TRAINS FUTURE WORKFORCE WITH NEIGHBORHOOD CONSTRUCTION

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"Despite working very long and hard, the crew was happy to give the extra effort. And for our part, we hope they will have picked up some additional skills for general construction labor." – Don Callen

Members of the Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee (HACM)'s YouthBuild construction training crew recently had the opportunity to work hand-in-hand with a seasoned construction team that is installing a massive underground stormwater detention system in the Westlawn Gardens neighborhood.

Funded through the U.S Department of Labor and contracted locally by Employ Milwaukee, HACM's YouthBuild program is a non-residential, community-based alternative education program that provides job training and educational opportunities. The unique training experience was invaluable as the young crew members begin considering work in the construction fields as a career option.

"We recruit young adults ages 18 to 24 who have not finished high school to give them an opportunity to get back on track towards a family-supporting career," said Housing Authority YouthBuild case manager Nannette Ray. "Crew members receive industry-approved certifications so they can work on any construction site when they finish with the program. Not all members end up working in construction, but they nevertheless earn skills to help them attain and keep employment."

Dakota Intertek Corp. is a registered MBE/DBE/SBE firm currently installing the underground stormwater detention system at Browning Elementary School in Milwaukee, in advance of a new playground complex to be completed over the detention system.

The special project started when Don Callen, Vice President of Dakota Intertek Corp. worked with Ray and Evans Gant, HACM's Section 3 Coordinator, to provide a real-world construction experience at real-world prevailing wages for the YouthBuild crew.

"When Dakota needed additional workforce, we were very pleased to be referred to the YouthBuild program," said Callen. "We were able to obtain the workers on relatively short notice, and they arrived on site eager to work."

Nine crew members initially helped to install an impermeable liner approaching 50,000 square feet. The project did not go as originally planned and the work had to be done in rainy, cold weather, but the YouthBuild crew stuck with Dakota's crew to finish it, said Callen. As the project has required additional labor, crew members have been invited back for additional work.

"We could not be happier with their performance, and we hope they picked up some additional skills for general construction," said Callen. "I would happily recommend YouthBuild to anyone needing good, solid workers."

Gant said the partnership has helped to reach HACM's Section 3 goals, which aim to provide employment opportunities to low-income individuals in the neighborhoods where the work is being done.

"Dakota reached out to us to let us know that they had an opportunity for new hires, and I immediately connected them to the YouthBuild program as an opportunity for the crew members," said Gant. "It's a win for everyone involved."

Tracey Underwood, one of the YouthBuild participants, said the program opens a door to a better future for him and his son.

"I'm just a regular young kid from Milwaukee who was always getting into trouble, but all that changed when people I know started dying and when my son was born. I told myself to stop playing around," said Underwood. "When I'm done with this program, I know I'll be in the construction field, because I'm building up the credentials and resume to be on a construction site."

The crew members also have the satisfaction of knowing that their work produced new amenities for the Westlawn Gardens neighborhood. The detention system will help to keep stormwater from flooding neighborhood streets, basements and nearby Lincoln Creek. In addition, the system will soon be covered by a new project, a multi-sports complex funded by the Milwaukee Bucks and Johnson Controls to provide recreational and educational opportunities for neighborhood residents of all ages.

"When Dakota needed additional workforce, we were very pleased to be referred to the YouthBuild program. We were able to obtain nine workers from the YouthBuild crew on relatively short notice, and they arrived onsite eager to work," added Callen. "We initially used the crew to install an impermeable liner approaching 50,000 square feet. The project did not go as easily as we had hoped, but the YouthBuild crew stuck with it, with some of the crew staying past 9:30 on a Friday night. We could not be happier with their performance, and have used the program for additional labor on the project, as the need arose. We will be pleased to call upon YouthBuild for additional workforce needs in the future."



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