



Home Builders Institute's Offender Training Programs

Testimony Presented
by
Dennis Torbett,
Vice President, Workforce Training and Employment
Home Builders Institute,
the workforce development arm
of the National Association of Home Builders

Before the
House Subcommittee on Federal Workforce,
Postal Service, and the District of Columbia
Danny K. Davis, Chairman

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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Home Builders Institute is the workforce development arm of the National Association of Home Builders' (NAHB). NAHB is a trade association whose 235,000 members are involved in home building, remodeling, multifamily construction, property management, subcontracting, design, housing finance, building product manufacturing and other aspects of residential and light commercial construction. Known as "the voice of the housing industry," NAHB is affiliated with more than 800 state and local home builder associations (HBAs) around the country. NAHB's builder members will construct about 80 percent of the more than 1.4 million new housing units projected for 2007, making the housing industry one of the largest engines of economic growth in the country, even despite recent market adjustments and challenges.

One of the most pressing problems facing our industry for many years has been the shortage of skilled workers. Factors contributing to this shortage include increasing and record demand for workers to build, remodel and maintain our homes, retirements in our industry, and dwindling interest in the skilled trades among America's younger generations.

Compounding the problem has been insufficient training opportunities for those considering a career in the industry. As you know, the number of construction career programs offered by high schools, post-secondary vocational schools and community colleges has declined dramatically over the past twenty-five years, and training through the public workforce development system is limited.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, more than 240,000 new workers are needed each year to meet the nation's demand for housing, and construction is consistently cited as a high growth industry. Estimates indicate that within the next decade, our nation will need to construct 18 million new homes to meet demand requiring the addition of more than a million new skilled workers to the industry.

Home Builders Institute (HBI) has been involved in developing our industry's labor force for more than 30 years through ongoing and aggressive training partnerships with Federal and state agencies. HBI's customized skilled trades training programs serve targeted populations including adjudicated and at-risk youth, dislocated workers, homeless veterans as well as offenders and ex-offenders, and they have successfully worked to put thousands to work in our industry, while helping many students rebuild their lives.

In 1994, the U.S. Department of Labor/Employment and Training Administration awarded HBI a Youth Opportunity Demonstration Grant to train and place adjudicated juveniles in the skilled trades. The initiative became known as Project CRAFT (Community, Restitution, Apprenticeship-Focused Training) and brought together multiple systems to benefit the young trainees - employers, the justice system, workforce development, education, the faith-based community, and health and social services. Its essential components remain today and are shared by HBI programs for adult populations, including offenders. These "best" practices are:

- Partnership Building and Linkages
- Comprehensive Service Delivery
- Community Involvement
- Industry-Driven Training
- Leadership Development
- Job Placement
- Follow-up Services

An independent evaluation of the demonstration grant completed in February 1999 by the Resource Development Group, Inc., concluded that the implementation of these “best practices” as part of HBI’s vocational skills training programs contribute to lower recidivism and higher employment outcomes.

HBI’s Offender Programs

HBI’s youthful offenders (ages 18-24) program Project CRAFT (Community, Restitution, Apprenticeship-Focused Training) and its adult offender employment program, Project TRADE Training, Restitution, Apprenticeship Development and Employment, both emphasize training and placement in residential construction-related careers. In addition, they also work to increase the students’ successful transition into the community through education, employment, treatment and social services to promote reintegration and reduce recidivism.

While the traditional skilled trades are essential to the production of quality homes, it should also be noted that they have changed dramatically over the last decade in response to the introduction of new materials, processes, tools, and computer technology. Increasingly, builders rely on engineered parts, modular units, computer-controlled systems, and metal components, all of which provide vast opportunities for people with a range of abilities and interests.

Curriculum

The core of HBI’s training is the integration of work based learning combined with a program of vocational and academic skills throughout the entire instructional process using the PACT curriculum. The industry-validated Pre-Apprenticeship Certificate Training (PACT) combines work based learning with workplace literacy and employability development. It also provides career advancement and increased wage earnings through a progression of industry-supported vocational training and related learning programs.

PACT, a competency/performance based curriculum, provides students with 240-480 hours of instruction coordinated with other treatment and education related activities. For approximately 80-100 hours participants engage in related classroom instruction which includes practical trade skills, safety training, care and use of tools, work habits and fundamental mathematics and communication skills. The remaining time is devoted to work-based learning that integrates occupational and academic skills. These hours can be credited toward the 2,000 hours required for completion of the first year of apprenticeship training.

Intensive hands-on training takes place at building sites made available by community based organizations, community revitalization groups, municipalities and other non-profit organizations. Additional hands-on training takes place at home building, rehabilitation construction, or construction remodeling sites where trainees apply skills introduced in the classroom while working alongside professionals. Work based learning is particularly appropriate, and particularly successful, for the adult population of offenders and ex-offenders.

HBI has found that the focused coordination of the program with the learning needs of offenders increases the likelihood of them completing their training and gaining the skills necessary to retain jobs and embark on successful careers. The students' active participation in the construction activity, inherent in the work-based training process, has a positive impact on participant self-esteem. In addition, community restitution is an important component of work-based learning and allows offenders to participate in community service construction projects, thus making a positive contribution to the local area.

Students benefit from seeing the direct result of their labor as it helps local communities and neighbors. In settings where safety and security policies do not allow for off-campus activities, HBI has been able to obtain a variety of campus-based construction and education projects to augment PACT training projects. Students have built storage sheds, playground equipment, playhouses, modular home components, along with a wide range of construction and remodeling projects in the communities in which HBI operates. These activities build self-esteem, contribute to participant motivation, offer restitution opportunities and provide concrete evidence of success.

Industry representatives worked with HBI in developing the PACT curriculum including the employability skills and literacy components. Employers today are also actively involved in planning, curriculum content validation, community work-based learning, related instruction, placement, support services and follow-up. This collaboration with industry addresses two critical barriers issues typically found in prisoner re-entry:

1. Access to quality employment with career progression opportunities in a high demand industry.
2. The provision of coordinated and comprehensive wrap-around services using systems-level approaches in case management (CM) and mentoring to address family reunification, housing, finances, social services, transportation, substance abuse, mental health and health issues, continuing education and other social and readjustment services.

These needed services are provided, and issues are addressed through an employment-centered initiative that has the support of a strong and active industry. NAHB's Home Builder Association (HBA) members are active partners in the design and delivery of employment services for Project TRADE participants. Examples of initiatives that have been undertaken by HBA members in conjunction with HBI are:

- Development of the Pre-Apprenticeship Certificate Training (*PACT*) curriculum which is designed to prepare individuals for entry level employment in the skilled trades and related fields and links with local crafts apprenticeship and postsecondary continuing education programs.
- Development of the math and communications curriculum, typically integrated into *PACT* and other education and training programs.
- Provision of industry-focused career awareness and exploration, job readiness and employability skills materials and content through HBI's *Build a Home, Build a Career* program, *My PEP* and guest speakers and industry tours.
- Linkages to community service construction projects. This important component serves a dual purpose as it meets the community service/restitution requirements of offenders and engages them in service learning activities that reconnect them with their communities.

- Participation by trainees in HBA meetings, Home Shows, Habitat for Humanity Blitz Build, Rebuilding Together, etc. where trainees work alongside of experienced employers, who serve as mentors and advocates.
- Responsiveness to placement and job retention needs of trainees through participation in coaching, mentoring and other employee support activities.

Industry members also:

- Serve as guest lecturers in *PACT* classes and in a class designed to introduce participants to careers in the residential construction industry, work place practices and employability skills.
- Promote entrepreneurial opportunities through seminars and guest speaker events.
- Provide opportunities for situational assessment and job tryout at employer locations.
- Participate in informational and mock interviews or provide worksite-based job readiness, employability and work adjustment training.

Members also help link the project with community service projects, identifying sources of in-kind and reduced costs for tools and building supplies, and providing employment opportunities for participants, including OJT and apprenticeships.

Program Sites At-a-Glance

Project CRAFT/Nashville has two major training components: Facility-based residential construction and related skills training at the Davidson County Drug Court, and a community-based residential construction and related skills training. Students are ages 18 to 24 currently in the youth or adult offender system, or are ex-offenders.

Linkages with organizations help leverage resources for program participants. In addition to the Davidson County Drug Court, chief partners in the program are the Department of Correction, the Department of Probation and Parole, the Home Builders Associations of Tennessee and Middle Tennessee, and the Nashville Adult Literacy Council.

Funded by the federal Department of Labor's Responsible Reintegration of Youthful Offenders program, the numbers speak for themselves. Thanks to additional funds, HBI has been able to monitor the impact of the program on the students and its results for the Department of Labor. Over a five year period, 215 offenders enrolled in the program, 85% were repeat offenders, yet 99% of those graduating with their PACT certificates were placed in jobs.

More than two years after graduation, 25% were still employed and only five have been newly convicted. More than half, over 60% of the students experienced at least one grade level gain in reading and math. The students took these accomplishments with them, and although they may no longer be at their original place of post-training employment, we know they have not returned to the judicial system – a significant achievement not to be overlooked.

As part of their community activities, the students have assisted in the construction of 15 Habitat for Humanity homes, installed storm doors and built storage sheds. Currently, students are involved in the construction of the new women's vocational training building at the *Davidson County Drug Court*.

Unfortunately, due to lapsed funding and bureaucratic delays, HBI is in the process of closing this program. Announcements are currently pending from the Department of Labor regarding the possibility of prospective funding that may reopen and expand the program later this year.

Project TRADE/Pinellas, FL is a unique partnership with the Pinellas County Sheriff's Department in Florida established in 2006. Pinellas students use the PACT curriculum and receive their PACT certificates upon completing the program. However, the program is reserved for female offenders and is the only one of its kind.

Now in its second year, Project TRADE/Pinellas has enrolled 90 students and is currently training 18 women. This summer Sheriff Coats featured the program in a local cable network, showcasing his office's efforts to enhance the likelihood of successful reentry thanks to the skills learned through Project TRADE.

One such example is Tina, one of the program's first graduates who now works with a local independent electrical contracting company. She began her formal electrical apprenticeship in September. Tina continues to give to the program as a guest speaker for current students as well as in interviews with the local media. She was recognized at a recent graduation ceremony as a model Project TRADE graduate.

Project TRADE/Sheridan, IL has been the recipient of much attention as it has implemented an innovative treatment approach which includes a rigorous qualification process for inmates to be admitted to Sheridan and to be eligible to participate in vocational training. In August 2006, television cameras shadowed the visit by a team from California's Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation who were investigating ideas they could take back to aid in the reform efforts of their state's prison system.

Since Project TRADE/Sheridan opened its doors in 2004, 247 inmates have gone through the program, with 171 or 70% receiving their PACT certificates. Until now, HBI has not been responsible for placement of its graduates. Instead, placement responsibilities have been assigned to another contractor. Employment placement is scheduled to become a part of HBI's scope of activities at Sheridan in 2008.

Project TRADE/Colorado is funded by ComCor Inc., one of the largest community corrections companies in the country and accredited by the American Correctional Association. ComCor, Inc. is committed to the treatment of offenders and the enormous value of vocational training, particularly Project TRADE.

The Colorado Springs program trains 30 ex-offenders annually and has trained more than 300 for industry jobs in its 10-year history. Much of the hands-on training over the past three years has taken place on community projects at the local Head Start, the Silver Key Senior Center and ComCor, Inc.'s facility and other grassroots organizations with an estimated value of more than \$200,000. Project TRADE/Colorado has an 80% placement rate for its PACT graduates.

Conclusion

Although these programs are designed to serve the offender population, it is not uncommon to have ex-offenders enrolled in other HBI training programs serving veterans or the homeless. HBI works aggressively with all available resources to provide information, programming, and educational opportunities to those interested in starting a career in our industry. We know that if you have a skill and a pathway to a good, long-term career in an industry full of opportunities for hard workers, you are less likely to fall back into dangerous or criminal patterns. We know that if you give someone a job, he may quit tomorrow; if you teach them a skill, they will have it for a lifetime.

Together, industry and government must ensure that there are training programs available to train the one million new workers and to build the 18 million new homes that will be needed in the United States over the next decade. Programs such as the ones I've just described are key contributors to this goal and much more – they build self-esteem, they empower the participants and they can fundamentally change lives. Yet, so often we let them fade into oblivion only to eventually seek them out for reinvention once again.

The California group who visited the Sheridan Illinois Project TRADE made that very point – during the 1970s and 1980s it was their state that had model rehabilitation programs very similar to the one they were visiting in Illinois. Yet, they let them wither from neglect, in favor of punishment and leaving many offenders who could have benefited to go without training and skills to build a better life.

As you review the training and education programs that have made a difference, I hope that you will consider those I have shared with you today. HBI and its partners in the residential construction industry and the correctional system are convinced that our programs are making a difference in people's lives, on families and communities and hopefully, working to permanently remove our students from the rolls of the judicial system.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and members of the Subcommittee for your time and interest in our efforts.