

## WORKADVANCE:

## Paid Job-Skills Training Readies Entry-Level Workers

Gerald, a Youngstown-area resident, had moved through a series of low-wage jobs – until he participated in WorkAdvance, a job-skills training program adopted by the Mahoning Valley Manufacturers Coalition. Through WorkAdvance, he advanced to earn more than \$19 an hour plus overtime at Nordson Corporation's machining facility.

WorkAdvance provides career coaching, 100 hours of paid technical training along with ongoing support essential for a successful transition into an entry-level skilled manufacturing position. No experience is necessary to get started and there is no cost to participants – and they are paid during the program.

This approach helps potential employees overcome key barriers to entering the manufacturing workforce. "WorkAdvance really lays it all out for them and helps them navigate the transition into a manufacturing career," said Jessica Borza, Executive Director of MVMC. "Equally important, it gives them a paycheck while they are in training."

For MVMC, the first step involves working with an employer to understand requirements for entry-level and mid-skilled positions. MVMC then collaborates with its education partners to create customized training that gives participants the technical and soft skills they need to meet the employer's specific needs.

WorkAdvance can accommodate up to 12 participants in a class. A network of community partners takes a grassroots approach to recruitment, and participants from the first class made many referrals in the next round. "Our partners are key to helping us to get the word out about WorkAdvance. They can speak tangibly about the opportunity and lend credibility to the effort. Success stories put a face to the program that help others relate and see the possibilities of this life-changing program," said Borza.

The students participate in a two-week career readiness training program delivered by Mahoning-Youngstown Community Action Partnership (MYCAP) and Goodwill Industries. Then they advance to an eight-week manufacturing skills training at either Eastern Gateway Community College or a local career and technical center. Once they start working at the partner employer, they receive additional on-the-job training and up to 16 months additional career coaching. Coaches from a community-based organization work with the employer's frontline managers to ensure the participants get up to speed quickly and adapt to the new work environment.

During training, students earn \$10 an hour, paid by the manufacturer. Grants secured by MVMC in partnership with The Raymond John Wean Foundation cover the cost of the career readiness and skills training. Ohio Means Jobs helps to spread the word to potential applicants and provides reimbursements to the employer to offset its initial on-the-job training costs.

The initial results show that WorkAdvance fills an important need for employers. "This gives us an opportunity to find good, solid individuals who want to come to work every day and work hard," said Ashley Woloshak, a Nordson's human resources specialist. "You have to be dedicated to finish the training program, so I feel it's a huge test to their character and whether or not they'll be successful here."

Based on the initial success, MVMC is looking to expand to serve more manufacturers seeking skilled entry-level employees. "WorkAdvance is an important part of our strategy to help manufacturers secure the workforce they need for success and to get more people connected with good-paying manufacturing jobs," said Borza.



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