

The Workforce Development Board of Solano County matches skilled employees with local employers



Workforce Development Board of Solano County helps employers find the skilled workers they need while also helping job seekers find work—and better lives.

by Thea Marie Rood

Solano County residents who have barriers to employment can find themselves trapped in cycles of poverty, which can impact entire generations or entire neighborhoods. This is especially true for people who are considered “justice-involved”—meaning they have been arrested, convicted or served time in a county jail or state prison.

But a state-funded prison-to-employment program is designed to overcome those barriers and help give people a second chance. It also provides labor-strapped employers with skilled workers—and some financial incentives to hire them.

How does the program work? For job seekers, the emphasis is on getting them job-ready as quickly as possible, and some of that begins before they are released.

“I start working with a lot of them in their last three months (of their sentence),” says Nel Sweet Davis, an employability specialist/case manager for the **Workforce Development Board of Solano County**. “They are

coached while they are incarcerated and (some enter) pre-apprenticeship programs that are a stepping stone—they can earn a certificate and get job offers directly from labor unions upon release.”

In fact, a workforce board partner, **Center for Employment Opportunities**, helps support Davis’ work with inmates, and also offers immediate paid employment and work experience when people rejoin the community. This includes indoor and outdoor maintenance, beautification projects and jobs with CalTrans.

Davis meets other individuals, once they are paroled, in the office where she helps them take a hard look at job placement, write resumes and improve their digital literacy. She also can help people explain their past.

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*Nel Sweet Davis, employability specialist/caseworker
Workforce Development Board of Solano County*

“I had one young lady who got a job offer from a marketing company in San Francisco,” she recalls. When the employer notified her of a background check, she was honest, said something would likely come up on it, and she was willing to discuss it. “Based on that, they told her, ‘We want to put your past behind you and hire you.’”

The workforce board also works directly with employers, and Davis is happy to point out the benefits. “When I talk to employers, I tell them, ‘You’ll get a really good candidate—they are going to do everything they can to keep this job,’” Davis says, citing multiple examples of people she’s worked with who are deeply committed to changing their lives. “And if they have a job, they are stimulating the economy—but if they go back (to jail), it is costing society money.”

Other direct incentives for employers include Workforce Opportunity Tax credits, as well as On-the-Job Training that will pay 50% of an employee’s wages for up to six months. There is even a state-sponsored Fidelity Bonding Program that functions like an insurance policy if an employee is high-risk and the employer is worried they’ll take a loss of some kind.

Once a match is made, the workforce board stays involved. It will pay union fees for the new employee, as well as buy work boots and tools. Transportation—in the form of bus passes, gas cards or Uber fees—is covered for the

first month, as well as help with rent or utilities.

“If they can become productive members of society, it helps everyone—it helps your business,” she points out. “They want to change—we’ve just got to be willing to give them a chance.”

For more information, visit www.solanoemployment.org.

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