

EDG Bulletin Column

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BladeRunners Helps Youth Enter Workforce

Nanaimo employment agencies offer various services from job banks, self-employment programs, wage subsidies to retraining and more. Through one of its programs, Nanaimo Youth Services Association (NYSA), specializes in helping vulnerable youth who face multiple barriers to employment enter the workforce. By offering the BladeRunners program, NYSA is able to help clients access jobs in construction, currently the largest employment sector in Nanaimo. The ultimate goal of the program is to provide long term careers to those who wouldn't normally have the opportunity.

Since its inception in 1996, the primary focus of BladeRunners has been construction and trades, but the program has since evolved and now includes tourism & hospitality, retail, customer service, and security. Participants are offered four weeks of paid pre-employment training and two-weeks of work experience with a local company. A three-month wage subsidy is then available to the employer, as well as continued support for both parties. The success rate has been extraordinary: over 90% of participants graduate from the training and two thirds are still actively in the workforce after two years. According to Steve Arnett, Executive Director of NYSA, the support offered to youth is an imperative component of BladeRunners. "Many of our clients don't have a social support network. NYSA is their extended family at this point in their lives." He says that providing them with a positive group identity, support and encouragement are as vital to their success as a tool belt and safety training.

Doug and Dillon Haylock, brothers who have owned and operated Central Island Construction since 2005, can attest to the success of BladeRunners. Having started their company with two staff, they now have 16 full-time employees; three of which completed the BladeRunners program. They hire new staff from the program who have just received training in basic construction, site safety, problem-solving, basic arithmetic, as well as Workplace Hazardous Materials Information Systems (WHIMIS) and WorkSafe. According to Doug Haylock, the skills learned through the program have proved valuable on a safety-conscious construction site. The soft skills offered through the program are just as important. Haylock says that "attitude is half of it. If they have gone through the ABC's of the BladeRunners program we know they are committed and we will happily try them out." He is also happy to report that one employee hired by Central Island Construction will soon be entering an apprenticeship program at Vancouver Island University.

To access the program, youth aged 15 to 30 can arrange to meet with an employment counsellor through NYSA. While waiting for admittance into the program, they complete a return to work action plan and work towards personal goals. During the program, they receive relevant training and supplies which allows them to begin working immediately upon completion. Throughout the process, counsellors offer comprehensive support based on individual needs. To learn more about the program, contact Nanaimo Youth Services Association at 250-754-1989.