

DHS
MAKING AN
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STEP

SENIOR TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

The Senior Training and Employment Program (STEP) has been a successful program for several decades – for both older workers who are forced into early retirement without financial supports and for nonprofits struggling to meet increasing needs with reduced funding. But in today's depressed economy, STEP is invaluable.

Federally funded under the Older Americans Act, STEP benefits from employment and training providers in the DHS Office of Community Services as well as the resources of the Area Agency on Aging. In the last two years, we've seen the number of STEP participants grow by 25 percent and their hours of community service with nonprofits increase by 41 percent. We've recruited new host agencies, and our placement rates are on the rise.

I invite you to meet three grateful participants here – and to learn more about STEP by visiting the DHS website (www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/) or calling 412-350-4255. Non-profit organizations interested in becoming a host agency should call 412-350-6875 or 412-350-6809.



Marc Cherna
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Senior Training and Employment Program (STEP), like its counterpart programs across the country, offers training and job placement assistance to unemployed county residents over age 55 who meet income guidelines and have limited employment prospects. Participants are assigned to subsidized part-time positions in nonprofit organizations for training and job readiness before moving into unsubsidized jobs in the private or public sector.



“For me, STEP opened an important door, and I’ll always be grateful for that.”

-Katya

Being forced into early retirement can be devastating emotionally and financially. Katherine was almost 50 when she lost her job as a computer technician. An armed services veteran with more than 20 years of civilian work experience, she found herself in a depressed job market with limited opportunities for older workers – but more than a decade away from Social Security and Medicare.

For seven years, she struggled to survive on part-time unemployment compensation while exploring employment and training options through several nonprofit organizations, but nothing worked out.

As her bills piled up, she knew that she would lose her house if she didn’t find a full-time job soon.

Desperate, she turned to the Senior Training and Employment Program (STEP). Normally a new applicant would initially be placed in a minimum-wage “community service” position for job experience and training, but the intake counselor recognized that Katherine’s work history qualified

her for immediate placement in STEP’s part-time subsidized job-search program.

After four months of intensive job search and job search training, Katherine was confident that, with a little patience, she would find a position. She requested a transfer to the community work program to update her work skills. While there,

she was contacted for two interviews and, a month later, was hired for a county position as a Clerk Typist.

“STEP saved me *and* my house!” she says. In control once again of her personal finances, she has been able to help her aging parents and regain her own sense of security.

What’s more, as a Civil Service job, her new position offers a range of opportunities for future advancement within local government or through a transfer to the state system, if the right job turns up.



“STEP saved me *and* my house!”

-Katherine

When Natalie enrolled in STEP, it was clear that she made up in energy and enthusiasm for what she lacked in work experience, but that doesn't help much when jobs are scarce and the applicant is pushing 60. Her counselor, who discovered Natalie's commitment to education and to young people, placed her in a work experience slot as a tutor at a public elementary school in her neighborhood. Her "people skills" were evident immediately, and when she interviewed for a position as customer service representative in financial services, she was hired immediately — at a salary well above the minimum wage.

Natalie is delighted with her new job, but she hasn't forgotten her love for young people. She spends her free time with an outreach program in her community that guides youth toward education and a better life.

Katya emigrated some years ago from Russia, found a good job with a large local company, earned a degree in accounting from the University of Pittsburgh, and became a United States citizen. Her American dream, however, shattered when the recession brought layoffs to her company like many others. She found herself jobless and alone, too old to start a new career and too young for Social Security.

Then she heard about STEP. She enrolled immediately and was

assigned in June 2008 to the Reemployment Transition Center for job placement assistance. Within three months, she was working again — as a teller in a large local bank.

“Sometimes the ‘dream’ is not where you expect to find it,” Katya reflects. “For me, STEP opened an important door, and I'll always be grateful for that.”