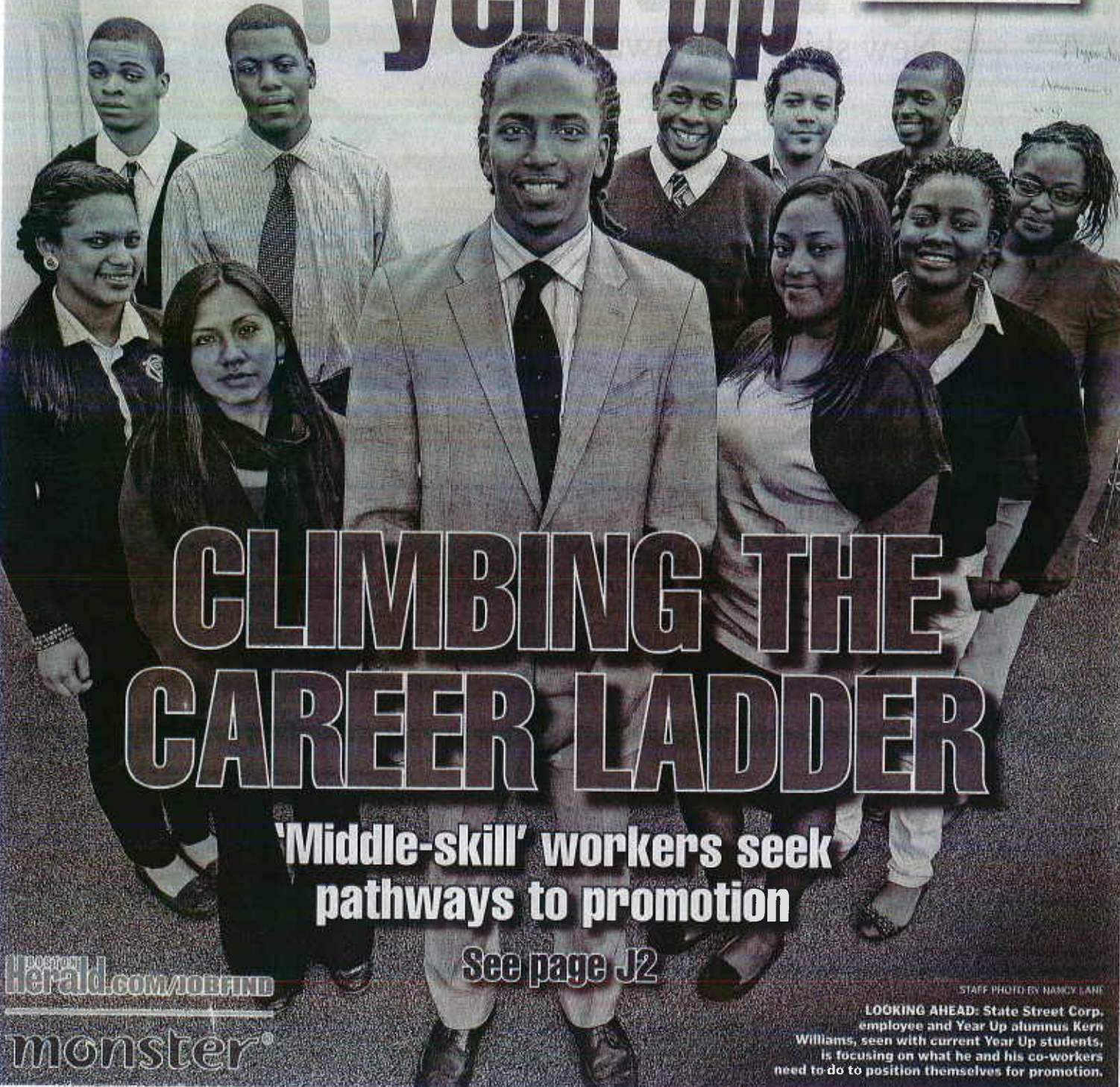


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CLIMBING THE CAREER LADDER

'Middle-skill' workers seek pathways to promotion

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LOOKING AHEAD: State Street Corp. employee and Year Up alumnus Kern Williams, seen with current Year Up students, is focusing on what he and his co-workers need to do to position themselves for promotion.

J2 Getting ahead with no college degree

By PAUL RESTUCCIA

New skills a pathway

Kern Williams already knows what it means to move up in life, having gone from being a gas station attendant in 2006 to a \$36,000-a-year fund accountant at State Street Corp. for the past 18 months.

But the 23-year-old Roslindale resident wants to move up the financial firm's career ladder and to that end has organized an affinity group of 45 other State Street employees who went through the Year Up training program that places low- and moderate-income neighborhood residents into financial services and IT jobs in major Boston banks and corporations. Its purpose is to help bridge the "opportunity divide" between those who go right to a four-year college and

those who don't.

"We are all looking at what we need to do to move up to the next level within the company, and what it will take for us to become managers" said Williams, a Boston board of directors member at Year Up, who is now attending the University of Massachusetts Boston part-time, hoping to eventually earn a bachelor's degree.

Williams holds what's called a "middle-skill" job, one that requires some kind of training beyond high school but not a college degree.

While Williams' job has decent pay and benefits, it has been difficult for him and his colleagues to climb the career ladder because

they lack college degrees.

"Our funding partner companies want a diverse workforce, but they also want these people to move up to managerial levels within the organization," said Casey Recuperero, executive director of Year Up, a Boston-based national nonprofit that has placed nearly 85 percent of its graduates in financial industry jobs. The rigorous 11-year-old program combines classroom learning, social skills and business etiquette along with six-month internships at companies such as State Street, American Express, Google and Microsoft.

Year Up has trained and

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STAFF PHOTO BY TED ANCHER

CAREER LADDER: Marcelene Juste, right, gets instruction from Mary Cronin at union Local 26's Hotel Training Center in Chinatown, which has helped her improve her career at the Fairmont Copley Plaza hotel.

J4 Focus shifts to 'career pathways'

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placed over 5,000 18- to 24-year-olds in companies in eight U.S. cities, with nearly 2,000 of those in Boston. And its career coaches are providing additional math-training skills and helping to steer its Hub alumni toward college degrees with the 18 college credits from Cambridge College that they earn from the program.

Private and public workforce training funders in the Bay State are now requiring other training programs to follow the successful model of Year Up by closely tracking graduates after they leave as well as employing career coaches to help people navigate the obstacles that prevent them from getting promotions.

This week the Massachusetts Legislature will hear a bill called the Middle Skills Solution Act, whose aim is

to increase coordination, collaboration and integration of training programs around the state to help people move more quickly through post-secondary education to further their careers. Work will involve getting transferable college credits for more certification training programs in the state that will get more workers on the college path. It will push for more partnering between businesses, community colleges and training centers.

The push for what is called "career pathways" is focusing on middle-skill jobs in places like hospitals, to train existing employees to get the education and certification they need to move up to a higher level.

Some organizations are already well on the way to doing this. Children's Hospital is spending \$160,000 for 16 employees to each take nine credits of college-

level courses in anatomy, physiology and pharmacology at the Mass. College of Pharmacy to prepare them to pass a difficult exam required to work with a soon-to-be-implemented new nationwide medical-coding system.

Dawn Boyd and Nicki Perdira both work as billers at Children's Hospital and both have high-school educations, but after completing the coursework and passing the exam, they will be promoted to medical coders, a higher-paying and more skilled position.

"If I were to go back to school on my own, I'd have to worry about the time and the money," said Perdira. "Now I only have to worry about the time."

Boyd added that she is eager for the "stimulating challenge" of learning the new 150,000-term medical-coding system.

To prepare these stu-

dents for the rigor of college coursework, Children's has partnered with the nonprofit Healthcare Training Institute run by training provider JVS, which works with a number of area hospitals to target training for existing employees.

"Our career-pathways training is designed around the specific job needs of hospitals," said Kira Khazatsky, the institute's health-care partnership director.

"What we're asking in return is a two-year commitment from the employees we're investing in," added Karen Schoch, manager of workforce development and training at Children's Hospital.

The "career pathways" focus has taken root among those who are funding workforce development



STAFF PHOTO BY NANCY LANE

MOVING AHEAD: Loh-Sze Leung, director of SkillWorks, tries to fund programs that give people additional training so they can get promoted.

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Union trains members to move up

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training, including the \$21 million raised every year for the state's workforce training fund, financed by a surcharge on employers' jobless insurance fees.

Funders are addressing criticism that a lot of workforce training has not delivered its intended results and that Bay State workers still lack the proper training.

"More businesses are seeing that they need to grow the talent of people inside their organizations and to do that, they need to work more closely with their training partners to tailor programs that fit their exact needs," said Nancy Snyder, president of Commonwealth Corp., a quasi-public agency that oversees the disbursement of the state's workforce development funds. "People who already fit in with the culture of the organization

are a natural choice."

The nonprofit SkillWorks, based at the Boston Foundation, funds training programs that help low- and moderate-income people get middle-skill jobs.

"Many middle-skill jobs now require more training and certification, so we are focused on helping people get the training that employers need and then working with businesses to retain the people they hire," said

Lob-Sze Leung, director of SkillWorks. "And we are also more closely tracking the training program outcomes to find out what works."

Not all middle-skill workers need to be on a college track to get better jobs within their organizations.

Best Corp., a hotel training center that's part of Unite Here Local 26, which represents unionized hotel workers, is also offering more in-house job training to help workers earn food

safety and alcohol-serving certifications.

Workers learn point-of-sale computer systems and get career coaching to advance in the hotel industry. There are five levels of English for Hospitality training to help workers get better-paying positions where they interact with hotel guests.

Mercelene Juste, 50, a Haitian immigrant who started as a housekeeper at the Fairmont Copley Plaza hotel in 2006, has moved up to steward, food runner and now currently stocks the bar at the Oak Room.

While younger workers such as Jean Smaille Paul and Huling Chen have just taken room attendant training to help land hotel housekeeping jobs, Juste said the physical demands of cleaning rooms is more difficult for an older worker.

"The training opportunities have made a big difference in staying in the hotel industry as I get older,"

said Juste.

Hotel workers get free training in culinary skills to become prep chefs or line cooks, train in guest services to get front-of-the-house positions or take food server training. Training provides hotel operators with workers who

have the needed skills, and climbing up the hotel career ladder can mean significant pay increases for workers. While housekeepers start at \$16.23 an hour, those who go through food server training can make \$65,000 a year as full-time banquet servers.

"Not every worker wants to or needs to be on the college track to succeed," said Brian Lang, head of Local 26. "With the job-training center we operate, hotel workers can move up the ladder, earn decent salaries with great benefits, and make careers in the hospitality industry."



STAFF PHOTO BY TED ANCHER
LEARNING UP: Students Jean Smaille Paul, left, and Huling Chen have taken the room-attendant training program with Boston's Local 26 Hotel Training Center.

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