

Good Morning Senators,

My name is Brian Inbody and I am President of Neosho County Community College. Thank you for this opportunity to present Partners in Change (PiC), a pre-employment training program for the chronically unemployed. Before I begin, let me first state, as their spokesperson, that Neosho County Community College has no opinion on the underlying bill. We do, however, have a strong opinion on workplace skills training.

Several years ago employers in our service area came to NCCC with a problem. Problem: an inadequate number of potential employees. While there is a sufficient population base for employment, many of those who were unemployed did not have the necessary skills or work ethic. Many lacked rudimentary communication skills, and even an understanding of basic workplace expectations such as hygiene and appearance. Some had never held a steady job of any length. These residents were caught in the vicious cycle of second- and third-generation poverty. Simply put, they were unemployable.

Social services were equally frustrated with this group of citizens who they could not successfully place in a job, nor remove from public assistance no matter how hard they tried.

Employers, area social services and Neosho County Community College, came together to see what could be done. In 1999 they launched Partners in Change. Here are the results. By August 2001, 200 participants were served. Of those 56% were placed into employment and 32% continued their education. Of that 200, 39% no longer needed Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) "cash" assistance.

Citizens of Kansas referred to PiC for assistance came from KansasWorks, Kansas Department of Corrections and Social and Rehabilitation Services (now called Department of Children and Families). People on probation or parole, those that could not be placed with a job, and those who lacked self-worth were referred to this program. PiC works best when there are real consequences for not successfully completing the program. Some lost cash assistance and some went back to jail for failure to try.

Partners in Change is based on a novel approach. It works on the theory that work ethic is like a muscle. When work ethic is not used regularly it atrophies quickly. You may have felt this yourself after a long vacation. Sometimes it is hard to go back on Monday morning. What if that vacation lasted months or even years? How hard would it be to go back to work then? What if you never held down a steady job? This is why this six-week program starts as only two hours a day and ramps up to eight hour sessions, so that participants slowly get used to the time required to hold a fulltime job.

The first three weeks of the program focuses on the participant's attitude, goals, responsibilities and life management. The second half deals with direct employability skills such as job expectations, communication, teamwork, computer literacy, and workplace math. The program ends with resume writing, and mock interviews with local employers. Some of these mock interviews have ended with real jobs being offered.

This program is coordinated with Adult Basic Education and with the College's offerings so that a graduate of PiC can go on to earn a GED or take workforce classes such as welding, certified nurse's assistant, or construction.

The pilot program ended in 2006 due to the termination of the welfare to work program. In recent years employers have once again come forward to ask that the program be reinstated. We have been able to get four classes up and running again since summer 2012 using a variety of funding sources.

What might surprise you is the cost of Partners in Change. We are able to offer this life-changing program for about \$750-\$1000 per participant. The classes are limited to 15 participants. We will lose some along the way, because this program has high standards. But those who make it will be changed.

What is equally surprising is the transformation that many of the participants go through in the course of six short weeks. I have seen individuals who lacked all self-worth gain a new sense of personal pride and purpose. I have watched recent hard-as-nails parolees with tears in their eyes realizing that they can make a better life for themselves and their families, thereby breaking a cycle of poverty. Employers have expressed appreciation for helping them find the people they need to get the job done.

Partners in Change is not a cure all, but it can help. It can help turn tax consumers into tax payers, help businesses find the workforce they need locally, help the unemployable have self-worth and purpose, and help break the cycle of poverty.

Thank you for listening and I will be happy to answer your questions.

Respectfully submitted February 20th, 2012.