

A R.E.A.C.H. That's Within Our Grasp

For the people at Goodwill Toronto, tackling tough problems head-on is simply what they do. So when Mayor David Miller called for the community to help curb violence in the city by creating employment opportunities for at-risk youth in vulnerable neighbourhoods, Goodwill was among the first to respond with R.E.A.C.H. – Real Employment to Achieve Community Health.

“This is an exciting initiative for us,” says Mitzie Hunter, Goodwill’s vice president of marketing. “For the past 70 years, we have been providing opportunities for those who face challenges with respect to employment. With R.E.A.C.H., we are creating 100 new paid jobs that will give 16-to-29 year-olds real skills and experience – a chance to learn by doing.”

Goodwill’s program allows young people to spend up to a year there, gaining work experience and developing skills that raise their self-esteem and improve their employability. Then, the young employees can go on to find jobs in the mainstream workforce or continue their education at a post-secondary institution. George Brown College has actually partnered with Goodwill to develop a special curriculum and provide a direct and formal link for the R.E.A.C.H. participants.

After the program, Goodwill will continue to help the new

Goodwill’s program allows young people to spend up to a year with them, gaining work experience, developing job, life and interpersonal skills.

trainees adapt to the work world and act as a liaison for the employer. “We mitigate the risk for the employer by getting these young people ready for work,” says Hunter. “For many of them, Goodwill will be their first paycheque, their first experience with work responsibility. Success becomes possible when employers interview and select young people who are working and learning in the Goodwill context. A bit of assistance makes it more likely that they will keep that job, getting off on the right foot to long-term self-sufficiency.”

Hunter explains that there’s a power that comes with being responsibly employed. “Research shows that work has a major effect on our lives,” she says. “It connects us to our community, giving us a sense of purpose, self-esteem, opportunities for growth and perhaps most important of all, the chance to develop relationships.”

Goodwill has set a considerable challenge for itself beyond those first



Toronto Mayor David Miller greets employee Gloria Aquino last fall at the launch of Goodwill's new youth employment initiative, R.E.A.C.H.

100 R.E.A.C.H. jobs. “It’s going to take a significant investment to meet our goal of creating 1,000 transitional employment positions annually by 2010,” says Hunter. “Like most non-profit organizations, we don’t have as much financing as we’d like for this employment program. So we are fundraising and seeking support from government, community and corporate partners.” With backing from the Board of Trade and our members, Hunter and her co-workers are reaching out to the business community, looking for companies who share their concern and are willing to help.

“We encourage our corporate partners to open their minds and doors to young people and create employment opportunities within their own organizations,” Hunter continues. “Goodwill has the model and would be happy to share our methods and learning with others. We are looking to develop relationships with employers who are willing to give these young people a real chance – that important first interview and entry-level job opportunity.” **on**

If you are one of those special companies that can support Goodwill in making a difference to our city – or just one life – visit www.goodwill.on.ca, or call Mitzie Hunter at 416 815 4751.



Mayor David Miller and Dr. Ken Connelly, president and CEO of Goodwill Toronto, challenge the Toronto community to create more opportunities for youth by supporting Goodwill’s efforts to create 100 jobs.