



## A Job Tree Grows in Brooklyn

One of the most controversial provisions of last year's welfare reform is the denial of government social services to legal immigrants who aren't citizens. The new law bars noncitizens from receiving food stamps until they become citizens or have worked in America for at least 10 years. In the future, legal immigrants will be denied most benefits and social services during their first five years of residence. These provisions reflect a new consensus on immigration policy: America should be open to foreigners who come here for an opportunity to work, not for welfare. But critics say that denying social services will hurt the communities where immigrants live.

A job-training program run by a Catholic priest in Brooklyn shows how private programs can equip immigrants to become self-sufficient. Called Resources, the program takes English-illiterate immigrants from China, El Salvador, and the former Soviet Republics, as well as refugees from Haiti and elsewhere, and turns them into successful, English-speaking chefs, professional cleaners, and graphic designers. The program's success in training and placing immigrants in well-paying jobs—all without government assistance—could help shift the immigration debate from the language of exclusion to that of empowerment.

### Modern-Day Sweatshops

It all started with a wrong turn. Father Ronald T. Marino worked for 15 years at the Catholic Migration Office in New York, but had never confronted the problem of immigrant employment. On a sweltering day in July 1994, however, he found he couldn't avoid it. While scouting for used office furniture in a building on Brooklyn's 65th Street, Marino stumbled upon a room overflowing with perhaps 150 women and children, most of

them Chinese. They were sewing, and all the windows were painted over to hide their existence from outsiders.

Marino demanded an explanation from the manager, seated in his air-conditioned office. He was promptly escorted to the door. Marino realized he had stumbled upon a nest of illegal immigrants working in a sweatshop. "The church has to do something about this," the Catholic priest recalls thinking. "At that moment, I started to get obsessed with the work issue for immigrants."

Two years later, Marino directs one of the most innovative and successful job-training programs for immigrants in Brooklyn. His Resources program has helped about 100 men and women—many with no work experience and no English-speaking ability—to become literate and qualify for good-paying jobs. If the passport to economic independence is effective job-training, Marino is the sort of man you want stamping the papers: He trains immigrants in one of three non-profit businesses owned by Resources. About 98 percent of his graduates are employed and off the welfare rolls.

Finding the right training formula took some undercover work. Marino posed as a man in search of a career change to see how government job-training programs worked. He found they were both costly and ineffective. Vocational schools taught some skills, but the participants were still virtually unemployable. The programs were rewarded with subsidies for keeping

large numbers of participants in training, but not for placing them in jobs. Neither were they penalized for failing to make the trainees marketable.

Marino told the *Washington Times*, "The people running the programs would say to me, off the record, that I as an American who could speak the language so well stood a pretty good chance of getting a job, but that these immigrants basically had no hope."

The clergyman drafted a proposal for an employment training program and distributed 20 copies. Nineteen business people who received it said he was crazed. One copy went to his bishop, who encouraged him. That was enough.

Marino went on a speaking tour in

**A Catholic priest runs a job-training program to help non-English-speaking immigrants become self-sufficient.**

Italy, where he shared his vision with a group of Italian businessmen. In gratitude for what America has given Italian immigrants, the businessmen offered him \$50,000 for the program, stipulating only that the money aid other nationalities as well. Marino launched Resources in 1994 with this seed money, and has since received no funds from either the government or the diocese, although both have been offered. The successful training program owns the businesses where its trainees work, and their work helps fund the program. It is now nearly self-supporting, grossing almost \$500,000 in 1996.

### Five Principles

The Resources concept has been honed to five tenets:

- Require proficiency in English and provide instruction to those trainees who need it;
- Teach a trade through both hands-on training and classroom instruction;
- Strengthen the character of participants; teach the dignity of excellence in work;
- Create companies to employ the trainees;

by Barbara von der Heydt

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◦ Help graduates gain clients within the community, ultimately launching them in their own businesses.

Besides its entrepreneurial focus, Resources is distinguished from other programs by its underlying philosophy. A summary graces the stairway to the group's offices: "The aim of work is not the work itself, but rather it is man." The words are those of Pope John Paul II, from the encyclical on "Human Work" (1980). They reflect the modern Catholic understanding that honest work—whatever it may be—has an ennobling effect on the human spirit. This is because work encourages the virtues of discipline, cooperation, honesty—all essential to fostering the dignity of the worker.

"I try to communicate an attitude toward work to the participants," says Michael A. Campo, a job trainer and manager with Resources. "The attitude is very important. Some think work is what you do for a wage, but it is far more. The feeling in the heart comes first before the technical procedures. If you put your heart into your work, and do whatever you do well, it's contagious."

When Dave Ali arrived in America from Trinidad, he did not know how to turn on a computer. Now, after two and a half years in the program, he is a full-time assistant in computer graphics at Resources. "I'm very excited about it," he says. "I never knew I had any artistic talent, but they put a lot of effort into teaching me. Now I help other people discover their own ideas."

Trainees are tested in their English ability, and are required to take remedial English until they demonstrate proficiency. As Marino explains, "If you're serious about living and working here, you have to be able to understand a supervisor's instructions in English." Trainees attend one of 30 English schools run by the Catholic Migration offices in Brooklyn and Queens.

Once they learn enough English, immigrants get professional training in one of the three businesses run by Resources: commercial cleaning, computer graphics, or culinary arts. If they pick professional cleaning, they receive 100 hours of instruction. For graphics and culinary arts, students get three semesters of instruction totaling 300 hours. Then they receive on-the-job

training through an apprenticeship.

Participants pay \$400 per semester, either in advance or from their salaries. This is not the make-work approach of many government job-training efforts. The clients of Resources Graphic Design have included Italian fashion designer Max Mara and Telesoft USA, a global telecommunications company. Professional Cleaning did more than \$130,000 worth of business in its first year alone.

### How It Works

Here's the nuts and bolts: After completing the training and apprenticeship, worker get a company uniform and joins a supervised team at a work site, earning from \$7 to \$10 per hour. At the end of the first year, these



**From immigrants to gourmet chefs: These two Resources trainees cook up a storm.**

workers are invited back to be trained as supervisors making at least \$10 an hour. Supervisors are taught to manage a crew, handle employee problems, order supplies, and deal effectively with customers. Each such promotion frees up a work space for a newly graduated student.

Supervisors can then be trained as managers, who are responsible for bidding on new contracts, ascertaining the needs of customers, obtaining machinery and chemicals, and dispensing work crews. In the final step, Resources will invite a small group of competent managers to form their own small business and award them two Resources

contracts to get started.

Students of culinary arts are given 200 hours of sophisticated instruction. Then they are ready to apprentice in a real restaurant. Restaurateurs are each asked to contribute \$1,000 toward a scholarship for a student; in return, they receive that student's services for a semester. In this way the student learns on-site from a professional chef. Many are offered a permanent position with their sponsor after graduation. All of the students who have graduated from the culinary-arts program are now gainfully employed.

The Resources program effectively combines job training with job creation: Most of its graduates work in businesses owned by Resources. The local business community and Catholic parishes and schools in the diocese are regular clients for cleaning and graphics services. Local businesses and printing shops that cannot afford in-house graphics staff also contract with Resources, as do parishes and schools. Churches in need of cleaning but short on staff and cash have found a godsend. Catering is the next planned expansion.

### An Alternative to Welfare

Marino's concept was designed to help immigrants, but it could address a bigger problem—the welfare caseload. The basic strengths of the model—teaching not only marketable skills but also the inherent value of work and vocation—are in urgent demand among welfare recipients. As the work requirements of welfare reform take effect, politicians will be especially anxious to create jobs and job-training programs. They had better start looking at what works.

Marino likes to reflect on the purpose of work—and of life—and how his program helps to strengthen the character of immigrants and those who are working with them. Because poverty is a moral issue as well as an economic one, he believes, those who empower the needy to live in dignity and provide for their families reap spiritual fruits for themselves. "We are made in the image of Christ," Marino says. "In order for me to find my dignity, I need to help you find yours. If you serve Christ, you see Him in the person you serve. You discover your own dignity in seeing Him in others."

# Triumphs & Traps

*What's Ahead for  
Conservatives*



All illustrations by David Clark