

News

Students Prepare for Life and Career at Grafton Job Corps

As seen in the Community Advocate

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A student hard at work.

Grafton – As some students busied themselves with projects in a bright classroom, others soaked up the noonday sun at picnic tables or played a round of ping pong in the recreation center during their lunch break. A Friday morning at the Grafton Job Corps is like being at any school – except that the students are not just in classrooms studying English and math; they are learning and practicing tangible skills that will directly prepare them for a career.

The mission of the Grafton Job Corps, a federally funded program administered by the U.S. Department of Labor, is to educate and train young people to enter the work world and to gain career and social skills to build a career.

While the Job Corps nationwide enrolls more than 60,000 students between the ages of 16 and 24, the Grafton center is contracted to serve 237 students at a given time.

Center Director Colleen Lanza said that the center is a great partner with the town of Grafton. In addition to their training, students participate in community service projects throughout Grafton and surrounding communities.

Lanza first became involved in the Job Corps about 10 years ago when she worked as a career counselor at the Shriver Job Corps site in Devens. When she transferred to Grafton, Lanza served as the social development director where she oversaw campus security, residential living, recreational services and student government, until she assumed her new role in April 2015.

“I love seeing students become independent,” she said.

Another favorite part of her job is graduation day.

“By far that is the most rewarding piece of my career,” Lanza said.

The Grafton site holds about two to three graduations per year, and many students are the first in their family to either receive a high school diploma or to plan to attend college.

The center offers 10 career technical training programs, including culinary arts, facilities maintenance, plumbing, advanced human services worker, security protective services, health occupations, clinical medical assistant, electrical wiring, medical office support and carpentry.

All graduates receive nationally recognized certifications.

One aspect that makes the Grafton Center unique is its location: academic buildings, dormitories and workshop space are dispersed on close to 70 acres of property in North Grafton, within walking distance of the commuter rail.

Its proximity to Worcester is beneficial; job and work-based learning opportunities are abundant in addition to the support services.

In addition to classes and extracurricular activities, the center has a softball field which is used for staff-student games, and a soccer field. There is a full gymnasium with weightlifting equipment and a game room.

The majority of the students live on campus in dormitories, which is convenient since there are also training classes held in the evening, such as courses on leadership, first aid, CPR, financial education, drivers' education, and counseling and social groups.

The center offers a "self-paced program" which means that the length varies based on the training program and whether or not the student has a high school diploma. Students all have different backgrounds; for some, English is their second language, while others have completed a semester of college.

Once students have earned their certificates, career staff help them transition to their next step, whether that is placing them into jobs, entering college or joining the military.

Work-based learning is woven into all the training programs with onsite and offsite internships. Some of the onsite internships include positions in protective services, reception, and maintenance and food service departments, making "students a key part of our function here," Lanza said.

For every trade offered, students partake in offsite internships at sites around the community.

Lanza cited the most challenging part of her job as ensuring that applicants know what to expect, as the Job Corps is not suited for everyone.

"We have high standards for student behavior and high expectations and we stand by those," she said.



The Grafton Job Corps recently scored highest in the region on the safety and student satisfaction survey that is administered to students twice a year.

“We are very lucky as a Job Corps center to have the relationship that we have with the local community. Grafton really has welcomed us into the community,” Lanza said.