

OAKLAND POST

“Where there is no vision the people will perish...” Proverbs 29:18

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Leadership Excellence, Youth Jobs

By [admin](#) on September 25, 2009

By Post Staff Part 8 of Series

For Johnell Gardner, a summer job at Leadership Excellence in Oakland, where he is helping to set-up a youth run eco-janitorial company, has not only meant money in his pocket but an important step toward realizing his dreams.

“This is helping me to grow – I want to get my janitorial license, to own a janitorial company and have my own business,” said Gardner, 24, an alumnus of Skyline High School.

About 35 young people are working at Leadership Excellence at a variety of summer placements scheduled to end Sept. 30. Some are working to establish the new green janitorial service, learning all aspects of business development, including marketing, bookkeeping, business licensing and regulations, accounts payable and receivables, logo creation and use of environmental friendly chemicals and maintenance techniques.

Other job placements include Cold Stone Creamery in Emeryville; Critical Mass Health Conductors, where they work as health educators in a community health project run in partnership with Bay Area Black United Fund; Urban Hieroglyphics, a local community art program; and Community Organizing through Radical Empowerment (C.O.R.E), which promotes community organizing and service learning. Leadership Excellence has received federal stimulus funding to pay the youth through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, overseen by the Oakland Workforce Investment Board (WIB).

This year's summer jobs program has provided work for nearly 1,100 Oakland youth, ages 14 to 24. Leadership Excellence is one of the 13 organizations selected to be part of the program by the WIB, which is composed of local, business, labor, education and community leaders. The Oakland Private Industry Council has administered the program on behalf of the WIB.

Led by Executive Director Saleem Shakir, Leadership Excellence runs a variety of programs, all designed to educate African American youth for personal growth and social change.

"We are very grassroots – we work within our community," said Shakir. "We're working to empower young people to become full citizens in our society. You have to know yourself to be able to interact fully with people of different backgrounds."

Leadership Excellence's community service, cultural and consciousness raising programs include Camp Akili, an annual summer camp for high school youth; Oakland Freedom School, a youth literacy program that utilizes works of African and African American authors and an interactive approach to teaching reading; SOLO (Sisters Overcoming Life's Obstacles) for adolescent women and MECCA (Men Educating Culturally Competent Africans) for adolescent men, which support the teenagers in confronting the complex transition to adulthood.

The organization also takes a group of youth every two years to West Africa, where they are involved in community service projects and cultural exchange.

"Historically, we have been involved in youth development and leadership. It became clear in the last four or five years that young people have a need for income, and we have become more focused on job training and job placement," Shakir said.

Leadership Excellence was founded in 1989 by Dr. Shawn Ginwright, sociologist and author, and Nedra Ginwright, who promoted the agency as a national model for serving urban youth.

For more information on Leadership Excellence, call (510) 267-9770 or go to www.leadershipexcellence.org.