

Training center gets people work, teaches new skills

December 2, 2009

Article By: Joshua DeLung

Tracy Workley thought she had a pretty secure job when she worked as a city inspector for Shaker Heights, a city in the suburbs east of Cleveland, but in October 2008, she was laid off as the economy slumped and the city cut back.

"I was nervous that I was going to start losing things I owned," Tracy says about her period of unemployment. "I was eating my savings and trying to pay bills."

She drew unemployment until February when the Recovery Act passed and was soon hired as a part-time regional trainer by the Corporation for Ohio Appalachian Development. As a nonprofit organization comprising 17 community action agencies involved in weatherization, the group needed help meeting training demands brought on by increased funding for weatherization created by the stimulus.

Now, after excelling as a trainer, COAD has selected Tracy to manage a new training facility slated to open soon in Cleveland. Her new job will be full-time with benefits.

"It's been phenomenal, and I'm looking forward to the challenge and a chance to use my brain even more," she says. "It's important to have healthcare and retirement, and it's been a blessing to finally feel a little job security again after floating out there scared."

Tracy says she really enjoys shedding light on weatherization projects for her promising students. It makes her feel good that her students "aren't just throwing insulation into an attic and walking away."

"I appreciate that at the end of my trainings, people look at me in amazement instead of with blank looks on their faces," she says.

COAD's existing training center has been the primary provider of weatherization training in Ohio since 1981, and, according to the group, it's been awarded \$3.5 million for a 24-month period to help train all weatherization providers in the state, something training center manager Nikki Morris is very proud of.

"It's a fairly daunting task, but we've been able to get out in front of it very successfully because we had a lot of experience doing this already," Nikki says. Fortunately, COAD had the networks and the organizational structure in place, and the Recovery money has allowed her to hire more trainers and an administrative assistant.

Ohio's training program is so successful that other states are requesting COAD's help in training their state's trainers.

COAD has met the needs of its own network, Nikki says, and is beginning to reach out and collaborate with training programs elsewhere and help them meet their needs, she says. "That's a feather in Ohio's cap for sure. We can succeed as a state and still fail as a nation — but that's not a word that's on my radar."

Last year, before the Recovery Act, COAD interacted with more than 730 students, according to the group. This year, it plans to quadruple that number.

Tracy says she's excited to do what she loves and to share it with even more people now.

"I've always come back to weatherization because I appreciate what we do, why we do it and how we do it," she says. "We're saving people money, and it lowers our bills too in the long run. I've always stood by this work, and I have a big loyalty to it. Now we have even more folks in the country who really understand it."