

Year Up: Closing the Opportunity Divide

Written by Editors

Thursday, 08 November 2012 21:32

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What does Johns Hopkins University, Morgan Stanley, Baltimore City Community College and professional staffing agency, Aerotek, have in common? The answer is Year Up Baltimore. These high-profile businesses and organizations are partners in an innovative training program that provides hand-on skill development, college credits and corporate internship to young adults between the ages of 18 and 24.



Baltimore is part of the national Year Up initiative. Founded by Gerald Chertavian, Year Up was created to close what he calls the “opportunity divide” that limits financial success for low income, urban students. Since its opening in 2000, the Boston-based organization has partnered with over 200 major corporations, served over 4,000 students and expanded to Atlanta, Chicago, New York, Providence, San Francisco and Seattle.

Smart companies put a premium on critical thinking and problem solving skills, teamwork and communication, says Chertavian. Year Up’s education/training program meets that need by preparing students for entry-level jobs in technology and finance. The first six months focuses on technical and professional skill building, while the second six months focuses on applying these skills through corporate internships. Students also earn up to 18 college credits.

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Established in 2010, Baltimore is home to the first Year Up community college-based program. The Baltimore City Community College Liberty Heights campus serves an estimated 64 young adults, providing support services such as tutoring, library access, mentoring. Plans are to replicate the Baltimore model at Year Up's around the country.

Chertavian's commitment to working with urban youth spans more than 25 years. He has actively participated in the Big Brother mentoring program since 1985. He is the recipient of the 2003 Social Entrepreneurship Award by the Manhattan Institute and the 2005 Freedom House Archie R. Williams, Jr. Technology Award. In 2008, he was appointed to serve on the Massachusetts State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

He earned a B.A. in Economics, graduated Phi Beta Kappa, summa cum laude, from Bowdoin College and an M.B.A., with honors, from Harvard Business School. He is on the Board of Advisors for the Harvard Business School Social Enterprise Initiative, a former board member of The Boston Foundation and an Emeritus Trustee of Bowdoin College. His 2012 book, *A Year Up*, was a New York Times best seller.

With a business career that began on Wall Street as an officer of the Chemical Banking Corporation, Chertavian co-founded Conduit Communications and fostered its growth to more than \$20 million in annual revenues and more than 130 employees in London, Amsterdam, New York and Boston. After he sold the company in 1999, he turned his full attention to creating opportunities for others.

When asked to define the elements necessary for Year Up's success Chertavian replied: "The most critical aspects of our program are threefold. First, we focus heavily on what we call 'ABCs,' or attitudinal and behavioral communication skills, and ensure that our young adults are prepared to enter into some very rigorous knowledge-based environments like the LinkedIns, the Googles, or the J.P. Morgans.

We focus very heavily on what some people call the "soft skills" or non-cognitive skills, and we are very good at preparing young adults for those professional environments. Second, we are well connected to those employers and both understand their needs and are able to satisfy those needs with pre-trained, pre-screened, entry-level talent.

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Third, we practice a combination of what we call ‘high support’ and ‘high expectation,’ which is all about ensuring that we provide our young adults with the social and emotional support that they need, while also holding them highly accountable to meet the standards we know they will have to meet in order to be successful in corporate America.”

The future of Year Up Baltimore looks bright. According to statistics from established sites, 84 percent of alumni are employed or attending school full-time within four months of graduating, earning an average wage of \$15/hour (\$30,000/year for full-time employees).

One hundred percent of qualified students have been placed into internships, and 95 percent of interns meet or exceed partner expectations.

For information about Year Up admissions, partners, making a donation, alumni services and volunteer opportunities in Baltimore, contact: Lameteria D. Hall, Site Director at: lhall@yearup.org or call 410-462-7732.

Jayne Matthews-Hopson is a writer and academic advocate. Education Matters because “only the educated are free.” Your thoughts, comments and suggestions are welcomed at: www.baltimoretimes-online.com.