

North@Work employment collaboration targets black men in north Mpls.

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Marcel Urman, Emerge workforce coordinator; Tawanna Black, CEO of Northside Funders Group, and Mike Wynne, CEO of Emerge, are key players in an initiative to train and place 2,000 black men from north Minneapolis in living-wage jobs.





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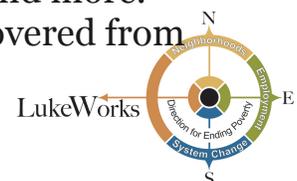
A 25-man group will be the first to take part in a pilot program that North@Work launched this month. The plan is for 400 men to be participating by the end of 2017, working toward a goal of 2,000 men in living-wage jobs by the end of 2020.

“This is a collaborative effort with [nonprofit and business] partners that hasn't previously been done,” said Kevin Murray, a business veteran who heads workforce development for the Northside Funders Group, an umbrella group for funding and training partners to form the consolidated North@Work initiative. “We're going to disrupt the current model ... with North@Work. Our partners are excited. We know their experience and expertise, and they will help North@Work gain traction ... one man, one relationship at a time.

The Northside Funders are about 20 foundations, government and businesses that invest collectively up to \$17 million annually into dozens of North Side nonprofits. They are not satisfied with the current overall job-training, placement and retention results. It's estimated that 50 percent of black men in north Minneapolis, also the lowest-income neighborhoods in the Twin Cities, are out of work.

The funders hired Tawanna Black, a veteran of industry and foundations, in 2014 to assess the reasons for the much-discussed opportunity-and-employment gaps among black men and determine what works. That included discussions with the unemployed who had been through previous job training, counselors, employers and others. Black and North@Work identified “six essential workforce innovations” that will wrap around trainees and be delivered by venerable community nonprofits that have the good track records of success.

Black said the concentrated initiative will move beyond traditional job training to personal empowerment, soft skills, coaching and more. Many of these men were poor students, and have not recovered from



previous job losses. Some have criminal backgrounds.

“It’s not just about learning how to use a computer,” Black said. “Many of them in interviews took us back to when they were 10 and a parent died, or went to prison, or there was no job ... and they weren’t doing well in school and adults in their lives weren’t thriving and that does something to a child.”

North@Work will slowly scale up the number of trainees with select nonprofit partners.

For example, the Minneapolis Urban League will help recruit trainees as well as engage mentors, faith leaders and others to support participants who haven’t succeeded in earlier programs. Emerge, which provides employment training, job certification, financial education and supportive transitional housing to about 2,500 annually, specializes in understanding trainee strengths, coaching and job- training placement. Dunwoody College of Technology will be one of the key technical-skills trainers. It will place graduates in health care, automotive technology and construction.

Common Sense Consulting at Work will work with hiring companies and job recruits from North@Work to ensure long-term fits.

Twin Cities Rise, which is known for producing self-empowered trainees who accept consequences for decisions, will work with all the men individually and through peer groups and with graduates on life-management, workplace behavior and personal growth.

“We’re talking about a [job-hungry] Twin Cities economy and we need all hands on deck,” said CEO Mike Wynne of Emerge. “What’s encouraging is the set of focused resources coming together on the same page for worker training. That’s crucial ... drawing on what we know works best and how to support individual men with comprehensive support.”

Neal St. Anthony has been a business columnist and reporter for the Star Tribune for 30 years. He also has worked in financial communications for two publicly held companies.
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