

# Burlington Free Press

## TRAINING AND A LITTLE BIT MORE

Stipends light a fire under ReCycle North's trainees

By Joel Banner Baird  
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It runs like a charm, but Missy Prouty will not keep the clothes dryer she helped repair last week at ReCycle North.

Money's tight for the trainee, and so is space: Prouty, 36, shares a one-room motel apartment in Shelburne with her three children.

Part of that equation is already changing.



In December, the Burlington nonprofit received two grants totaling \$110,000 from Jane's Trust and the Vermont Community Foundation to support and expand apprentice-style learning programs.

In mid-January, Prouty and her fellow trainee, Joey Dunbar, 38, of Burlington received their first stipend checks: \$216 each, for two 30-hour weeks.

"It helps. Every little bit does," said Prouty, who has been homeless for three years, taking seasonal work at Vermont Teddy Bear Co.

The trainees car pool twice a week to a three-hour evening class at Essex Technical Center.

By next month, both will have earned state certification in the repair and maintenance of natural gas appliances.

When they graduate from the program, they'll have earned much more than a certificate and a modest bump in their checking accounts, said Debbie Sheldon, director of human resources and training at ReCycle North.

"We do mock job interviews here. We work on resume-writing and team-building -- along with their regular work," she said. The stipend gives them a little more security; another reason to stick it out.

"You're out of work and you're learning a new job skill," she continued. "How do you pay for transportation and books?"

Job placement in an economy hungry for skilled tradesmen is a powerful lure. Referrals come from various social services agencies and, in Dunbar's case, agencies aiming to ease a person's transition from correctional facilities to gainful employment.

Sheldon said she plans to offer stipends to 36 applicants during the next two years for training in appliance repair, customer service and retail management, computer systems technology and office administration.

Not every trainee that walks through the door scores a stipend.

"These are merit-based awards," she said. "Do they pitch in and help or do they hang around the water cooler? We evaluate trainees' performance on a daily basis. We don't want to graduate someone we can't recommend."

Sheldon said she's proud of Prouty's progress.

Prouty said she's confident she is on the right track.

"The kids don't like it too much because I'm not always there for them," she said, "and when you have a place that small, there's going to be fights. But I know my kids aren't going to live if I don't do what needs to be done. Family comes before everything.

"That's why I'm doing this," she added. "I hate being the way I am. I really do. I just have to suck it up and work hard."

Prouty volunteered her time as a trainee at ReCycle North before she earned money for her efforts. It was time enough to find a stereotype-defying niche.

"I'm not one of those girls who freaks out when they get a little grease on them," she said. "I'm a hands-on person: I change my car's oil, the spark plugs. I can fix a stopped-up sink. Hey, I'm washable."

Appliance repair is a career shift for Dunbar, too: Most of his life he's alternated between factory work and construction; summer jobs and filling in at ski resorts.

A friend clued him in about the trainee program.

"I'd always thought ReCycle North was one of those indoor flea markets where people drop off their junk," he said. "I was really impressed. I kept applying and finally got my foot in the door. It was the first time I'd been in a technical trade."

The routine of an unpaid trainee evolved into career plans in HVAC -- the field of heating, ventilation and air conditioning.

"This has been the best job I ever had -- even when I wasn't getting paid for it," he said.

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ALISON REDLICH, Free Press  
Chuck Hall of Burlington, appliance technician and former trainee, helps Missy Prouty of Shelburne, a trainee in the appliance repair department at ReCycle North, as she works on her first Maytag dryer.

### Jane's legacy

- Support for Recycle North's trainee programs — \$100,000 over the next two years — comes from Jane's Trust, a charity formed in memory of Jane Bancroft Cook.
- Cook, an heir to the Dow Jones & Co. fortune, lived much of her life in New England. Her trust's annual grants of \$8.9 million support cultural, environmental and welfare projects in this region and Florida.
- A list of grant recipients can be found at [www.hembar.com/selectsvr/janes/janesgrant2007.html](http://www.hembar.com/selectsvr/janes/janesgrant2007.html)

### Granting tangibles

On February 1, the Vermont Community Foundation awarded \$420,000 to 51 organizations across the state as part of its Basic Human Needs program. ReCycle North received \$10,000 to provide stipends for its apprentice-style trainee programs. Other grant recipients in Chittenden County include:

- **Chittenden Emergency Food Shelf** (\$10,000) — funds translators for recent immigrants.
- **Intervale Center Inc.** (\$3,500) — provides food to social service agencies; trains youths in organic farming techniques.
- **King Street Youth Center** (\$10,000) - supports King Street South, a "wrap-around," out-of-school care program for refugee children who attend Champlain Elementary School in Burlington.
- **Lund Family Center** (\$10,000) — helps families deal with challenges such as loan parenting, social isolation, addiction and mental illness.
- **Mercy Connections Inc.** (\$8,040) — supports Kindling Connections, a workplace-readiness program offered at the Education and Training Center in the Old North End of Burlington.