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Mike Feinberg and Other WorkTexas Officials Explain Why Support Outside of the Classroom Is Critical for Skills Training Success

By California Business Journal Editorial Staff

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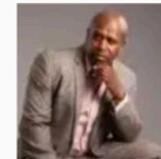
WorkTexas provides instruction to help young people and adults enter a number of in-demand fields — such as welding, carpentry and construction, plumbing, and building maintenance.

After the nonprofit program launched in 2020, its leadership found some participants needed other assistance, in addition to its skills-based training,

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according to Yazmin Guerra, workforce development leader for WorkTexas and the Harris County Juvenile Probation Department.

“We know our students need transportation; that’s been one of the biggest things we’ve found — and childcare,” Guerra says. “People need [both] to be able to go to work.”

To help WorkTexas provide additional assistance to its participants, co-founder Vanessa Ramirez began reaching out to a number of organizations that offer services she thought students might benefit from to learn what their referral process involved.

Today, WorkTexas partners with multiple entities to help program participants obtain help that they may need — including WorkFaith Connection, which helps provide soft skills-based instruction, and the Wesley Community Center, which supplies assistance with financial literacy.

“Workforce Solutions is another one of our partners; our students who are eligible qualify for funding for scholarships; support services, such as transportation to get to and from training; tools they need for training,” Guerra says. “We partner with the Houston Food Bank to address food insecurity; Journey Through Life for behavioral health; Legacy [Community Health] for medical needs. We are open to establishing as many partners as we identify are needed to address the various needs of our students to help them keep their jobs and advance in careers.”

Further Encouragement from Mike Feinberg and WorkTexas

Using federal and local funding and public-private partnerships, WorkTexas has also been able to provide daytime care for more than 60 children of program participants and other community members.

“It’s a childcare desert in the areas we train,” Guerra says. “The majority of the people [here] are low-income, so they would qualify; and the

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[WorkTexas] team members support the parent in completing the necessary applications to qualify.”

After WorkTexas students finish their skills training, program officials make an effort to stay in touch with them — often for an extended period of time.

“We’re not just looking at how the students are doing with us this year,” **WorkTexas co-founder Mike Feinberg** says. “We make a commitment to follow our students for at least five years. We’re interested in what that looks like, in terms of career contentment; and especially in terms of earning power and creating sustainable lives for themselves, their families and future generations.”

At times, he says, the communication can feel a bit like job coaching — including providing either technical or emotional support.

“We are proactively reaching out to all of them every six months [to ask] are you still in the same job? Are you looking for a different job? What’s your salary? Do you need any help?” **Mike Feinberg** says. “We’re also reacting when they call in and [say], ‘I just had a fight with my boss,’ [or] ‘I don’t like the job; there’s another opening across the street — do you think I should apply for it?’ We’re having those conversations with people, too.”

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