



# Beth Moncrief, Katherine Jumbe and John Hayden of Genesys Works

Can internships for disadvantaged youth help meet the demand for skilled professionals?

A Civic Caucus Focus on Human Capital Interview

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## Present

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## Summary

A program that trains low-income students, mostly students of color, in information technology skills and the "soft" skills needed in a business environment and then places them in corporate internships often gives those students a stronger sense of the relevancy of their school subjects. So say Beth Moncrief, Katherine Jumbe and John Hayden, staff members of that program, Genesys Works. The nonprofit program has been operating in the Twin Cities since 2008. Last year, Genesys Works placed 220 students from 35 schools in internships with 47 corporate clients.

Genesys Works provides concentrated, ongoing support to the students and the corporate clients to help ensure that internships are successful for both. The program also closely guides students in applying for postsecondary education and follows the students once they enroll. Moncrief says the program faces challenges in the areas of arranging transportation, working with school-day schedules, finding and recruiting the right students, and setting realistic expectations with corporate clients on what duties the interns can perform.

In working with the students, Jumbe has come to realize that society needs to figure out what it means to be successful as a high school graduate. She says we send students the message that our schools are bad and that the students are a problem to be solved and not a resource to be tapped. She believes Minnesota has not figured out what the place is for low-income students and students of color at its schools, its colleges and in its workplaces.

An interviewer suggests that the program could work well in rural Minnesota, where many small communities have manufacturing industries close to high schools. Hayden says Genesys Works wants to continue to grow and to help other organizations replicate what it does.

## Biographies

Beth Moncrief is program director for Genesys Works, where she has worked since 2008. She oversees student programming and recruitment and works with partner schools. Prior to joining Genesys Works, she served as an AmeriCorps member for CollegeTracks, a college access program in Montgomery County, Md., where she helped first-generation college students make their college dreams a reality. She has also served as legislative assistant for the Minnesota House of Representatives and taught abroad in South Korea.

Moncrief is a graduate of Carleton College, with a major in history and a concentration in African Studies.

Katherine (Katie) Jumbe is development director for Genesys Works, a position she has held since 2014, after spending a year on the program side as a program coordinator. Previously, she worked for five years at Carleton College, where she served first as assistant dean of admissions and later as associate director in the Annual Fund. Prior to her time in higher education, she was a student teacher at Community High School in Ann Arbor, Mich.; a Peace Corps Volunteer working with low-income students in Belize City, Belize; and an activity assistant at Normandale Hills Elementary in Bloomington, Minn.

Jumbe holds a B.A. with a major in English and a minor in French from Carleton College (2004) and an M.A. in Education from the University of Michigan (2008).

John Hayden is program coordinator for Genesys Works, where he works directly with a cohort of 20 students at a time as they proceed through the whole cycle of the program, including training, college application assistance and job placement. Previously, he served as program coordinator with Playworks Illinois in South Chicago, where he worked in the Englewood neighborhood in South Chicago, using the Playworks philosophy to reduce violence and reform the learning environment at Perkins Bass Elementary School. He also was program leader and teacher with Catholic Charities CYO in the San Francisco Bay Area, where he taught environmental education to youth in the Redwood Forest and led summer camp programming. Hayden is an active board member with No Labels Minnesota, a nonpartisan political group committed to promoting healthy democracy in Minnesota. In 2010, he earned a degree in biology from Spring Arbor University in Michigan.

## Background

The Civic Caucus has released two recent statements on human capital: [one in September 2014](#) laying out the human capital challenges facing the state today and in coming years and [a follow-up paper in January 2015](#) offering recommendations for maintaining a high quality workforce in Minnesota. The Caucus interviewed three staff members of Genesys Works-Twin Cities to learn how the program's model of intensive training and support prepares otherwise disadvantaged youth for successful employment in high-demand information technology positions.

## Discussion

**Genesys Works is a nonprofit organization in St. Paul dedicated to building bridges between economically disadvantaged high school students, businesses seeking technology-proficient workers, and an inner-city public education system struggling to produce high-quality, market-ready graduates.** Genesys Works-Twin Cities was created in 2008 to transform the lives of minority and low-income youth in Minneapolis and St. Paul, while serving the business needs of the Twin Cities corporate community. It is part of a national network founded in Houston in 2002 by Rafael Alvarez. There are also programs in Chicago and the Bay Area, with another program opening in Washington, D.C., in 2016.

**In 2007, the program decided on the Twin Cities as its first expansion site outside of Houston.** The decision was based on a market study comparing communities on philanthropy, headquarters of corporations and the public school system. "This was deemed the sweet spot," Hayden said.

**The program's mission is to enable economically disadvantaged high school students to enter and thrive in the economic mainstream by providing them the knowledge and work experience to succeed as professionals.** Students enter the program during the summer prior to their senior year of high school and, after eight intensive weeks of training, are assigned to work, part time, at one of the program's corporate partner locations during their senior year. The training is designed to arm students with the knowledge they need to provide value to corporations in specific technical fields varying at each of the program's locations.

Students are also trained in the communication and career-navigation skills needed to enter and succeed in corporate environments, including public speaking, situational awareness and drafting professional written communication. The culture of the program is one of high expectations and professionalism, starting from a student's first day.

"The program is like a staffing company," said Program Director Beth Moncrief. "We just happen to staff with inner-city high school students."

**In the Twin Cities, the program trains students only in the area of information technology (IT).** "For us, IT is our sweet spot," Moncrief said. "Every single company needs IT and the IT unemployment rate is basically zero. We know we're going to need a bigger IT workforce going forward."

She said the Twin Cities program has considered other fields besides IT. But a pilot program in business operations proved challenging to match with meaningful, entry-level jobs that would allow students to gain marketable skills. And, while there are a lot of health-care businesses in the area, she said patient privacy regulations and limitations on what students under age 18 can do have made that a difficult field for the program to enter.

**The program also hopes to serve as a catalyst for major education reform.** It aims, in partnership with schools, to achieve a culture in inner-city schools in which the pursuit of a professional career becomes "the given" for all students.

**Nationally, Genesys Works has served 3,139 students since 2002.** In 2014, the organization served 1,250 students and program alumni; students in Genesys Works internships earned \$5.2 million. After completing an internship, 95 percent of the students served by the program enroll in college. Eighty percent of those students have graduated from college or are still enrolled there. Nationally in 2014, the program had 169 corporate partners providing internship opportunities for the participants.

**Genesys Works provides intensive direct service to students, with each program coordinator working with a cohort of about 20 students through the whole cycle of the program.** "That makes our model unique," said Program Coordinator John Hayden. "Sometimes we run into situations that would affect a participant's workplace performance. We also help them with the barriers they face in their schools to getting access to resources to get them into college and to be successful. I am with them all the way through."

**The program has three components: a summer training program, an internship and college access programming.**

- **Students learn soft skills and technical skills during Genesys Works' eight-week summer training program.** Students attend the intensive sessions four hours a day. The program coordinators teach soft skills for two hours, ranging from such basics as the handshake to broader topics such as how to behave in the corporate environment, how to write resumes and professional e-mails, etc. "We're trying to take the high school edge off," Hayden said. IT trainers teach the students during the other two hours, focusing on specific IT skills.
- **The program has 47 corporate clients in the Twin Cities area that provide placements for the students in paid internships.** Hayden said the program helps place each student who completes the summer training in an internship that matches his or her skills and interests and that is located in a place the student can feasibly get to each workday. Student internships have included help-desk positions; working with a project manager on a specific task; desktop deliveries and installations, and software development engineer roles. "The internship goes side-by-side with the school day," Hayden said, with the student usually working four hours in the afternoon. Students work 20 hours a week or about 1,000 hours over a school year, earning about \$10,000. "The students acclimate to a professional environment," he said. "And our corporate clients are good at treating them as professionals and helping them succeed. The students grow tremendously." Program coordinators meet individually with each student and supervisor in the workplace once a month.
- **Genesys Works staff offer a seminar with a college-access curriculum and also meet frequently with the students to see where they are in their college-application process.** "We show them different colleges and help them think about what type of college they want," Hayden said. Students attend workshops where they can sit down and complete their applications, financial aid applications, the FAFSA form, etc. "We take them all the way through," he said.

Moncrief clarified that the program's definition of college includes two-year and four-year colleges and certification programs. "It's a broader look at what college is," she said.

**In 2014, 267 students were brought into the Twin Cities summer training program and 220 of them were placed in internships with 47 corporate clients.** Moncrief compared those numbers with the Twin Cities program's first year in 2008, when there were 11 students from three different high schools working in internships at seven companies.

**Ninety percent of the Genesys Works program is funded by earned income.** According to Moncrief, the corporate clients pay Genesys Works \$19 for each hour an intern works. The program then pays the intern \$9 to \$10 an hour. "The difference funds our program," she said. Beginning in fall 2015, corporate partners will pay \$20 per hour and interns will move up to a starting hourly wage of \$9.50 per hour.

**The corporate clients benefit by getting motivated workers, engaging with the community, getting help in creating their future IT workforce, and developing leadership skills by having their employees manage the students.**

**The program has 35 school partners.** Moncrief said the St. Paul Public Schools are Genesys Works' strongest school partner. "The schools we work really well with have strong work-based learning programs, so that our students also get high school credit for their internship," she said. "We look for schools that believe college and career readiness are really important." The program works with all of St. Paul's district high schools.

She said the program has also moved westward, where many of its corporate partners are located. "We struggle to recruit students in Minneapolis," she said. "There are a lot of other programs there. Sometimes it's challenging for those students to leave school in time to get to work." She said the program works with five high schools in Minneapolis: Roosevelt, Washburn, North, South, and Henry. It also partners with Richfield, Columbia Heights, and Robbinsdale Armstrong high schools, among other suburban schools, which all have high-needs students who qualify for free or reduced-cost lunch.

**Genesys Works has several challenges in working with school partners: transportation, school day schedules, finding the right students for the program and setting realistic expectations for the corporate partners.**

- Transportation. Moncrief said it's very hard to get students to their workplaces. The program has a transportation cap requiring that it not take a student more than 45 minutes to get to work. There are often no buses connecting the schools with the workplaces, so the program is spending \$100,000 a year on taxis to transport about 20 percent of the students to work. However, Hayden noted the considerable inconvenience and unreliability of using taxis. The other eighty percent of the students rely on buses, personal vehicles or rides from family members.
- School day schedules. She said a push to start school days later makes it harder for students to leave on time to get to their jobs by 1:00. The program works well with the flexibility that full-time students in Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) have. The program doesn't really work for students enrolled in an International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma program or those taking a full schedule of Advanced Placement (AP) classes, she said.

- Finding the right students. Moncrief noted that Genesys Works targets "the quiet middle," students in the 2.0 to 3.5 grade-point range who aren't over-engaged in other activities.
- Setting realistic expectations. "These kids are not going to walk in and do what the college interns do," she said. "They come with different life experiences." She said the program works with the clients to be sure they understand that and will provide coaching and support to the student interns.

**The program's student demographics include overwhelmingly low-income students of color.**

According to Development Director Katherine Jumbe, for the class of 2015, 88 percent of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch and 95 percent are students of color. The two largest groups are African American students, followed by Hmong students. About 12 percent of the students are African immigrants and 13 percent are Hispanic.

**Genesys Works has benchmarks it strives to meet.** Jumbe said the benchmarks are (1) that 80 percent of the participants will finish the summer training; (2) that 90 percent will finish their internships; (3) that 95 percent of those who complete the program will enroll in college immediately after high school; and (4) that 85 percent will have stayed in college and be on track after two years.

The most recent outcomes for Twin Cities Genesys Works on these benchmarks are that 83 percent of students in the class of 2015 completed the summer training, 93 percent in the class of 2014 enrolled in college right out of high school, and 79 percent are still in college and on track after two years.

**Tracking progress on program outcomes is a challenge for any nonprofit.** "The demand from funders for statistics is growing," Jumbe said. "But nonprofits are limited in resources and it's a challenge to pay for a system to keep the information and, for us, staff time to track the students down."

**There are other programs providing high school internships in the Twin Cities.** Jumbe listed the following examples:

- Cristo Rey High School in Minneapolis, where all students, grades nine through 12, work in a corporate setting one full day per week;
- Right Track in St. Paul, which offers summer internships, such as jobs in parks, libraries and nonprofits and in corporate settings;
- STEP-UP Achieve Jobs Program in Minneapolis offers summer internships and a limited number of school-year internships, but doesn't offer as much support in the workplace as Genesys does.

**In most smaller high schools, there are no technology classes and few high schools pay attention to the soft skills.** "Our schools need to do a better job of teaching the soft skills," Moncrief said. "They're expected when you get into the workplace."

**The biggest limiting factor for Genesys Works in the Twin Cities is the number of students, not the number of corporate partners.** "Our challenge right now is making sure we have enough

students who want to do this program and can commit that amount of time, while meeting graduation requirements," Moncrief said.

**Society needs to figure out what it wants from the high schools.** "We haven't defined what it means to be successful as a high school graduate," Jumbe said. "Today, we're trying to get 100 percent of students to a level that's different from what they would have needed 50 years ago. Jobs today involve a level of sophistication that requires college or additional training. We need to reassess how far kids need to get by the time they're 18."

**The program is trying to recruit heavily at schools closer to its corporate clients.** "We're getting further away from our inner-city public schools," Hayden said. "There definitely are needy students outside the inner cities. But we have to be mindful of mission creep and getting away from our roots."

**The community college system should really help students determine what they want to do next and the best way to fulfill those goals through an academic program.** Moncrief said the two-year schools are understaffed with counselors and other resources, even though students at those schools tend to have more challenges. "If we could help them make sure they're on the right path and that they know what they want to walk away with and what it means, it would be a much better situation," she said.

**Interviewer: The Genesys Works model could also work in Greater Minnesota, since there are also low-income students there.** The interviewer noted that there aren't many manufacturing jobs in the core metro area, but a number of rural communities do have those jobs. "I have no remedy for what to do in North Minneapolis," he said. "I wish I did. But there are needs in some rural communities that do have industry near the schools."

**The program could do more outreach with parents and the community.** Moncrief said Genesys Works does not have the capacity to work actively with students or their families earlier than their junior year. She said the program does engage parents with the summer training program and when the internships are announced. "But there's more that we could do with specific communities and with parents to make sure that they're engaged and helping us figure out solutions," she said.

**More than half of potential student recruits to Genesys Works say they want to know how to be a professional in a business environment.** "A strong pull for our program is the desire to be able to present themselves, to be competent public speakers and to have more confidence," Hayden said. "I hear more of that during recruiting than I hear about students looking for the technical training."

Jumbe added that a study of what brings success in IT careers, commissioned by the Creating IT Futures Foundation in the Bay Area, showed the importance of soft skills to people in those careers. Because things change so quickly in the technical world, she said, people in IT jobs must have the soft skills to build a network or find a mentor to help them transition as skill requirements change. "Otherwise, they'll be left behind," she said.

**For kids who aren't good students, getting into the workplace gives them more of a sense of relevancy than they might have had in school.** Once they get into the workplace and see what

they'd like to do long-term, Moncrief said, they have a better understanding of what they must do in school to get there. "But we screen for motivation," she said. "We look for kids who say, 'I know I want to do this program.'"

"Our students take on a lot of leadership in their families and their communities," she said. "They tend to be role models who inspire their younger siblings to be motivated in this way."

Jumbe asserted that it's motivation, but it's also environment. "Minnesota has not made a shift to really value our immigrant communities and communities of color," she said. "We have amazing corporate partners, but we do have some people who don't appreciate working with the student population we serve. I'm not sure Minnesota has done the work to figure out what the place is for low-income students and students of color at our colleges, at our schools and in our workplaces."

"Students need a stable home environment, engaged teachers and boundaries," Jumbe continued. "We haven't yet said what the things are that every young person needs to be a healthy individual. It's a different world faced by low-income students."

**Society sends the message that our schools are bad and that the students are a problem to be solved and not a resource to be tapped.** "We don't give students the sense that they are the brightest future we could possibly have," Jumbe remarked. "We must get our community excited about working with these young people and making them feel that they'll be the thing that will save Minnesota 10, 15 or 20 years down the line."

**Genesys Works wants to continue to grow and work with more students and more corporate partners.** Moncrief said the program is growing by 50 students a year, which is a manageable rate of growth. Hayden said Genesys Works hopes others will replicate what it does. "We look for places where we can help other organizations get into similar work," Jumbe pointed out. "But at this point, we don't imagine we're going to suddenly become the answer for all Twin Cities students."