

# Building skills

# Partnership Los Angeles Community College District



*"In this company they encourage you. They tell you,...you have to improve yourself and they talk to us about the programs and tell us how we can get better and not stay where we are. They open the door for us."*

## **Maria Landaverde**

Janitor, DMS Facility Services

Maria Landaverde is one of 15 students to graduate from the Vocational English as a Second Language (ESL) and the Green Janitor Certification Program offered through a unique partnership created by Building Skills Partnership (BSP). The partnership brings together janitorial companies, building owners, the labor union, and community colleges to provide low-wage workers with educational access at the worksite. At a time when there is a growing number of working low-income families in the state of California, BSP is helping janitors move up the economic ladder by providing job skills training that will enable them to receive promotions and earn higher wages in the industry.

The October 2014 update to our report, *Working Hard, Left Behind*, finds that of the 1.87 million low-income families in California, 73% are part of the labor force, mainly working in low-skill jobs. These low-skill workers, like most of the janitors who participate in BSP's programs, tend to have low educational attainment. In fact, 59% of low-income working families in the state are headed by a parent without a college education compared to 32% of all working families. Yet these workers want to invest in a better future for themselves and their families and they know that education can be a pathway from poverty to prosperity.

Unfortunately, scheduling conflicts because of work, transportation, childcare, parental responsibilities, etc. often hinder them from seeking a traditional education. The lack of education and support means these workers are stuck in low-wage jobs and are barely making ends meet. Despite this, their future remains hopeful because of organizations like BSP that have found a way to eliminate those barriers.

BSP's work helps Maria and other low-wage workers acquire skills-training by creating agreements between the janitorial companies and building owners that will allow workers to take classes on the worksite and often during work hours. The employer understands the benefit received from a more efficient and knowledgeable workforce and the worker understands the new economic opportunities that become available with additional education. It is a win-win partnership.

For many of these low-skill workers, language acquisition and computer literacy are the first steps to an education. Those skills alone help prepare them to be successful in a college environment. For others,

programs such as the Green Janitor Education Program or tablet training position them to be at the forefront of job opportunities across the state. With so many buildings now certified green or incorporating technology into their business needs, applicants for janitorial and operations positions must be trained appropriately to continue to meet the industry's evolving standards.

After the trainings, workers can often be eligible for promotions such as daytime cleaning, Area Supervisor, etc. They can also choose to continue their education through BSP and take classes in digital comprehension skills, financial literacy, health and wellness, or parent education. BSP is promoting career and community advancement through their core programs to thousands of low-wage workers who need more advanced education and skills to move up the economic ladder.

Maria is now in her second year of classes through the BSP program. She attends class from 5:45pm-6:45pm (during work hours) two days a week and though she is a mother of two college-age daughters and a grandmother, she is still able to easily participate in the program while managing her family responsibilities. She hopes to continue taking classes through BSP and dreams of one day managing a small business with her daughter who is currently majoring in Accounting and Business at her local community college.

The impact these classes have on janitors, and could potentially have on thousands of other low-wage workers, is a benefit to the individual and the state. The strength of our economy depends on our workforce. Currently, in California there are more low-skill workers than are needed and not enough middle-skill workers.<sup>1</sup> "The need [to educate low-wage workers] continues to grow as the wealth gap continues to grow," says Luis Sandoval, Development Manager of BSP. Providing low-skill workers with the education they need to move into middle-skills jobs is, therefore, imperative to ensuring our future as a state.

With the proper support from programs like BSP's and the state, Maria can reach her dream of becoming a small business owner and so can thousands of other service workers.

## CORE ELEMENTS

- A unique win-win partnership between over 75 janitorial companies and more than 40 building owners who understand that cultivating a more efficient and knowledgeable workforce is critical.
- A partnership with the Los Angeles Community College District that recognizes the unique niche BSP has and the expertise community college professors have—professors are sent to the worksite to provide vocational ESL and citizenship classes.
- Strategic curriculum aimed at workforce development, immigrant integration, and community advancement—janitors have access to workplace vocational ESL, Green Janitor Certification Program, computer literacy, citizenship, financial literacy, parent engagement, health and wellness, and college access programs.
- Easy access to education—most of the classes are taught at the work site and often during work hours so that issues such as schedule conflicts, child care, and transportation are eliminated.
- Experienced instructors—students who participate in BSP's programs have varying levels of educational attainment and often require additional help and specifically tailored curriculum. Classroom instructors are therefore critical to making the program a success and are screened for appropriate adult education teaching experience. Although there is a standardized curriculum that parallels the community college curriculum, each instructor is given the flexibility to adapt the curriculum and tailor the activities while maintaining the same learning outcomes.

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<sup>1</sup> Middle-skills jobs require some college, an associate degree, or a certificate; high-skills jobs require at least a bachelor's degree.

- Motivated students—low-wage workers want to invest in their futures but employer encouragement and opportunity is key.
- Funding—40% of the program’s cost is covered by employer contributions, with the rest coming from private and government grants.

## SUCCESS

- Since inception, more than 4,000 janitors and other workers have completed an intensive course in English.
- Each year, BSP provides training and programs to over 2,000 workers throughout California.
- 80% of participants complete the program.
- Janitors who complete BSP’s training and programs improve their English, customer service and build other job skills and as a direct result are promoted to daytime, supervisor, utility, building maintenance, and other higher paid positions.
- Janitors learn to integrate technology or new tools into their work duties or develop English language skills to improve communication with tenants, staff, and fellow co-workers.
- For employers, new skills and communication abilities among employees have led to higher job performance and loyalty.
- Workplace training sites in the state include Google, Cisco, Microsoft, and Adobe in Silicon Valley and Century Plaza Towers, City National Plaza, Sony Studios, and Yahoo!, and other landmark sites throughout California.



*“Janitors are the eyes and ears of what happens in a building. The work they do every night impacts a building’s ability to save energy, conserve water, divert waste and improve indoor air quality. It is important to invest in their education and skills to promote the best practices of a sustainable cleaning system. We are proud to partner with USGBC-LA, SEIU-USWW, building owners and janitorial contractors to train and certify janitors under the Green Janitor Education Program. By investing in this primary immigrant workforce we are integrating them in the workplace community and creating confidence and skill for career pathways.”*

**Aida Barragan**

Executive Director, Building Skills Partnership