

Climbing Some Steps on the Pay Ladder



Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times

Makida Hall, 20, works full time in Manhattan for the Cosi restaurant chain. A city program helped her obtain the job and regularly advises her.

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THE New York City government is helping Andre Franks and Makida Hall rise from the bottom rungs of the job ladder. And Mr. Franks and Ms. Hall are helping the city become more sure-footed in providing such aid.

Mr. Franks, 23, of Manhattan, and Ms. Hall, 20, of the Bronx, are among 100 people enrolled in a pilot program begun by the Bloomberg administration in August to assess methods to help low-earning New Yorkers increase their wages, develop savings habits and plan for career advancement.

The program is aimed at expanding the free assistance that the city has been offering at its half-dozen employment aid sites, called Workforce1 Career Centers. That aid generally involves job counseling, training and placement services for the unemployed and for people facing layoffs or the closing of their companies; it is available without regard to an individual's economic status.

By contrast, the pilot effort seeks to help people who are securely employed but whose earnings are low, city officials say. Such people may be employed full time for little pay, which was Mr. Franks's situation, or may have part-time jobs because they could not find full-time work, Ms. Hall's former situation.

Because the program, called EarnMore, is intended to help people obtain and retain higher-paying jobs, it offers assistance of longer duration than what is normally provided at the city's job centers, an administration official said.

"Our Workforce1 Career Centers focus on placing New Yorkers in jobs and follow up after six months to find out whether they are still employed," said Robert W. Walsh, the commissioner of the Department of Small Business Services, which oversees the centers. The EarnMore program, however, will work with its participants for two years, he said, so that it "helps them build their skills, work toward promotions, grow their assets and access other government programs."

The program is open to city residents who have worked steadily for at least six months in full-time or part-time jobs paying no more than \$14 an hour. Mr. Walsh's aides said they considered that figure appropriate for accommodating as many people as possible who have low weekly wages from part-time employment.

The pilot program aims to enroll up to 500 people by early spring. Information about applying is available through the city's 311 information line.

The program, run for the city by Seedco, a nonprofit organization, is part of an attempt by Mayor [Michael R. Bloomberg](#) to find new ways to reduce poverty. Information has not yet been compiled on how many of the 100 enrolled so far have moved into higher-paying work.

Ms. Hall is among those who have. She first went to the Workforce1 center in Harlem early this year, hoping that it would help her find a full-time job. She had found work as a nanny, but that generally involved only 10 to 15 hours a week at \$10 an hour.

"I attended a career workshop at the center and filled out job applications, but didn't get called," she said. "I felt down because I thought I was getting nowhere." Then, early last month, while still in her part-time nanny job, she enrolled in EarnMore.

The program referred her for full-time work preparing sandwiches and beverages at a Manhattan outlet of the Cosi restaurant chain, where she earns \$9 an hour for a 40-hour week.

Her counselor — or coach, in the program's language — "always calls, and I have to report back to him" on job-related matters, she said.

MR. FRANKS obtained a full-time job 15 months ago through the same Workforce1 center. It involved stocking shelves, making deliveries and operating the cash register at a Duane Reade drugstore in Manhattan. But it paid barely above the minimum wage.

Two months ago, while still holding that job, he enrolled in EarnMore. "My coach showed me how the system works and gave me advice on how to approach management and move up in the company," Mr. Franks recalled.

As a result of that advice, he said, he applied for training to become an assistant store manager, which pays \$13 an hour, nearly double his current salary. He has completed the training and is awaiting the promotion, he said last week.

EarnMore, he said, "opened my eyes to what I want to do in my job and in my life."