



SKILLFULtransitions
A service of **Employ Milwaukee**

PROGRAM REPORT

2022-2023

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Cover Photo: Graduates of Journey House's Construction & Design training program at their graduation ceremony at the Grohmann Museum, July 25, 2023.

OUR VISION

Employ Milwaukee's Skillful Transitions was designed to assist people whose previous employment had not returned post-pandemic, and those who were not working, or had an uneven work history prior to the pandemic. Skillful Transitions Worker Advancement Initiative (WAI) program was made possible by a grant from the American Rescue Plan Act State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds through the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development. Skillful Transitions offered opportunities to individuals for paid work experiences with local employers, and skills training for high-demand jobs. It served a dual purpose in helping businesses who lost a part of their workforce due to the pandemic and faced economic hardship, or those who sought to grow their current workforce.

Skillful Transitions ran from October 2021 – September 2023, with the goal to serve 500 individuals. Employ Milwaukee more than doubled that goal and served 1,135. Skillful Transitions focused on serving underrepresented populations including long-term unemployed, justice-involved individuals, racial/ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, individuals who are low-income, veterans, victims of human trafficking/domestic violence/sexual assault, and individuals facing substantial cultural barriers, such as immigrants.

Eligible Training Activities:

- Occupational Skills Training
- On-the-Job Training
- Paid Work Experience
- Job Readiness Training

Additional Services

We provided a variety of supportive services as a part of Skillful Transitions, in order to ensure that our participants were successful in gaining quality employment. Individuals received a \$10 per hour stipend. We also provided Visa gift cards for training completion and employment milestones to encourage retention and completion. As participants face many barriers to employment, we alleviated some of those barriers by providing supportive services such as transportation and childcare assistance.



OUR IMPACT

1,135 ENROLLMENTS

940

TRAINING
ENROLLMENTS

743

TRAINING
COMPLETIONS

270

PAID WORK
EXPERIENCE

787 MEASURABLE SKILLS GAINS

PARTICIPANTS RECEIVED:

1,121

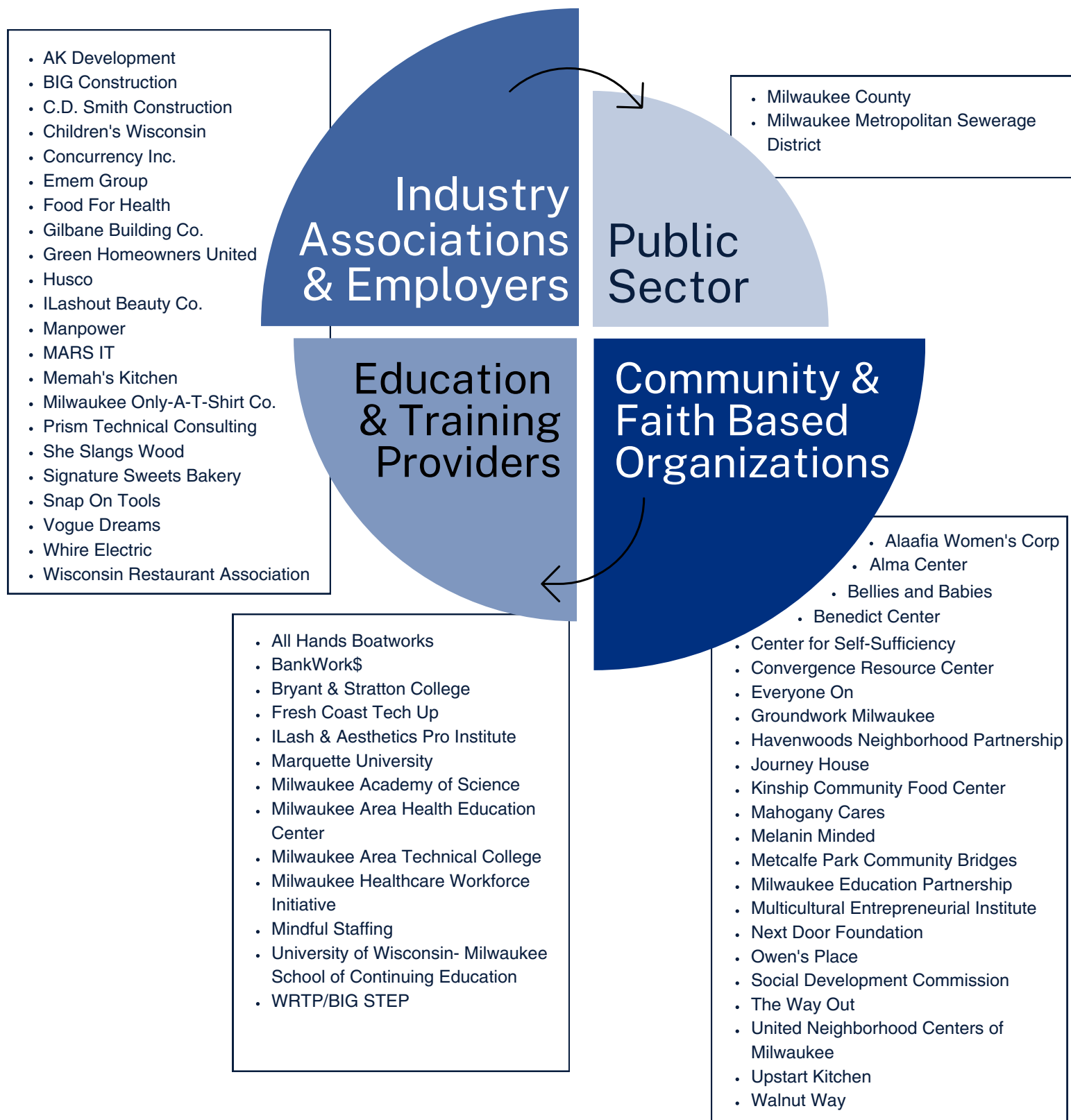
CAREER SERVICES

266

SUPPORTIVE SERVICES



OUR PARTNERS



A NEW START

When war broke out in Ukraine in February 2022, Yevhan S. knew it wouldn't end quickly, as many had initially predicted. He and his wife and two teenage daughters were living in the capital city of Kyiv and thought they would be relatively safe there, particularly when compared to those living in the eastern region of the country. It didn't take them long, however, to realize that life would never be the same for them.

Yevhan is considered one of the lucky ones as his parents had legally immigrated to the United States in 2000, and had settled in Milwaukee, WI. He was able to secure work authorization for he and his wife, and late spring, 2022, Yevhan and his family settled in Milwaukee with his parents. Yevhan and his wife immediately began to search for work.

Yevhan had a career in banking when he lived in Ukraine. He was a Branch Network Manager with a bank there, supporting a number of branches. But he didn't have experience in the U.S. banking system, so when he saw the BankWork\$ training on Employ Milwaukee's website, he quickly signed up for a pre-screening interview and was accepted in the program that began on April 11th. He successfully completed the BankWork\$ training (certified pre-apprenticeship) on June 1, 2023. In August, Yevhan was hired as an Associate Banker at BMO Harris Bank.

"I was so impressed with the diversity of the students in my class," Yevhan said. "The Instructor Adrienne Wright brought banking experience to her teaching role."



Yevhan S. (left) and BankWork\$ Manager Jovo Potkonjak (right)

"The other staff, Jovo Potkonjak and Oscar Delgado helped me find other resources to help me succeed. It was really the other students in the classroom that inspired me the most to graduate. They really helped me with my conversational English skills", Yevhan commented.

"I am really looking forward to rebuilding my life here and using my banking skills."

-YEVHAN S.

"Yevhan was so eager to translate his previous banking skills to the U.S. financial job market," said Jovo Potkonjak, BankWork\$ Manager. "There's no doubt he will be successful here. We are so pleased that we could help this immigrant and his family through the Skillful Transitions (WAI) grant that funded his training."

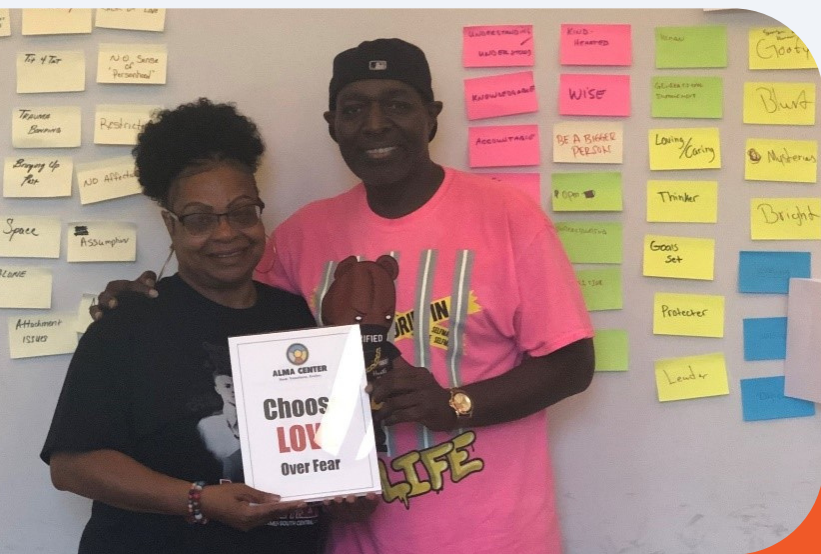


ALMA CENTER: TRANSFORMATIONAL WORK

The Alma Center is a community-based not-for-profit agency with a mission to heal unresolved trauma and transform and evolve self, relationships, and community. The Alma Center's innovative practice of Healing Focused Care (HFC) is an evidence-informed model for transformational work to break cycles of hurt and harm that is solidly grounded in the contemporary understanding of trauma and healing.

In addition to Employ Milwaukee's Skillful Transitions On-The-Job Training program, the Alma Center also partnered with the Medical College of Wisconsin to hire four, full-time Health Focused Care Facilitators.

One of these hires was Millie L, who spent 30+ years in prison. Upon release, she was working as a janitor, but was looking for something more to use her natural skills of resourcefulness and empathy. While speaking at a restorative justice conference, Millie was approached by the Alma Center's Director of Operations, Julie Landes, who shared with her the Healing Focused Care Facilitator job opening. Millie got the job, and she soon found out that she had to "throw out everything I thought I knew about Trauma Informed Care" and jumped into the four-month intensive training, learning Alma Center's Journey Toward Legacy curriculum. "The training was an eye-opening experience," Millie said.



Millie L. (left) and Alphonso J. (right) in the classroom at the Alma Center.

“At the Alma Center, I was received as a whole person. I’ve been able to bring all of my years of experience helping others heal, and that has been the most rewarding part of this job.”
-MILLIE L.



OCCUPATIONAL SKILLS TRAINING

With record low unemployment and record high workforce participation, businesses need skilled workers more than ever. Skills training funded through Skillful Transitions focused on training in high-demand, high-growth occupations that offer family-supporting wages and benefits. With the right job skills training, individuals enjoy the power of having relevant skills on their resume, are prepared for potential advancement, and prove they are committed to a career growth by increasing their job skills and knowledge.

Skills training was provided across industry sectors including construction, information technology, healthcare, financial services, food production, hospitality, retail, education, and transportation. While in training, **participants received a \$10 per hour stipend**, and a \$200 gift card upon successful completion. Additional gift card incentives were available to those that achieved employment milestones after four weeks of full-time work.

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT:



For over 100 years, Snap-On Tools has been a mainstay in Milwaukee's strong manufacturing community. Yet, in order to remain competitive, Snap-On needed to **upskill their current workforce for high-demand CNC Machinist jobs**. Competition for skilled CNC Machinists is high in Milwaukee – the national median salary for CNC Machinists is \$46,758, while it's **\$51,053 in southeast Wisconsin**. Snap-On Tools partnered with Skillful Transitions to fund a four-week CNC Machine Set Up training, taught onsite by an Milwaukee Area Technical College Instructor, where participants earned college credit.

20 PARTICIPANTS **\$38,500** IN TUITION

ON-THE-JOB TRAINING

On-The-Job Training (OJT) is a workforce resource for businesses that are making new, full-time hires in high-demand, high-growth sectors.

With Skillful Transitions, businesses were reimbursed 75% of a new hire's wages for four to six months, depending on the amount of training hours needed for the occupation and considering the individual's past work experience and skill level.

Businesses made the hiring decision and used their own system to train participants with the new skills necessary for successful, long-term employment with their company.

Training new workers impacts productivity, but an OJT helps a business save money and time, increase employee retainment, and promotes teamwork – a great experience for both the business and the new hire.

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT:



Green Homeowners United (GHU) helps people fight climate change and save money in the process by helping them cut carbon emissions at home. When Congress passed the Inflation Reduction Act in 2022, rebates became available for moderate income homeowners to make energy efficiency improvements such as heat pumps, insulation and stopping air gaps. GHU knew **they needed to increase their workforce** to keep up with the demand for residential energy upgrades.

GHU hired Josh H. in August 2022 through Skillful Transitions. Josh had carpentry and home repair skills but needed additional training in energy efficiency projects. Through the OJT program, **Skillful Transitions was able to reimburse GHU 75% of Josh's wages** for about four months, while he was trained as an Insulation & Air Sealing Specialist. When Josh completed his training, **his wage increased by nearly \$2 per hour.**



PAID WORK EXPERIENCE

A Paid Work Experience (PWE) is an employment strategy that seeks to transition people with labor market barriers into wage-paying jobs that allow low-income, unemployed individuals to do useful work and support themselves and their families. Transitional jobs combined with earning supplements, such as affordable childcare and health care – **are keys to reducing poverty and increasing employment**, as shown by many rigorous analyses. As a member of the Public Policy Forum’s Milwaukee Transitional Job Collaborative, Employ Milwaukee champions effective transitional jobs strategies.

For PWEs through Skillful Transitions, Employ Milwaukee served as the Employer of Record funding wages, including FICA and Worker’s Compensation taxes. The business partner interviewed and chose the individuals they wanted to bring on board to their business. Participants were able to work up to 29 hours a week for four to five months, depending on the amount of experience in hard or soft skills the individual needed. Priority was given to businesses who were offering experiences in high-demand, high-growth industry sectors, as well as those focused on recruiting participants from the program’s target population.

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT:



Havenwoods
NEIGHBORHOOD
PARTNERSHIP

“Street Keeper” crew members worked on a team to upkeep the Havenwoods neighborhood through litter pick-up, landscaping, and other small maintenance projects. They also assisted with the planning and execution of community events. Participants gained work experience, job-readiness training, career planning, and recommendations to the many businesses located in the Havenwoods district on Milwaukee’s northwest side.

29 PARTICIPANTS

\$110,000+
WAGES TO PARTICIPANTS



JOB READINESS TRAINING

Job Readiness Training (JRT) enhances the employment readiness of job seekers through education and training in both hard and soft skills, exposes participants to a variety of high-demand, high-growth sectors, and helps them acquire the necessary job skills in order to connect them to new employment opportunities that offer family supporting wages, benefits, and an opportunity for upward mobility.



The Gap Year program at Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC) is designed to provide educational access to students who wouldn't otherwise be able to attend college and showcase career pathways that are important to our economy. During the 10-weeks intensive program, high school graduates who are not currently planning to pursue higher education, explore jobs with high starting salaries, connect with local employers, build their network with civic and business leaders, and form connections with peers.

100%

UNDER \$75,000
FAMILY INCOME

81%

RACIALLY DIVERSE
PARTICIPATION

54%

INCREASED AWARENESS
OF CAREER OPTIONS

MESSAGE FROM PROGRAM MANAGERS



Sara Rogers (Planning Analyst) & **Romell Greer** (Special Project Manager) are the two members of the Employ Milwaukee staff who oversee the Skillful Transitions program.

One of the key components of ensuring a successful program, is having the right staff. Both Romell and Sara's unique backgrounds in community outreach and business solutions are not only recognized and appreciated, but directly contributed to the program's success!

Sara's experience in Business Solutions and Romell's background in Community Outreach brought unique perspectives to Skillful Transitions. Employ Milwaukee has been recognized by our country's leaders for the innovative ways it has been able to utilize American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. The Skillful Transitions program, which operated solely on ARPA funds, was able to efficiently use the \$5.5 million given to launch the program – which is an achievement we hold in high regard.

"This program is unique because we wanted to implement as many incentives as we could for our participants to ensure they stuck with the program and were successful," Sara says. "We provided stipends, paid work experience opportunities, and other supportive services. The businesses we partnered with were excited to be a part of the program because they got to give new employees a job opportunity and develop hard and soft skills."

Skillful Transitions is an excellent example of how innovation and flexibility in program development led to not only impressive results, but tangible sustainable change in the lives of those that live and work in our communities. "I think the gift cards and stipends really helped encourage those in training to stick with it. We had an 80% completion rate, which is almost unheard of," Romell says.

"The key to our success is flexibility; and that's what we need more of. There hasn't been a business that said being a part of this hasn't been helpful or rewarding," Sara says. "This program opened doors for people who may have been just looking for a job opportunity and then gave them a needed skill. Romell and I set out to show job seekers and businesses if we do something different from what's been done, we will get different results."

“By giving our participants a helping hand, we see our best results. This program was fresh and exciting. We'd love to keep this style of programming alive. It benefits everyone; community, the organization, and the participants.”

-ROMELL GREER

MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO & PRESIDENT

“I cannot speak enough about how proud I am of this program. I love that we were able to be creative and innovative when working with partners, that’s when workforce development shines!”

**-CHYTANIA BROWN,
CEO & PRESIDENT OF EMPLOY MILWAUKEE**



This program demonstrated how critical flexibility with eligibility, and offering stipends and paid work experiences can be key to a program’s success, not only in terms of participation and skills training, but also in completion rates. When I say flexibility, I mean that in every sense of the word. Many other programs have much stricter eligibility criteria and limited services and supports. Through the resources given for Skillful Transitions, we were able to broaden the eligibility requirements and expand supportive services to ultimately serve more people. The original goal was to serve 500 individuals, we ended up serving 1,135 participants. During the pandemic, Milwaukee’s employment demands were higher than the resources we had available. American Rescue Act Plan (ARPA) dollars that funded Skillful Transitions allowed us the freedom to introduce innovative programming – and I love when we’re able to do that. I believe that the stipends were a key factor in Skillful Transitions’ success – participants did not have to make the difficult decision between completing the program or having to drop out to take a less sustainable, but quicker job placement.

I would like to see more of this kind of flexibility with public and private funding in standard resources. With this grant, we had a tremendous collaboration with our business and education and training partners, and we were able to serve much more of our targeted populations. If we were able secure these resources to address a crisis, the success of this program should encourage this type of model for more grants in the future.



THANK YOU

Employ Milwaukee's Skillful Transitions Worker Advancement Initiative grant was made possible by a grant from the American Rescue Plan Act State (ARPA) and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds through the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development.

Participants of Journey House's Construction & Design training program onsite at Quorem Architects



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