



New strategy to help city's jobless youth

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The Toronto Board of Trade announced a job initiative nearly two years ago inviting local employers to create 1,000 jobs for the city's at-risk youth. In the end that program, Youth One, was a flop – less than 100 jobs were found.

But Toronto Mayor David Miller says a new initiative aimed at the same target audience won't repeat the mistakes of its predecessor.

Miller yesterday announced the launch of Partnership to Advance Youth Employment (PAYE), aimed at giving young people aged 16 to 29 from the city's challenged communities a chance to fill entry-level positions with private employers.

To start, no targets will be set, Miller said. "We learned if you set targets in this, you are bound to fail. It's not about targets. It's about reaching into neighbourhoods and bringing opportunities to places where there are too many barriers."

Toronto development consultant Steve Diamond is chair of PAYE, a joint effort by the city, private employers and community agencies.

With Youth One, Diamond said, the board of trade basically sent emails to members asking them to hire young people. The board also used its website, newsletters and radio ads, to limited effect.

PAYE will provide counselling and preinterview training for youth and employers' needs will be determined in advance. A recruitment day will bring the two together.

That model was used in a pilot project last summer in Lawrence Heights, involving 29 employers, including CIBC, Cara Foods and Royal Bank. There, 100 youths got job coaching; 70 attended job interviews. Some 36 were offered jobs, and most have retained them.

Diamond hired a Lawrence Heights woman as an administrative assistant, and she's been with him for nine months. He hopes to see PAYE grow each year, and "hopefully in four or five years the numbers will be quite substantial."

The program is being expanded to six other areas troubled by joblessness and crime, including Flemingdon Park and Kingston-Galloway.

The *Toronto Star* will be one of the employers in the program, Brian Daly, the newspaper's vice-president of human resources, said yesterday. The *Star* wants to target more of its hiring to disadvantaged communities, so this is a "perfect opportunity," he said.

See www.torontopaye.ca or call 416-397-JOBS (5627) for details.