INSIDE THE JOB MARKET



Jobs4Youth secured 46 paid positions for participants across 17 companies last summer, including Wander Berkshires, shown above. Pictured from left are Youth Council member Jennifer Hoffman of Berkshire Community College; Taconic High School junior Ares Forrest, who worked for Evergreen Education; Pittsfield High School freshman Latifah Ahmed; Kat Toomey of Mass Hire; Taconic junior Romelo Holley, who worked for MassHire; and Marianthy Posadas-Nava.

Jobs4Youth program serves as a Berkshire blueprint for the future

MassHire Berkshire's Jobs4Youth pilot created 46 paid positions at 17 companies, connecting young people with employers and building the county's future workforce.

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This year, my grandmother began passing down stories of her childhood, connecting me to the lineage of women before me who designed futures beyond what was available to them.

I learned that my great-great-grandmother moved her family from a small village on Mexico's eastern coast to Mexico City so her daughters could attain an education. She opened a bakery, spent her nights knitting sweaters for department stores, and made sure

every one of her children had a career. Her determination shaped opportunities for generations of our family, including my own.



Posadas-Nava

Taped to my computer is a sticky note I scribbled during college: Ubuntu, a word from the Bantu languages of Southern Africa that speaks to our shared humanity and interconnectedness, often translated as “I am because you are.” I carry that spirit as I learn from the incredible people who’ve welcomed me into the Berkshire community, shared their stories, and opened their businesses and workplaces to me.

This year, I had the privilege of joining the MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board and Career Center to lead the development of a regional youth employment pilot, Jobs4Youth, funded by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, to bring employers, educators, community organizations and civic leaders together to create paid opportunities for young people.

Through this work, I’ve come to recognize the same determination that shaped my family’s story in the grit, wisdom, and collective spirit of the Berkshires. There are more people to thank than I could ever fit into this article, but I hope to honor their contributions by carrying forward what they’ve built.

For decades, Berkshire educators, workforce professionals, and employers have carried that same commitment forward. Charles H. McCann learned his trade alongside his father at Sprague Electric and later championed vocational education. Today, McCann Technical School and Taconic High School continue preparing students with skills connected to local industries.

MassHire's partnerships with schools have grown from one coordinator traveling between high schools to career readiness teams developed with North Adams Public Schools and adapted across all 11 Berkshire districts. Berkshire Community College, MCLA, and the Career Center extend those opportunities as people continue learning and working. Behind it all are teachers taking calls, counselors learning what excites a student, and employers making room for someone to learn.

Jobs4Youth grew from that inheritance. More than 100 business conversations revealed workforce needs and where young people could contribute. We connected those insights with educators' knowledge of their students and relationships cultivated by the Career Center, mayors, chambers, and community partners.

We shaped employment opportunities around business needs and supported young people through interviews, work permits, and transportation. We secured 46 paid positions across 17 companies, including 14 businesses partnering with MassHire for the first time. I'm deeply grateful to Bagel & Brew, Zucchini's Restaurant, Wander Berkshires, Ethos Pathways, Porches Inn, Evergreen Education, and the MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board for joining this pilot and helping create opportunities beyond summer.

What we've learned here can be adapted elsewhere, beginning with each community's inheritance: the people, institutions, and industries invested in its future. Educators know their students, employers know their needs, and workforce partners connect learning with opportunities across a person's working life.

Shared priorities allow each contribution to strengthen the next, extending opportunities beyond any one program or summer. This is the blueprint: recognize what a community has built, connect its strengths with purpose, and trust the people closest to the work to shape what comes next. When local agency is directed toward the collective good, what one generation has built becomes the foundation for the next.

It is often difficult to see the long-term impact of the decisions we make today. That's what makes our commitment to the future workforce of our county that much more powerful. It is saying what my great-great-grandmother speaks to me through my lineage: the opportunities we create for one another today become the foundation from which future generations can imagine and build lives of their own.

The young people we're investing in are the future of the Berkshires, and the future we share depends on what we continue to make possible for one another. May we carry forward the same spirit of possibility and collective care that brought us here, building together a future greater than any one of us could imagine alone.

Marianthy Posadas-Nava is the MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board and Jobs4Youth Employment Consultant.