

# ESPRI

MAY 2018

QUARTER 2



## Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative

### What is Upskilling?

According to the ACT's 2018 Policy Platform on Workforce Development, the percentage of New York residents considered **underemployed is between 8-10%** (ACT, 2018), while unemployment for the state is currently at 3%. This means there are more underemployed individuals working either part time or below their level of training and certification than there are unemployed individuals looking for work.

The Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative (ESPRI) wants to help individuals in our community who are underemployed know where to go to get help to pursue additional education and training opportunities which can enable them to move into higher paying jobs and provide supportive services to promote success throughout the process.

The term **"Upskilling"** is the process of learning new skills or entering into an education program in order to earn a certificate, degree, or training. The goal of upskilling is to enroll in additional training through apprenticeship, vocational training, certification or a degree, to obtain additional skills and get a higher paying job. Upskilling can seem impossible due to barriers such as lack of time, resources, childcare, transportation, or debt.

However, there are many programs and trainings in our community that can assist individuals who make the decision to upskill and support them in their journey. Featured in this edition of our newsletter is the Buffalo Public Schools Adult Education Center that offers many programs in healthcare, construction and trades, and education classes to earn a high school degree.

#### Upskilling

Noun

1. The process of learning new skills or of teaching new skills



#### Example of an Upskill Opportunity

Your working as a Nurse's Assistant



You attend part time classes to become a Registered Nurse or LPN



You graduate from your program with your new credentials



You get a better paying job with your new skills

# Interview with Community Organization

## Buffalo Public School Adult Education

The staff at the Buffalo Public School (BPS) Adult Education Division shared their perspective on the positive aspects of upskilling and working with the community to promote continuing education to gain additional skills and get higher paying jobs. Communications & outreach specialist Joanna Steinmetz, Academic Adviser Erik Nevius, and Education Coordinator Jason Guzzetta took the time to explain why it is so important to take advantage of an opportunity to upskill.



Buffalo Public School Adult Education  
389 Virginia Street, Buffalo, NY 14201

BPS Adult Education offers classes to students from over 20 different nationalities and welcomes everyone to take vocational or technical training programs, ESL (English as a Second Language), and TASC (Test Assessing Secondary Completion) classes. Mr. Guzzetta explained that the design of BPS Adult Education is **“to meet students where they are at”**. No student is turned away from class based on their reading or math skills, instead, they are placed in ESL or English and Math refresher classes. The school is willing to work with student schedules and education level, even offering distance learning through Skype and online classes.

BPS Adult Education operates in multiple locations throughout the City. Most sites also function as “drop in centers” where anyone can sign up for classes and training to make it as convenient as possible. Mr. Nevius stated, **“we know it is difficult, so we make it available”**.

They focus on soft skills such as resume writing and interview etiquette, interpersonal skills, timeliness, respect, and how to conduct oneself in the workplace. Students are instructed to act as if coming to school is their job and to treat their classmates as co-workers.

They also make sure to offer training programs and classes with stackable credentials with clear pathways to future degrees. Hands on experiences are key for the training programs, ensuring that the students conduct labs and are exposed to actual on the job training. BPS also hosts job fairs and works directly with companies to fill specific positions. Ms. Steinmetz indicated, **“we want the best placement and fit for our students”**. They keep a database on graduates to check up on how former students are doing and to send out open position information.



Erik Nevius and Jason Guzzetta

Two distinct paths emerge when asked what they thought motivated students to pursue additional education and training. For those in the community who wanted to complete their high school education and earn a GED, now called the TASC exam to earn a higher wage, or be able to continue their education. The second being those described as English language learners, refugees, and immigrants who want to take ESL classes and the TASC exam. Most refugees want to improve their English or receive certification to get a job in the U.S. For example, nurses certified in other countries need to take the nursing board exams once they arrive in the U.S. in order to work in the medical field. BPS Adult Education allows them to refresh their English, take prep, and practice exams and to prepare for the nursing exam.

For more information about Buffalo Public Schools Adult Education Department click the [Link](#), or visit <http://www.upskill.org/>

## Student Experience at BPS Adult Education

### Ling Yiu - ESL, TASC, and Certified Nursing Assistant Graduate

Ling Yui is a Certified Nursing Assistant and works in Amherst at a pediatric doctor's office. She is the loving mother of a boisterous four year old, and her husband is a University at Buffalo Medical student. They are expecting the birth of their second child in August, and have plans after her husband's graduation to move to California to work in the medical field. They hope to eventually live in San Diego closer to relatives.

When Ling Yui arrived in Buffalo from Guangdong, China, she spoke some English but ***"I wanted to improve my English after moving from China to Buffalo"***. She began taking ESL classes at BPS adult education and within six months was ready to take the TASC exam ***"It was like being on a big team where everyone wanted to learn together, we would all meet up to study English together. When I entered the CNA program it was like a family there too"***.

Ling worked hard and found that although she was beyond a beginner



Ling Yui

English level she had to focus on learning more advanced vocabulary to become certified here in America. She entered the Bridges Program, a class specifically designed for those who are not at a beginner level but still needed English practice. After completing the bridges program, she moved on to the TASC classes and began studying for her High School Equivalency exam.

After she passed her TASC exam, she was encouraged by her teachers and advisors to enter a training program. ***“First I improved my English, then I was pushed by my teachers and Academic instructors to go and study”***. She decided to start the Certified Nursing Assistant program with some of her classmates from the ESL Bridges Program. She started the CNA program and loved it.

During the interview, Ling told the story of how her good friend who she studied ESL and the CNA program with her continued her education and went to Erie County Community College to become a Registered Nurse. Her friend now works at the Erie County Medical Center. Ling loves that ***“People from everywhere who all wanted to study together”*** are able to come together and learn at BPS Adult Learning Center. She felt supported and found a community with her classmates and teachers.

She expressed how much she liked the hands on learning experience and how she has had lots of practice before she took her Nursing Board exams. She recommends the BPS Adult Education programs for anyone who wants to learn and says she was counseled on how to achieve her dreams here in America.

## Local Employer Spotlight

### Rodriguez Construction



Luis Rodriguez

***“You need to have the initiative to upskill and the desire to lead a crew. You have to want to learn the business”***. This is the response Mr. Luis Rodriguez from Rodriguez Construction Group gave when asked his thoughts on what motivates someone in the construction field to upskill.

Mr. Rodriguez acknowledged that while upskilling is not easy, it is a worthwhile investment. He said, ***“it is important to upskill because potential employers and contractors want to see a degree or certificate in addition to the years of experience”***. An employee may have excellent skills and talent but, lacks accreditation meaning that they may be payed less than an individual with a degree or certificate.

That is why Mr. Rodriguez sends his workers back to upskill as much as possible. During the interview, he told a story about the time Rodriguez Construction sent an employee to Erie Community College to

upskill and earn an associate's degree. The employee who earned their associates degree was able to earn more money, work on different projects, and move up through the ranks from a landscaper to a superintendent.

Mr. Rodriguez holds a degree in Civil Engineering but went back to learn new skills and training from Buffalo Public Schools Adult Education because he wanted to gain a better understanding of the work of his employees, gain a deeper appreciation for trade skills, and understand the time it takes to work in a manual construction position. He received training in carpentry, plumbing, and electrical work. He believes that in the construction industry, the boss should know all the aspects of the job, from construction to management. Mr. Rodriguez found the upskill opportunities at BPS Adult Education so valuable that he sends his managers to upskill in the trades.



When asked what soft skills are needed in the construction business, Mr. Rodriguez responded punctuality, politeness, and communication were the most important. He also stressed that communication is key to being able to deal with different personalities and work effectively on the job site. He stated, ***“Construction work is deeply rewarding when you see something you built completed, however it is a stressful environment; take that into consideration when thinking about starting a job in this field”***. He also recommends for those just starting in the engineering or management sector of construction, to work on their interpersonal skills and on relationship building. Do not be afraid to go out and learn something new or to pick up the telephone and make that personal connection.

The interview concluded with Mr. Rodriguez' parting remarks for those who want to enter the construction field. “You have to really enjoy seeing things built”. He also recommends to, ***“do the training to learn the business so that you can enjoy it”***.

To find out more about [Rodriguez Construction Group](http://rodriguez-cg.com/) click or go to <http://rodriguez-cg.com/>

# The ESPRI Team

We're on the Web: <https://www.uwbec.org/espriwny>

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Are you interested in Upskilling?  
Check out the ESPRI Upskill survey [HERE!](#)



"Buffalo ESPRI's focus is to support working families by implementing a workforce development pipeline while providing supportive services for long-term stability and growth."

-BUFFALO ESPRI TEAM