

# The Body Shop Youth Traineeship Scheme

## Executive Summary

Working in conjunction with a Melbourne-based welfare agency, The Body Shop has initiated and financially underwritten the training of 27 young people in the retail industry. Six of them are attached to The Body Shop. They are paid a training wage while attending TAFE and an award wage while gaining direct work experience. All of the trainees had been long-term unemployed or homeless young people.

## Philosophy underpinning the project

Part of the corporate philosophy of The Body Shop is to put something back into the community from which its profit is made.

Each shop adopts a community project; staff decide what to do and are given time off on pay to carry out their community role.

The company believes that what it puts back into the community and how that is done ought to be part of the criteria against which its general retailing performance is judged.

A Director of the company, Graeme Wise, commented that:

*"The community care philosophy runs right through the organization. All the staff are committed to their schemes. It's not for P.R., although it would be easy to fall into the trap of being seen to do it for that reason".*

The company:

*"... wanted to do something that involved directly providing practical help. We didn't want to be providing charity handouts and we wanted the kids to feel part of the structure of the company, not charity cases".*

*With this in mind representatives of The Body Shop approached The Brotherhood of St. Laurence, a Melbourne-based welfare agency and the Youth Traineeship Scheme was born.*

## Profile of the trainees

The company asked The Brotherhood of St. Laurence to identify young people for the scheme.

In order to be selected, trainees had to be unemployed for a year or more or be homeless. The trainees either had no prior work experience or a very limited employment history.

*"We went for the most needy rather than the ones who were likely to be successful anyway".*

Six young people who were selected dropped out of the scheme very early on, but the others have lasted the distance.

In all there are 27 trainees in the scheme who are nearing the end of their period of training and work experience; five of those are attached to The Body Shop's retail outlets and another trainee has chosen to transfer to work in the company's warehouse.

The remainder are being trained with a view to employment in other areas by the Brotherhood of St. Laurence.

Trainees were recruited from among the 16-20 year-old age group. The six Body Shop trainees consist of four young women and two young men.

## **Resources**

The Body Shop has guaranteed \$144,000 per annum for the next three years.

Grants to subsidise the training and employment of the young people have also been obtained from the Victorian Department of Labour and from the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training.

The Brotherhood of St. Laurence has provided additional funds, along with staffing resources from its Employment Action Centre. It has employed a Housing Officer to help the trainees obtain secure and suitable accommodation.

One trainee now boards with a member of staff from The Body Shop. Some of the other trainees have been provided with bond money or basic furniture so that they could secure their independent living arrangements. The young people are provided with rent assistance during the course of their traineeship.

Some of the trainees kept running out of money several days before their next pay day. The pay periods were, therefore, changed from fortnightly to weekly and this appears to have curbed the problem.

At the outset of the scheme the young people were each given money to have their hair done and to buy a few new items of clothing.

*"It was really exciting going shopping like that. When you're unemployed you haven't got the opportunity to look as good as we can now".*

Initially, it was thought that a mentor would need to be allocated to each trainee to provide support and encouragement. In the event, that has not been found to be necessary, partly because several supportive, informal relationships have developed between staff and trainees.

Staff from The Body Shop's Public Affairs Department and from the Brotherhood's Employment Action Centre call in to the trainees' work locations from time to time to check on whether they need any particular assistance. From the point of view of the trainees:

*"We get plenty of support and we can talk about any personal problems if we want to".*

## Nature of the traineeships

The traineeships are akin to apprenticeships.

The trainees combine work and education over a twelve month period.

Initially, they underwent a 10 week training period to orient them to work and to assist in their personal development, as well as in the acquisition of basic vocational skills.

The six Body Shop trainees then spent three weeks in the stores where they reported to assistant managers and gained general work experience.

For the remainder of their traineeship period their week consists of three days in employment with The Body Shop and two days at Collingwood TAFE.

They are paid an award wage while they are working in the shops or warehouse and 75% of that wage during the period of their TAFE training.

At the TAFE college that The Body Shop trainees attend there are nine students in the class.

All of the trainees had left the educational system before completing secondary school so, "it was weird going back to school, having to do homework and stuff". Although "school has got harder" as they approach the end of their training period, the trainees all expressed confidence that would they finish their course and that it has prepared them well for retail and related work.

During their work experience periods they have been offered time off to do "linking projects, like finding out about the history of a product, its ingredients and how its made".

Upon completion of their training they are guaranteed a further three months full-time employment at The Body Shop. During that time they may apply for jobs outside The Body Shop or compete with external applicants for permanent positions within the company.

Their chances of obtaining work within The Body Shop are considered to be excellent. Apart from the fact that the company has plans to open another four retail outlets, its managers - and the trainees themselves - believe that they are well trained, much more confident than they were and have very good product knowledge that will stand them in particularly good stead when competing with other applicants.

Some of the trainees commented that they feel "more educated than the casuals now".

A director of the company also observed that:

*"If you walk into the shops now you wouldn't be able to tell which one is the trainee... If they've worked in The Body Shop for a year and they've got references then they ought to have an entry qualification into other areas of retail".*

The training of the young people has included "a bit of word-processing and spread-sheeting". As well, said one of the trainees:

*"You only have to ask how to do the banking or the cashing up and they show you".*

The TAFE Certificate that they obtain will also allow them to obtain cross-credits into other retail courses if they should choose to do so.

Besides ending up with formal accreditation and on-the-job training the young people stated that they feel much more able to give a good account of themselves at interview nowadays. One of them remarked that:

*"I know I could sell myself better now and get another job. Before I always felt that I let myself down at interviews and I used to feel awful walking out the door."*

In the training course for the new intake of young people it is planned to include talks by the "old" trainees as a fillip for the newcomers.

## **The future of the scheme**

During the further two years for which the scheme is underwritten The Body Shop is hoping to "network" with other companies and to obtain commitments from them to take on a certain number of retailers or other staff.

By combining forces with other companies it would also be possible to expand the training options. A director of The Body Shop commented that:

*"You need to have twelve trainees before you can start a TAFE course for them. If we can combine with other companies we might be able to set up warehousing or retail courses, for example."*

From the perspective of the trainees, The Body Shop is "doing something worthwhile for the community" and for them as individuals:

*"You feel so much better about yourself when you're working. You're at the same level as everyone else and so you feel a lot more confident."*

*"Before I was always botting off my mates. (Laughing) Now I can say it's my turn to buy the drinks."*

The advice of a Body Shop director to other employers who may be thinking of starting a similar scheme is to start small, be flexible and be prepared to write off the cost.

*"Do it as social input and involve your staff in the development and running of it. The reward is an incredibly good corporate feeling in your own company. It enriches our lives; we go home happier people...And out of this scheme we'll get some staff we really want to hire at the end of it."*

He also remarked that it has been very useful to be able to work in with an agency with expertise in the field - in this case, The Brotherhood of St. Laurence - and to draw on its networks and experience.

For both The Body Shop and The Brotherhood of St. Laurence the scheme is the first of its kind and each organization is excited by its potential.

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Further details about the scheme can be obtained from:

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This summary has been written on behalf of the BCY Committee with funds provided by The Myer Foundation.

## **FACT SHEET**

### **The Body Shop Youth Traineeship Scheme**

#### **Selection Criteria**

Aged 15 - 19; unemployed for not less than a year or homeless or otherwise disadvantaged.

#### **Number of trainees**

Six attached to The Body Shop and funding made available for another 15 trainees

#### **Gender of Body Shop Trainees**

Four females and two males

#### **Length of Traineeship**

12 months and guarantee of 3 months full-time employment with The Body Shop

#### **Wages Paid**

Traineeship award wage that approximates to 75% of the full award is paid throughout the training period

#### **Use of Government Subsidies**

Australian Traineeship Scheme through the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education & Training.

#### **Nature of formal Training**

TAFE Retail Course

#### **Training Qualification**

TAFE Certificate and cross-credits into other retail courses

#### **Nature of Support Provided**

Housing Officer and other staff attached to the Brotherhood of St. Laurence's Employment Action Centre and range of informal support there and in the work-place.