

# Job Training Builds Sustainable Futures

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*This is the latest installment in our Signs of Sustainability series, organized by Sustainable Tompkins. Visit them online at [www.sustainabletompkins.org](http://www.sustainabletompkins.org).*

Reusing materials can be complex, labor intensive and even highly technical, depending on the material that is being reused—but it can also be an empowering and exciting process. Whether extending the life of a personal computer by installing a new operating system, or dismantling a home so the components (windows, doors, siding, plumbing, insulation, flooring, lumber) can be put back into active use instead of into a landfill, the skills required to do so are applicable to many other good-paying jobs.

The ReSET (Skills and Employment Training) job-training program is a free 10-week program combining a broad array of hands-on activities with seminars and presentations by local experts. The program offers skill building in specific job skills as well as job-readiness training. If this segment of the program is completed successfully, participants are eligible to apply for a full-time, paid 15-week apprenticeship with Finger Lakes ReUse.

By developing and honing skills through reuse activities such as computer refurbishing and deconstruction (an environmental alternative to traditional demolition), trainees can become qualified candidates for jobs in the local technology and construction fields.

As part of its triple bottom-line mission to enhance community, economy and environment through reuse, Finger Lakes ReUse (FLR), a nonprofit community organization that operates the ReUse Center at Triphammer Marketplace, developed this formalized job-training program for those who are interested in employment in these fields and have experienced barriers to employment. ReSET builds on two of FLR's core services: the eCenter computer refurbishing and repair program, and the Deconstruction Services program. Both of these programs offer tremendous opportunities for trainees to learn through hands-on activities in areas of technology and construction.

In the ReSET Tech track, participants learn the basics of technology systems, hardware refurbishing and troubleshooting malfunctioning computers. In the ReSET Construction track, participants learn about sustainable building materials and design, safe work-site practices, proper tool usage and maintenance, and related topics. Both tracks work with trainees to develop and affirm soft skills such as active listening, self-motivation, teamwork and conflict management.

Trainees are responding enthusiastically to the program, which was first launched in March. One ReSET Construction trainee noted, "I lived through a time when nobody talked about sustainability, but now it's happening. Now I've seen both sides, the wasteful side and the sustainable side, and now I want to be a contributing factor to the sustainable side."

Trainees who completed the pilot ReSET Tech training praised the program, saying of the hands-on approach, "That is a major

plus! Touching all aspects of computers [is] causing me to pursue this knowledge in and out of the program." Another participant said, "The instructors were wonderful. I would think anyone would appreciate the attentiveness and instruction that they gave us in the ReSET program."

Guest instructors from local businesses and organizations provide new information and specialized perspectives to ReSET participants. Local computer-technology experts from Brightworks Computer Consulting, Databound Solutions, and Cornell University's IT (Information Technologies) Services have provided instruction on topics such as software development and security. Professionals from the local construction industry along with sustainable building advocates have taught on topics from deep energy retrofitting to project management.

Instructors include representatives from ASI Renovations, Snug Planet, Holt Architects, Ecovillage, New Earth Living and Cosentini Construction, Tugley Wood Timberframing, the Skilled

Trades Diversity Council and Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County. FLR staff and volunteers also play a crucial role in teaching and mentoring participants in their areas of expertise.

The ReSET program is community collaboration, developed in partnership with the Ithaca Youth Bureau's Computer All Stars program, Tompkins Workforce New York, and Challenge Workforce Solutions, with support from the Ithaca Urban Renewal Agency, Tompkins County Solid Waste, and the United Way Youth and Philanthropy Fund. ReSET was recently awarded a grant from the Helen Thomas Howland Foundation as administered by the Community Foundation of Tompkins County to support the paid apprenticeship portion of the training.

Learning, equity, evolution,

enterprise and innovation are essential parts of FLR's daily work to earn its place in our community. The ReSET program strives to help trainees build a more sustainable future by developing skills and talents in their search for long-term employment.

"It was a long planning process and is an exciting culmination of everything we've been learning about the potential to educate and empower through reuse," said Diane Cohen, executive director of FLR. "It is great to see [our trainees] totally absorbed and engaged in an educational process, while simultaneously providing us with extra hands to process all the materials to help meet our growing supply of donated inventory and enormous demand for affordable materials and services."

For more information, visit [www.fingerlakesreuse.org](http://www.fingerlakesreuse.org).

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