

Program trains MetroWest women for clean energy jobs

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Toni Hammond, 35, of Maynard, shakes hands with State Rep. Carmine Gentile, D-Sudbury, while her daughter Syriah, 4, holds her certificate of completion during a graduation ceremony of a dozen women who completed a five-week training program in clean energy sales at South Middlesex Opportunity Council in Framingham Friday. The Massachusetts Clean Energy Center gave SMOC funding for the Successful Women in Clean Energy Initiative for women who were under or unemployed, displaced or veterans. [Daily News Staff Photo/Ken McGagh]

build up the community, to teach people what I've learned."

During the five-week training program, she studied environmental literacy, solar energy, and energy conservation. She participated in mock interviews, resume workshops, and customer service training.

As Yarrell put it, she and her fellow trainees learned "everything that we were going to need to be strong in this workforce." That workforce is the clean energy sector, where she and the others are now headed for six-month paid fellowships.

FRAMINGHAM – Shanae Yarrell's days begin in the morning and end in the morning.

The 30-year-old Framingham mom wakes at 6:30 a.m. to ready her daughter for school – even though her nighttime cleaning job can keep her out as late as 3 a.m.

Yarrell always dreamed of a career of passion. On Friday, sleep notwithstanding, she took a step towards that

goal, completing a clean energy job-training program alongside 11 other low- and moderate-income women.

"It feels like I can pretty much go anywhere from here," Yarrell said. "I always want to be the one to help

The South Middlesex Opportunity Council (SMOC) ran the program in partnership with the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center (MassCEC), the financial sponsor. In addition to the opportunity council, the clean energy center is partnering with Roxbury Community College to run a similar program there this year.

The nascent program, now in its second year, is helping more women and people of color enter a clean energy industry that is booming and lucrative – but lacking in diversity.

In 2016, women comprised less than 30 percent of clean energy workers in Massachusetts,



while racial and ethnic minorities accounted for 23 percent of workers, according to the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center's annual industry report.

Clean energy companies sometimes still struggle to find workers with enough qualifications and experience, said Steve Pike, CEO of the MassCEC. The program focuses in particular on training the women for sales jobs.

Fatima Tom, left, of Boston, Tony Gooseberry of Ashland and Fanta Stafford of Framingham listen to speakers before getting certificates for completing a the Successful Women in Clean Energy training program at the South Middlesex Opportunity Council in Framingham Friday. The Massachusetts Clean Energy Center gave SMOC funding for for the initiative for women who were under or unemployed, displaced or veterans. [Daily News Staff Photo/Ken McGagh]

"I think the industry is strengthened to the

extent we can employ more folks with varying experience levels and experiences," Pike said.

For Yarrell, with a young daughter and a job that in her telling leaves much to be desired, the program's name alone sparked her interest: the Successful Women in Clean Energy Initiative.

"Successful women? All right here we go," Yarrell recalled thinking, speaking at Friday's graduation ceremony at SMOC's Framingham offices.

Ashland resident Tony Gooseberry, 41, moved to Massachusetts from New Orleans in November with nothing but her car, which for a while served as her home.

"But the Lord was like, I got something for you," Gooseberry, another graduate of the program, said. "Everything is moving, everything is getting better."

Gooseberry is a musician, a lifelong flutist who also plays percussion instruments. She wants to go to school to become a music engineer, composing instrumental music to help people feel at peace.

"People suffer all day every day, and Jesus died so that we can be the light of the world," she said. "And you got hate all around, it's always hate, hate, hate. Where is the compassion? Where is the love?"

The clean energy sector in Massachusetts grew from 60,274 jobs in 2010 to 105,212 jobs in 2016, a 74 percent increase, according to the MassCEC's industry report.



Shanae Yarrell, 30, of Framingham speaks to fellow graduates, friends and family during a graduation ceremony for a dozen women who completed a five-week training program in energy sales at the South Middlesex Opportunity Council in Framingham Friday. [Daily News Staff Photo/Ken McGagh]

Those jobs represent 2.9 percent of the state's labor market, the report shows, and they pay well: around 70 percent of clean energy workers earn more than \$50,000 a year.

For Flor Monroe, the job-training program was about finding her way back to the field. The Marlborough resident has an undergraduate degree in forest engineering and a master's degree in environmental science and policy.

She earned the first degree in her old home, Colombia, and the second in her new home, the United States, where she has lived for eight years. But Monroe isn't working in the environmental field – at least, she wasn't before.

Like the rest of the women graduating from the program, Monroe is interviewing to find a company that will hire her for a six-month

paid fellowship. Last year, some graduates of the program were hired full time afterwards.

Among the other graduates Friday were Christine Murray, Julie Olivares, Mei-Lin Po, and Fanta Stafford of Framingham; Toni Hammond of Maynard; Monthyna Genece of Watertown; and Fatima Tom of Mattapan.

"I think this will be a very successful program for Massachusetts," Monroe said.