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By **TONY MARQUIS** | *Business Trends*

Seven years ago, Delilah Sostre was a high school dropout working at a supermarket.

She enrolled in a 20-week course at Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow, a nonprofit organization in Brooklyn. The program helped Sostre earn her GED and a full-time position at a local dentist's office. In July, as the general manager at Infinity Dental Care, she hired the office's second trainee from OBT. A third followed in December.

"I wanted to give the chance to somebody else like they gave me the chance," Sostre said. For 25 years, OBT has been training a workforce some parts of society has written off – most of the young adults who come into OBT have dropped out of high school.

"The reality is: They're smart kids, and with the right sort of guidance, they could be quite successful," Executive Director Randy Peers said.

OBT has programs for business skills, adult literacy, youth education and adult job training and placement. About 1,100 youth and adults enroll in OBT's programs each year. From 2002-08, 71 percent of program graduates found employment.

"Over our 25-year history, we've got some alumni who really have got some great careers going and have been supporters of the organization," Peers said.

Before taking the job at OBT, Peers spent four years at the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce, where he managed an employment assistance program called Good Help.

Peers had a background in workforce development. He ran programs for ex-offenders and helped manage the Church Avenue Merchants Block Association in East Flatbush.

In 2005, OBT's founder, Sister Mary Franciscus, passed away.

"She was a pretty amazing lady, and I always had a lot of respect for the organization that she built," Peers said.

Peers joined OBT in 2006, and has helped start a job-training program that partners with the Ikea in Red Hook. With the job market slowing, OBT has gotten creative in its placement practices.

In the past, law firms, financial services companies and government agencies have hired heavily from OBT. Now, a majority of the organization's placements have been in medical offices and for companies looking to outsource labor. Peers is also hoping some of OBT's trainees get jobs at the U.S. Census Bureau.

"At the end of the day, the labor market is still the labor market, and our young adults are still going to be competing for fewer jobs against a much more highly skilled group of people who are out of work," Peers said.

Local small businesses have made up a majority of OBT's placements in the last eight months.

"Small businesses, they have to be careful," Peers said. "Hiring an overqualified person today who might not be with you in a year's time – is that the right investment for your business to make?"

It isn't all success stories at OBT, though.

"When a young adult messes up, we take it personally. Sometimes, it's just immaturity," Peers said. "We have them for 20 weeks, and we do the best we can."

But a majority go on to become productive members of a company and society.

"I spoke with my boss, and I told him, you know, let's get some girls with OBT," Sostre said. "You come out of there well-trained, ready for the business world."