

[Janelle Cruz before she was murdered]

Job Corps Offers New Opportunity Youths Get Chance to Learn Trades, Finish High School; [Orange County Edition]

MARIE MONTGOMERY. *Los Angeles Times*, 20 March 1986, pg. 4

Do Dong spoke little English when he and his brother left Vietnam in 1981 and joined their father in the United States, leaving their mother, two sisters and a brother behind.

Because their father was too old and frail to work, the brothers had to support him, but they couldn't get jobs because their English skills were so limited. The family lived on welfare and refugee aid.

Do, 21, learned about the federally funded Job Corps from a friend and enrolled in its electronics training program two years ago. The Job Corps paid for his training, which included English tutoring and schooling for his high school diploma, as well as room and board at the San Diego training center.

Do is now studying electronics full time at Golden West College, something he could not have done without the proficiency in English and the high school diploma he gained through the Job Corps.

The family continues to live in a cramped apartment in Huntington Beach, but Do has hopes of buying a home and bringing the rest of his family to the United States when he completes his studies.

Moved From Oklahoma

Eva Kinney, 19, recently entered the Job Corps' San Diego center for training in word processing. Two months earlier, she had moved from the home of her father and stepmother in Oklahoma to her mother's home in Laguna Hills. Her goal is to be able to live on her own after her training, which she expects will take one to two years. She also hopes that the Job Corps will help her find her first job.

Do and Kinney are typical of the 67,000 young people, ages 16 to 24, served each year by a program that surprisingly few in Orange County know about.

The 22-year-old Job Corps was established to get people off the "welfare cycle," said Penny Conroy of Nero & Associates, a firm that recruits men for the program.

However, the success of the Orange County program has been limited by the

local target group's lack of knowledge about the Job Corps, Conroy said. While "there is a three- to four-month waiting list" for Orange County men who want to enroll, local women and Latino men are particularly underrepresented in the Job Corps, she added.

Conroy said she hopes a notice about the Job Corps, which will be sent with welfare checks this spring, will aid minority recruitment.

Asians Largest Group

Asians such as Do Dong make up the largest group of Orange County recruits. Other minorities fall way behind the numbers of Asians, Conroy said.

The Job Corps uses private companies such as Nero & Associates and nonprofit groups such as Women in Community Service, which recruits local women, to get qualified applicants.

Gordon Bennett, field representative for Women in Community Service, explained that the Job Corps tries to encourage low-income people to join the program by offering full financial support while the recruit receives job training and necessary schooling for a high school diploma. Training is provided in the automotive, clerical, culinary, medical, construction and computer fields.

To be eligible, recruits must "be at the government poverty standard, be able to complete the job training program and have no criminal record," Conroy said.

Conroy and Bennett work with county truancy officers to find Job Corps candidates. They also post notices at local employment offices.

Recruits are sent to one of 12 job training centers in the West-the nearest are in Los Angeles and San Diego. The centers are funded and operated by trade unions, private companies or nonprofit groups, Bennett said. San Diego's center is run by the Singer Co., while the Los Angeles training center is operated by the YWCA.

Each center offers a different combination of training programs, but the combination is not necessarily based on the interests of the company running the center. However, if a private company or union is the sponsor, recruits at that center "have an edge on someone off the street" in getting into that union or company, Bennett said.

Earned Diploma

Janelle Cruz of Irvine is one of the many Job Corps graduates who have used the program primarily to earn a high school diploma. Although she was not a dropout, Cruz said problems caused by her parents' divorce forced her to "get out of my

family situation so I could finish high school."

Cruz went to the training center in Clearfield, Utah, where, like other recruits, she was tested for aptitude in job skills, then placed on a self-paced training program.

She graduated last fall with straight A's and is now a full-time student at Orange Coast College, where she is training to be a legal secretary.

Cruz stayed in the Job Corps program for 10 months. The average stay is seven or eight months, said Beverly Babb, West Coast regional director for Women in Community Service. But students can stay for up to two years with free room and board. Bennett said the government and training center combined spend an average of \$5,000 to \$7,000 a year on each recruit.

Training centers are organized much like community colleges with dormitories, recruiter Gordon Bennett said. But they are more rigidly structured than a typical high school or community college, according to Cruz.

On a normal day at Cruz's training center, "you get up at 6:30, have breakfast, do your chores, then go to school. You get into trouble if you don't get to class on time or finish your chores," she said. Negative "points" are chalked up against students breaking the rules, which could slow their progress at the center.

Craig Doughty, another recent Job Corps graduate, entered the San Diego training center to get his high school diploma and learn the masonry trade.

Little Chance of Job

Doughty had little chance of supporting himself a couple of years ago when he dropped out of high school. "After that, I got kicked out of the house," he said.

The 18-year-old's mother told him about the Job Corps. He stayed in the program three months, earned his diploma and received enough masonry training to get a job as a bricklayer for a Riverside contractor. He now makes enough to live on his own in Corona.

Doughty said the Job Corps schooling was similar to on-the-job training. "They basically teach you to be able to work an eight-hour day," he said.

In addition to job training, the recruit is trained in "life" skills such as opening a bank account, applying for jobs and balancing a checkbook.

Upon completion of training, the graduate is placed in a job by either his training center or his recruiter and given up to \$2,400 to get started after returning home. Cruz, for example, received more than \$1,000 in readjustment money after leaving and could have received the full \$2,400 if she had stayed the maximum of two

years.

Even if the recruits leave before training is completed, they often can find a job in their chosen trade, Conroy said.

Job placement "is great for the graduate," Conroy said, because the training center and recruiter race to get the person a new job. The organization placing the graduate gets additional funding from the government.

Despite all the advantages of the Job Corps, graduates say it does have some drawbacks.

Cruz said her own determination was what helped her get through the 10 months at the Job Corps.

"A lot of the kids were unmotivated, and they made it harder on the people who did want to learn," Cruz said. "I had a lot of acquaintances there, but mostly I just got into my studies."

Motivation Vital

Bennett agreed that success in the Job Corps depends on individual motivation. "The experience is what you make out of it."

Doughty also said the center housed many people who didn't want to work. "I would say about 70% of the people there were freeloading, and about 30% just wanted to get in and get out."

Doughty left the Job Corps when he received his high school diploma and what he felt was enough training for a job. He said he's grateful to the program for helping him complete high school.

Conroy said she feels that the program is helping to break the welfare cycle in the families of recruits.

"College is not for everybody," and the Job Corps offers opportunities for those who can't afford college or trade school, she added.