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Somerville acts on employment

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A **Somerville** workforce development **program** has teamed up with a jobs website to match low-income **young adults** with local businesses.

Although anyone can post or apply **for** one-off jobs or part-time work **for** free on HelpAroundTown.com, **young adults** age 18 to 24 in the city's Pocket Change **program** can signify their membership by using a badge on their profile, and employers can give preference to those applicants if they choose, said **program** manager Amanda Maher, the city's senior economic development specialist.

Pocket Change members get alerts when new jobs become available, and their case managers help them to apply and act as contacts if a job-poster wants to provide feedback.

Through a \$7,500 contract, **Somerville** will pay **for** improvements to the Help Around Town website, which will allow the city to continue to use it **for** the Pocket Change **program**, Maher said.

Reem Yared, chief executive of Help Around Town, said **Somerville** initially approached her **for** advice, but it became clear that both sides were on the same page.

"We had exactly the same goals," she said. "I started Help Around Town with the specific purpose of helping youth find local jobs and build a reputation."

She said many employers will go the extra mile if they know they will be helping someone who really needs a job.

"It's really out of good citizenship, they know they are hiring local youth who want to make it," Yared said.

Funding **for** the contract and the **program** is provided through a \$100,000 Working Cities Challenge Grant, awarded to **Somerville** early this year by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston.

The city applied **for** the grant after a 2013 report by Commonwealth Corporation and the Drexel University Center **for** Labor Markets and Policy found that many **young adults** lack the "soft **skills**" needed **for** a job, such as knowing how to write a cover letter and resume, showing up **for** work on time and not talking on their cellphones on the job, Maher said.

"Many employers were saying, 'If you can send us someone with those **skills** and a good work ethic, we'll train them to do the rest,'" she said. "So the whole idea behind the **program** using Help Around Town is to provide **young adults** with pocket change while we work with them on soft-skill training. It also provides them with work experience **for** their resumes, as well as references, so that they'll be ready some day **for** full-time permanent **employment**."

The partnership between Pocket Change and Help Around Town has already paid dividends, Maher said. Several **young adults** who applied **for** one-off jobs with **Somerville** businesses through the site have since moved into more permanent **employment** with a local business.

In the meantime, the city has been seeking additional funders to sustain the **program**, she said.

For more information, contact Amanda Maher at amaher@somervillema.gov or 617-625-6600, ext. 2528, or go to HelpAroundTown.com.

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Caption: SQUARE DEALS: A jobs program being launched in Somerville is designed to help job-seeking young adults develop 'soft skills' and match them with hiring local employers such as those in Union Square, above.

STAFF FILE PHOTO BY MATT STONE

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