

# CONSTRUCTING THE FUTURE

*Meet Dean, who received job training through Summit Academy OIC, a United Way partner agency.*



**“I found myself in midlife at a crossroads,”** said Dean. “And where do I go?” At 52, Dean was living in a halfway house in Roseville, recovering from a battle with drugs and alcohol and chronic depression.

His prospects for employment were dim. Dean, a Yankton Sioux, had grown up on a farm in South Dakota. After serving in the military, he owned a mortgage company for a number of years. “And then I got caught up in the mortgage crisis,” he said. “I was found guilty by the federal government of mortgage fraud. I did two-and-a-

half years in a federal prison.” After prison, his life continued to unravel.

“When I got out of prison, I had to decide what I could do,” he said. “I couldn’t work in any business that had a fiduciary responsibility. I decided instead to go to school, better myself—put myself in a position to where I could get a job that I could afford to pay my financial obligations. And I found out about Summit Academy.”

United Way is the largest, non-governmental funder of jobs programs in Minnesota, investing over

\$5 million in 36 programs annually. Summit Academy OIC in North Minneapolis is a United Way partner agency. United Way supports the Hard Hats construction program.

“Deep down, I was bound and determined to be successful,” said Dean. “To be someone that my children, my family, can be proud of, and turn my life around.”

Each semester, students in the Hard Hats program build a mock house outside on campus, just off Victory Memorial Parkway, learning skills such as carpentry, plumbing,



electrical wiring, welding and weatherization. Each student undergoes 20 weeks of rigorous classroom and hands-on training, plus placement services. Students learn hard skills like reading blueprints and using materials and equipment safely, and soft skills such as interviewing and being dependable, so they are positioned for success.

Summit Academy OIC believes that the best social program in the world is a living-wage job.

For Dean, the experience has been transformational. "You know, after

being in prison, losing everything that I had materialistically, financially, I was at a place in my life where I was a little unsure," he said. "And Summit, since I've been here, has allowed me an opportunity to regain my confidence, my self-esteem, my self-respect."

Summit Academy OIC has an 80 percent placement rate for its graduates and leverages strong partnerships with local companies such as M.A. Mortenson. Summit Academy graduates helped construct TCF Bank Stadium and Target Field.

Increasing people's earnings through job-training programs and other efforts is one means by which United Way is helping people in need move up and out of poverty.

"In Sioux culture, it's a circle," said Dean. "Everything goes in circles. I think that I'm coming full circle, back around again, and I'm ready to blossom."

*Last year, United Way helped nearly 6,500 people get and keep a job for at least six months.*