In 2021 we continued to build our portfolio of best-in-class programs and services.

Everyone has the right to be safe, no matter what the job.

OAI’s Hazardous Waste Worker Training program provided OSHA-related health & safety training to 3,260 vulnerable workers in 14 states.

Everyone deserves a chance to succeed, no matter where they are starting from.

Together, OAI’s Environmental Career Worker Training and Greencorps Chicago programs placed 115 individuals into permanent employment with an average wage of $14.68.

Everyone succeeds when workers are skilled, engaged, and employed.

OAI’s Chicago Southland department placed 71 participants into employment in healthcare, manufacturing and TDL with an average wage of $14.36.

Adaptation and Innovation: a Reflection of our Values

This year, as the COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact every aspect of our lives and of OAI’s work, we took the opportunity to implement improved systems that benefited all of the individuals we serve as well as our staff and partners. For instance, we optimized our use of technology and implemented online, synchronous training using the Zoom platform for both job seekers and workers participating in health and safety training. We invested in the necessary technology and staff/ partner training that has allowed us to implement more efficient, paperless course registration and documentation tracking systems and the adaptation of online delivery modalities. We also implemented virtual hiring fairs for job seekers, attended by hundreds and resulting in 45 job placements. We were able to offer virtual tech support across the organization as many team members continued to work from home and utilize online systems for all aspects of operations; a significant shift for our small formerly low-tech organization, and further demonstration of our commitment to integrity and impact.

Leveraging our expertise in health and safety, OAI developed Train the Trainer courses in Principles of Infectious Diseases, Bloodborne Pathogens, and COVID-19 Awareness and delivered the training to 53 trainers who, in turn, provided this training to more than 1,600 essential workers and community members across the country. OAI and its partners addressed the needs of low-literacy and/or low English-proficient workers by providing COVID-19 and safety training in Arabic, Cantonese, English, Mandarin, Polish, Spanish and Vietnamese. We formalized partnerships with more than 18 organizations for COVID-19 Awareness training including the American Academy of Dental Assistants, Chicago Public Schools, Chicago Public Library, Greater Chicago Food Depository and others.

COVID-19 restrictions required that all in-person training was delivered with smaller class sizes and we continued to implement the highest-possible safety precautions across all programs. Despite these changes, we were able to develop and implement new Registered Apprenticeship programs in the healthcare and manufacturing sectors; working closely with local businesses to address their skills shortages and recruitment challenges. We also partnered closely with area economic development leaders to align training with business growth especially in areas such as supply chain management, robotics and e-commerce distribution; all sectors booming because of the pandemic. We continued to center collaboration as a strategy for reaching a wide and diverse audience and celebrated many new and sustained partnerships across all of OAI’s programs. We also implemented a comprehensive Diversity, Racial Equity and Inclusion (DREI) assessment process that resulted in training for all staff and board; ultimately leading to the development of a staff DREI action team. We are thrilled to hold ourselves accountable to our commitment to racial equity throughout all aspects of our work.
Cheryl Francis
Director of Economic Development, Village of South Holland, South Holland, IL

Jun Zhao, Phd
Director, Business & Worker Training, OAI, Secretary, Oak Park, IL

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OAI CHICAGO SOUTHLAND SUCCESS STORY

Kentucky firefighters participate in hands-on training for a Confined Space course offered to four neighboring, volunteer fire stations including their new recruits in Warren County, KY. Various scenarios were practiced in an elementary school playground, which offered tunnels of various heights and depths.

Kentucky firefighters participate in hands-on training for a Confined Space course offered to four neighboring, volunteer fire stations including their new recruits in Warren County, KY. Various scenarios were practiced in an elementary school playground, which offered tunnels of various heights and depths.

BUSINESS & WORKER TRAINING SUCCESS STORY

A primary aim for OAI’s Business and Worker Training (BWT) team is to train First Responders and Law Enforcement Personnel who do not have access to the resources or training essential to their health and safety. OAI trains Emergency Personnel to respond to the critical hazardous incidents and emergencies they face every day in their communities. During the 2020-2021 program year, the COVID-19 pandemic, and restrictions to mitigate the spread of infection, lead to significant changes in training delivery. While classes were typically held in traditional classroom settings, OAI responded quickly and transitioned classes to either online formats or alternative settings to allow the continued support of worker safety.

OAI developed several new virtual HAZMAT Awareness courses for emergency dispatchers in partnership with Kentucky Emergency Management (KYEM). Through this collaboration, OAI trained more than 400 Emergency Responders on critical topics such as Confined Space, Bakken Crude Oil, and Chemical Assisted Suicide Awareness. OAI instructors also worked creatively to follow COVID-19 safety guidelines and continue to provide HAZMAT training to more than 300 Kentucky Firefighters and First Responders. One of the alternative settings used to deliver training was a local school playground which enabled use of small tunnels to practice responding to emergencies within confined spaces. Emergency Personnel and Fire Fighters were able to put their training into practice while responding to natural disasters, including the tornado and subsequent flooding that took place in Kentucky, in 2021.

Chris always knew that he wanted to be in engineering and work with his hands. He came COVID-unemployed to OAI and saw the Electro-Mechanical Technician Registered Apprenticeship as a great way to develop his career path. Designed with solid input from the employer, Morrison Container Handling Solutions, the apprenticeship program provided theory and hands-on classroom/lab training at Purdue Northwest on multiple topics that gave him the know-how to build and service both electronic and mechanical components of just about any equipment found in a factory or distribution center. After six months, Chris earned two industry-recognized certificates, PMMI Mechanical Components and PMMI Basic Electricity. Having completed the apprenticeship program, Chris is a full-time employee as a Manufacturing Assembly and Field Service Tech at Morrison Container, earning a livable wage he is proud of.