Gabby Rudolph turned 21 on the eve of Independence Day this year. “It was my best birthday yet,” shares one of the newest graduates of the YWCA’s First Course server certification program. “I’m working at Nicholson’s as a server and I’m really glad I got the direction and the training to be here.”

First Course is a program that offers technical and job readiness training for servers. Established by the YWCA and made possible with funding from Bank of America, Huntington Bank, CareSource and the Southwest Ohio Region Workforce Investment Board (SWORWIB), First Course uses a curriculum developed by The Federation of Dining Room Professionals (FDRP).
**Partnership Approach**

The YWCA collaborates with KR Hospitality Group and Cincinnati Works to administer First Course, which uses an innovative approach to solving workforce gaps, known as the Comprehensive Case Management Employment Program (CCMEP), devised by Governor Kasich to help those in poverty and employers needing talent. CCMEP combines the resources of the Community Action Agency, Talbert House, Easterseals and the Urban League of Greater Southwestern Ohio to provide a comprehensive approach to helping at-risk youth and young adults aged 14-24 identify and achieve their life goals. Offering a proactive and innovative approach to case management, CCMEP’s team consists of four coaches and a youth success advocate from AmeriCorps Project Advance.

**Training Provider Eligibility under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2018 implemented by SWORWIB**

First Course is included in the Ohio Workforce Inventory of Education and Training (WIET) system, using The Federation of Dining Room Professionals (FDRP) curriculum endorsed by the American Culinary Federation Education Foundation and the International Sommeliers Guild.

The training opens doors to earning opportunities in the hospitality industry through obtaining a certificate as a Dining Room Associate, upon passing both a practical and written exam. The YWCA is the lead agency. KR Hospitality Group and Cincinnati Works provide training and job-readiness. The SWORWIB approved the training partnership as a provisional Eligible Training Provider in 2017. In late 2018, the training team must present their results for completion, certification, employment and average wages to become an approved Eligible Training Provider for public funds through the OhioMeansJobs Center in Cincinnati at 1916 Central Parkway and operated through a contract with Hamilton County Jobs & Family Services.

**Supporting Hospitality Workforce Challenges**

The technical part of the program is taught by Kathleen MacQueeney, owner and principal consultant of the KR Hospitality Group. MacQueeney, who moved to Cincinnati in 1984 after graduating with a degree in social work, helped open deSha’s restaurant in Montgomery.

“Finding and training staff has always been one of the industry’s biggest challenges,” comments MacQueeney, “And it’s bit dichotomous – this sector is probably the most flexible in terms of accommodating schedules, spotty employment and education history and criminal records.”

As her career in the industry progressed, MacQueeney was tapped to lend her expertise to Cincinnati State Community & Technical College. “The teaching kitchens at the college are terrific, and the chefs and servers needed a real-life classroom.” MacQueeney served on the opening team for the Summit Restaurant on the campus to serve several needs, including hands-on training for fine dining serving and cooking. And tips from guests help offset the costs of tuition.

MacQueeney shares, “When the YWCA initially
applied for a grant from LISC at the national level, it wasn’t approved. But Kathy Schwab, the local LISC Executive Director, believed in the project’s merit. She suggested that the YWCA contact me to help. That was a great opportunity for me to combine my social work education and passion for the hospitality industry for positive change.”

She continues, “Cincinnati Works was chosen by the YWCA to help administer the program; employment coaches at Cincinnati Works, like Billie Vega, help bridge resources at the YWCA and Cincinnati Works to teach the job readiness portion and provide candidates coaching during the interview and hiring process.”

Since 2017, the YWCA has held four First Course training sessions. Thirty-seven graduates have completed the six-week program, comprised of technical training – which covers everything from setting to plating to pairing, along with soft skills of interviewing professionally, writing a resume, anticipating needs and managing stressful situations. Students attend classes during the day and work as servers in training at several of the area restaurants and at one of the region’s busiest banquet facilities.

MacQueeney shares, “Ric Booth at the Duke Energy Convention Center was an early supporter, lending us all of the props and space we needed.”

**In demand:** Gabby’s manager, Michelle Mead, says, “Customers are drawn to Gabby… wish we had 12 more just like her.”

### New WIOA Youth Expectations, Governor Kasich’s New CCMEP

On July 1, 2016, the state implemented the Comprehensive Case Management and Employment Program (CCMEP) as an integrated intervention program. CCMEP combines the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The SWORWIB agreed to move youth funds to CCMEP and to oversee the new Ohio legislation in Cincinnati/Hamilton County (see below). The new framework is designed to improve employment and educational outcomes for youth 14-24 years of age. CCMEP allows for flexibility in spending, while providing the enhanced services and supports structure needed to overcome barriers to employment and education.

#### Effects of CCMEP on WIOA youth services

- The volume of youth served increased from 669 to 748, excluding summer youth participants.
- Work experience spending increased from 14% of expenses to 21%.
- The fundamental nature/needs/barriers/engagement of WIOA youth have not changed.
- Assessment tools and case management services are more in-depth to better inform the staff about all barriers.
- Funding and services have increased flexibility to react to needs as they arise.

#### Effects of CCMEP on TANF services (ages 14-24)

- Significant TANF dollars were made available for enhanced services to both WIOA and TANF-funded youth.
- Case-load size decreased, allowing more in-depth case management efforts.
- Individual Training Accounts, On-the-Job Training and an array of barrier removal services are now available.
- 1,300 TANF eligible individuals were served so far.
- Summer employment provided 340 youth an aggregate total of approximately $1,000,000 in earnings as well as supplying additional valuable training opportunities for the participants.
- CCMEP WIOA youth providers continued under WIOA performance expectations while also learning CCMEP, which brought more resources for SWORWIB-funded youth 14-24 in-school and out-of-school.
for the first three classes. And, thanks to funding and technical support from many organizations, including Sherry Kelley Marshall at SWORWIB, and a partnership with Cincinnati Works, we were able to purchase supplies and a ‘starter’ uniform for each student – shirt, pants, shoes and apron – to help remove obstacles. And collaborations with the Duke Energy Convention Center, JACK Casino, St. Anthony Center and Madisonville Education and Assistance Center provide facilities needed for training.”

Nicholson Manager Michelle Mead is bullish on the program results. “Gabby Rudolph is one highly requested server here. Customers seek me out to compliment her. She’s referenced in our guest reviews. People are just drawn to her. Honestly, I wish we had 12 more employees like her.”

Gabby’s currently working seven days a week, logging between 35 and 45 hours. “I won’t always work these many days in row,” she says, “but right now. I’m saving for a car. And I couldn’t do it without my mom, who helps take care of Sincere, my one-year-old son.”

She’s equally grateful for the training. “We have to know a lot about how our food is prepared, ingredients – and our bar,” comments Gabby. “And I use a lot of what I learned during the classes in this job. Having that training has helped me get some great opportunities to earn more money, too – like working the Food & Wine Show at Sawyer Point.”

MacQueeney retells the story of the Food & Wine Show experience: “One of the Nicholson’s chefs was struck by the number of people Gabby knew, so he asked her whether they were ‘regulars’ at the restaurant. When Gabby told him ‘no’, the chef laughed and told me ‘she’s just that personable! And that’s why so many people request her.’”

Gabby says the best part of being at Nicholson’s is the teamwork, “It’s such a positive environment. Everyone – even the managers – are always willing to pitch in. Every day. There’s just no negative energy.”

Trainings, like this server program, represent the collective impact of the SWORWIB, Hamilton County Jobs & Family Services (HCJFS), educators, non-profits, industry thought leaders and new methods like CCMEP, that help leverage existing resources, like the Talbert House, which was selected by HCJFS and the SWORWIB to operate the program in Cincinnati and Hamilton County.

Matt Long, Workforce Development Manager, YWCA, shares, “This program is our mission in action. OhioMeansJobs and CCMEP case managers identify individuals who wish to pursue training and job opportunities in the hospitality field. Those individuals are then referred to First Course and receive ongoing support during and post-training from CCMEP agencies, such as Urban League and Easterseals, along with support from the YWCA and Cincinnati Works.

MacQueeney leverages the region’s rich industry talent to deliver the program’s curriculum, “Laura Landoll, CSW, advanced sommelier, helps students learn about new and Old-World wines, and different varietals; Kevin Klusner from Sam Adams is a certified Cicerone and he delivers the beer training. Up to 10 industry managers from area restaurants conduct mock interviews to help prepare students for the post-program job interviews – and the program

Next First Course class moves to Madisonville in October

The next class, which begins in October 2018, is now accepting applicants and will be held at the Madison Education and Assistance Center in Madisonville. “Moving the training locations helps us increase awareness. We know that transportation can be a challenge, so when we move the training locations around, we increase awareness while trying to make sure that we are recruiting students from as many neighborhoods as possible,” says Kathleen MacQueeney, owner and principal consultant of the KR Hospitality Group.
has select partner restaurants where the students perform a four-hour, job shadow shift to offer a ‘real live look’ at a day in the life of a server. Nicholson’s, Kaze, The Mercer, Senate, Abagail Street, The Sleepy Bee, JACK Casino, the Duke Energy Convention Center and Keystone Clifton provide an evaluation on the shadow shift to aid us in coaching the students, and we’re very appreciative for their partnership.”

Earning & Learning
When Gabby, who grew up in Price Hill, saw the CCMEP flyer, she remembered thinking, ‘Wow, now this is something that I could be really be good at.’
“So, I called and got a chance to work with Billie Vega, one of the Cincinnati Works employment coaches. She helped me get ready for the interview and, after completing First Course, succeed. I have a certificate, I’m making good money and I’m learning what it takes to get ahead.”

SWORWIB President & CEO Sherry Kelley Marshall offers, “That’s a good reason for celebration. And, a great recipe for regional success. Programs like CCMEP help fuel the workforce needs of Ohio’s 22,000+ eating-and-drinking establishments. According to the National Restaurant Association, an estimated $20.9 billion was spent at restaurants in 2017, which employed nearly 600,000 Ohioans – including 53,606 in southwest Ohio. The number is expected to grow by nearly 10% by 2028 to 636,500 statewide. These jobs represent opportunities that, when coupled with certificate training, can illuminate pathways for advancement and careers within this industry.”

Checking the tab: Connecting with customers, mastering the guest order system – along with food and bar information is all in a shift’s work. “Our servers are our front line,” says Nicholson’s Michelle Mead. “They’re required to know a tremendous amount of information, and the certification program prepares them beautifully.”