A new program, managed by the PMI Dallas Chapter, is aimed at opening eyes and doors for disadvantaged youth—bridging the education gap and the talent gap at the same time.

With no set educational or development path for project management, many students aren’t aware of the possibilities that exist. The PMI Dallas Chapter and its sponsor, Global Conductor Management Consulting, are working to be part of the solution, while addressing the corporate talent gap as well.

The 3.4 percent unemployment rate in the Dallas–Fort Worth, Texas, USA area is contributing to a local talent gap, and Fortune 500 companies and consulting firms like Global Conductor are in constant need of local, certified project managers to meet their corporate objectives. The area is home to 21 Fortune 500 companies and is one of the three fastest growing cities in the United States, according to Forbes.com. With more companies arriving every year, skilled project management practitioners will be increasingly hard to find.

The PMI Dallas Chapter is focused on building awareness of the project management discipline and supporting the development of project management practitioners. This huge pool of skilled project managers (4,000 members) is eager to share their knowledge to help the next generation enjoy the successes and challenges of project management. By reaching out to high school students through a training program, they are helping to prepare students with critical thinking skills and hoping they will take an interest in the profession.

The program supports the community as well. A local children’s hospital provides the projects for the students, which often involve providing needed supplies to the neonatal intensive care unit. Last year, the program contracted with other design students to manufacture covers for infant positioning aids. Prior to that, the students designed and produced “lovies” that are placed with the infants and carry their mother’s scent.

The students get the full experience of project management, working with a real budget, vendors and deadlines, while learning critical skills such as public speaking, leadership and planning. Students take on responsibility in a way many of them have never experienced before. Since the projects are real, there are real stakeholders and infants who are relying on them to succeed. As they meet with PMI volunteers and discuss their project challenges, the chapter members are always greatly impressed by the students’ work and how similar it is to their own. Most importantly, the students learn that not only are these skills—and a career in project management—valuable, but they are also attainable.
“The challenge of working with disadvantaged youth is that, in some cases, you want more for them than they want for themselves,” said Talibah Adenouga, PMP, PMI Dallas Chapter liaison for student educational programs. “This program opens their eyes; they become excited and invested in their goal. The transformation is unbelievable.” Now a teacher at Skyline High School in Dallas, Ms. Adenouga was raised in a similar neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York, USA, and became a project manager for AT&T at 20 years old.

Ms. Adenouga, with the assistance of Patrice Warren, PMP, and the support of chapter leadership, initiated this program after hearing at a region meeting about work the PMI Tulsa Chapter was doing in schools. She hopes to expand the size and scope of the program to other schools and cities across the United States, continuing to help underprivileged youth and communities and expose them to the opportunities that a career in project management can provide. “Many of the students have never been put into an environment like this before,” she said. “They get a real feel for how intense, and rewarding, a career like project management can be. Our goal is to help raise awareness, both in the educational and the corporate world, of the true value and benefit of certified project management. My team and I are so grateful for the encouragement of PMI and Global Conductor for supporting this remarkable program.”

Grettel Molina, PMP, who is on the team of chapter volunteers for this program, said, “It is a very rewarding experience to participate in this group, you get to share your passion for project management and how useful its concepts and tools are for professionals of any field and in life.”

“From the first minute Talibah heard a program for school kids existed, she was hooked,” said PMI Dallas Chapter President Susan Kennedy, PMP. “Helping kids get ready for life is what she does. She creates the full project management experience in the classroom as the students take on roles like budgeting, communications and quality reviews. “The children’s hospital is always appreciative to receive the results of Talibah’s kids’ projects, and the kids get a real sense for what a difference they can make in the world,” she said.

Each May, the chapter features some of the students at its monthly dinner meeting. “As they talk about the challenges they faced with project deadlines, sponsors and budgets, the audience of experienced project managers encourages them with supporting comments and lots of applause,” said Ms. Kennedy. “You can tell the experience is a highlight for them and the chapter members.”

“Because of her success, Talibah continues to grow and mature the program each year. For the first time ever, we have a corporate sponsor for the kids program, Global Conductor Management Consulting. With their help, the students this year will all have matching polo shirts, signifying their participation in the project.”