

National Grid looks to bolster aging utility workforce

By Devin Bates Worcester County

PUBLISHED 2:45 PM ET Apr. 19, 2023

MILLBURY, Mass. - Some recent graduates received hands-on training with National Grid Wednesday as part of a larger effort to bring a much-needed boost to the utility workforce.

Utility workers are one of the oldest working populations in the country, with about half of its current employees eligible to retire over the next decade.

"My parents are baby boomers, so it's not that surprising to me," said Sara Dalton. "I guess I was just surprised they weren't more prepared for when the baby boomers were going out to already have people trained and reach out."

Dalton is a student at National Grid's Energy Infrastructure Academy. She went back to school during the pandemic, earning an electrical utility certification at Quinsigamond Community College. She's one of 25 students in the academy hoping to give the aging workforce a spark.

"Unfortunately due to COVID, I didn't get to do my co-op with National Grid, so this is my opportunity to get the hands-on experience because eventually I want to go into line work," Dalton said.

The utilities workforce is also lacking in diversity. Carlene Lacey, National Grid's director of New England strategic workforce development, said it's a priority to get people from underrepresented and marginalized parts of society involved in the program.

"National Grid is committed to being able to train and upscale individuals so that they can fill the roles so that we can go into a clean energy future," Lacey said. "But we also recognize that we have to go into the communities we serve so we can look like the communities we serve."

"I'm really proud to be part of it, I'm seeing a lot of white faces, you know?" said Solomon Jjiago, another academy student. "Being part of such an environment takes out the mediocrity in me and here I can realize higher horizons if I just harness the power I'm given right now."

For some students like Jjiago, the appeal of the work comes from how important it is. As he put it, it's hard to live without electricity.

"I have an avenue and I have the resources that can make people happy in the long run, not even in the USA, but even way back at home," Jjiago said.