

UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
YOUTH COMMITTEE
SCOTT KUCHINSKY, CHAIRMAN
Wednesday, January 19th, 2022 10:00AM Via Zoom
MEETING MINUTES

Committee Members

1. Scott Kuchinsky - Committee Chair, Plainfield Public Library
2. Cathy Hart- HACE (Elizabeth Housing Authority)
3. Susana Mateo, Elizabeth Public Schools K-8
4. Nasrene Mondol, American Job Center
5. Jasmine Lee, Simon Youth Academy
6. Elizabeth Ramos Union County College
7. Nicole Soto, Job Corps
8. Denise LaSpata, United Way of Greater Union County
9. Jas Verem, International Rescue Committee
10. Evenide Fanfan-Vilcean, Roselle Public School
11. Ayesha Howard, Plainfield Public School

UCWDB Staff

Meredith Barracato

Meeting Summary

I. Welcome

Chairman Kuchinsky welcomed everyone to the meeting and mentioned he was feeling a little under the weather so he would be quieter than usual during the meeting.

II. Review and approval of the November 17th, 2021 Minutes Committee Meeting minutes:

A motion was made by Cathy Hart and seconded by Evenide Fanfan-Vilcean. Motion carried.

III. Youth Forward Presentation- Cancelled

Chairman Kuchinsky mentioned due to unforeseen circumstances Hawa Bonds from the Youth Forward team was not able to attend and would do the presentation at a future meeting. Meredith Barracato mentioned that at the end of the meeting they will be asking programs to give a status update.

IV. Sub Committee Review:

Meredith Barracato reviewed the slide regarding the sub committee meeting that was held on December 3rd. United Way is spearheading the following sub strategies which they would be working with Youth Forward;

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- Enrollment Procedures-Streamline and simplify the enrollment procedures.
- Internal referrals-Develop a system on internal referrals and what is the best platform to do this.
- Partner Trainings-The need for partner trainings to have a better understanding of case management aspect, Youth Forward initiatives.
- UCWORKS- understand how to use the virtual one stop website.

V. Sub Strategies Update:

Meredith Barracato provided the committee sub strategies update that were considered high priority and mentioned there have been offline conversations with committee members.

- Identify school staff & administrators to educate on WIOA programs and eligibility requirements.
- Establish a co-enrollment process for youth clients.
- Identify additional ESL providers within the county to address the language barriers for out-of-school youth.
- Develop a comprehensive list of alternative schools/programs available to students at risk of not graduating.
- Identify apprenticeships and on-the-job training opportunities for the youth.

Meredith Barracato mentioned the WDB is developing a policy and technical assistance that will be shared over the next three months. She added that this will be a robust manual with details on how to deliver the information.

VI. Youth Voice:

Meredith Barracato reviewed a slide regarding the youth voice initiative. Cathy Hart mentioned she has focus groups with the seniors and would be able to do the same with the youth. Cathy Hart also mentioned they are applying for a Youth Build grant that she has applied to and will be doing something similar. She added her team is participating in a police academy hiring event as part of the NAACP program which will be focus on helping educating the youth on the positive interactions between the police. Meredith Barracato mentioned the need for conducting various focus groups and asked committee partners to contact her.

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Meredith Barracato asked if any program had anyone who would be interested in participating in the youth committee. Cathy Hart mentioned Groundworks NJ has a youth leadership program that might be interested in participating.

Nicole Soto mentioned the questions that were presented on the slide as part of the youth survey are similar to the questions that Job Corp ask their youth clients and is willing to invite Meredith Barracato to that focus group.

VII. Lessons from the Pandemic: Meredith Barracato reviewed two slides regarding the lessons learned during the pandemic and asked the partners what strategies their agencies did they implement during the pandemic. Some of the items that have been added to many agencies are the following;

- Organizations have modified their classroom content into more 'bite-sized,' self-paced, engaging learning modules
- Transitioned operations to virtual formats for staff by increasing investment in technology tools, providing capacity-building support, and adapting HR policies to recognize off-site work.
- Projects developed crowdsourcing initiatives like hackathons and innovation challenges to support youth-led local solutions for new ideas to deal with the pandemic.
- Projects are creating safe digital spaces to encourage youth voice and to allow young people to collaborate and manage the impact of the crisis.
- Training small businesses in e-commerce, digital marketing, e-wallets integration, and using social media tools for networking.
- The pandemic has seen the growth of new opportunities in the e-delivery service sector and the health sector.

Jasmin Lee mentioned her program began to develop more mental health initiative and increased the amount of mental health support they normally offer their students. She mentioned they were probably going to increase the amount of mental health services to their students.

Jas Verem mentioned the students they work with as part of the WIOA program are high school seniors who they are working with to prepare for college. They have tried to supplement educational services that were not as robust during the pandemic due to remote learning. Many of the student had issues with reliable WIFI services which was a hurdle they needed to overcome. Trying to keep their students motivated during remote learning because they were not

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interested in the remote learning aspect. Meredith Barracato asked if Jas's team provide incentives to keep their students motivated. Jas mentioned they are using the 6 students they have in UCC as mentors and to assist with answering questions on how to enroll into college. He mentioned they have been speaking a lot to parents to focus on trying to find the best options for their children to attend affordable college such as UCC has been a major project for them because parents don't understand the financial burdens their child will be under taking. These discussions are part of parents orientation. The IRC was able to secure laptops for when they enroll in college and gift cards when they attend Zoom meetings. Jas mentioned the laptop program will be something they will be keeping even after the pandemic is over. They would like to resume in person field trips and college campus tours. Meredith Barracato asked if the IRC goes over financial literacy with the students. Jas mentioned they do a lot of the conversations with the parents so they understand the loan process and the difference between a school like Rutgers and Community College.

Elizabeth Ramos thanked Jas for promoting the benefits of community college. She added that the college learned the importance of offering students in person and virtual space. Since July of 2020 they have opened to students to provide a secure and stable WIFI which is really needed. They also have 3 social workers who offer mental health, financial support and tackle food insecurity.

Jas Verem asked for more English Language courses because they have students who are unable to proceed to higher education because they need more intensive ESL services. He said there is usually a waitlist for those classes due to the need in Union County.

Nicole Soto from Job Corp mentioned they have noticed a challenge with outreach and recruitment for their programs. They noticed students are not fully committed to enrolling in their program and once enrolled they are sometimes discouraged in the beginning while transitioning from their normal program to Job Corp. Nicole has offered virtual tours to potential students who are interested in their program.

Nasrene Mondol from the American Job Center mentioned their biggest challenge was providing service remotely for their team and clients. She mentioned having clients understand the importance of using technology and have been reinforcing the fact that normal services are not going to be the same. She noticed that most people are more focused on ensuring they have food and shelter before considering skills upgrade or a change in their career.

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The county has been good with offering laptops to receive services in the digital setting. She added having clients use e-signatures have been a challenge and their has been some burn out due to various issues facing the staff and clients.

Susana Mateo mentioned mental health should continue to be a focus when it comes to services for the youth because they are struggling with many of their own challenges but that of their family. She mentioned in the past her program did various training because they noticed a lot of the challenge's students have are real mental health issues such as depression or trauma. She suggested more training needs to be offered to the program staff, students, and families to increase the understanding the challenges with mental health issues. Their needs to be more trauma informed care for the youth. Meredith Barracato added the need for more access to mental health services for staff, students, and employees.

Evenide Fanfan-Vilcean from the Roselle Public School CTE program mentioned her biggest challenge is having in person experience in the medical field. She has had to reach out to doctors so they can do more Zoom lessons but its not the same. She added the lesson learned was the fact her program learned to pivot and they have become more innovative to find other safe ways to learn the material.

VIII. Meeting Schedule 2022:

- a. Wednesday March 30th 10:00am
- b. Wednesday May 25th 10:00am
- c. **Wednesday June 15th 10:00am- Optional Meeting**
- d. Wednesday July 20th 10:00am
- e. Wednesday September 28th 10:00am
- f. Thursday December 8th 10:00am

IX. COMMITTEE ADJOURNMENT