

UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
Youth Partners Focus Group
January 25, 2023 10:00am Via Zoom
MEETING MINUTES

Attendees:

1. Marissa Caponera, Housing Authority of the City of Elizabeth
2. Elizabeth Clark, Plainfield Board of Education
3. Nasrene Mondol, American Job Center
4. Catherine Hart, Housing Authority of the City of Elizabeth
5. Shannon Frank, The Gateway Family YMCA
6. Jasmine Lee, Simon Youth Academy
7. Elizabeth Ramos, Union College
8. Dr. Syreeta McClain, Simon Youth Academy
9. Jasmine, Sowah, Youth Forward
10. Juanita Vargas, United Way of Greater Union County
11. Susana Mateo, Elizabeth Board of Education
12. Scott Kuchinsky, Plainfield Public Library
13. Hawa Bonds, Youth Forward
14. LaChelle Thompson, Housing Authority of the City of Elizabeth
15. Perle Almeida, American Job Center

UCWDB Staff:

Meredith Barracato

Meeting Summary:

Welcome and Introductions:

Chairman Scott Kuchinsky welcomed everyone to the meeting. All participants introduced themselves.

Strategic Plan information:

Meredith Barracato reviewed slides that discussed the various elements of the strategic plan.

Chat Box Poll Question:

What are the main barriers to employment facing youth?

- Jasmin Lee: Once hired, demonstrating the necessary skills to remain employed. Lack of soft skills.
- Shannon Frank: transportation and time management

UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
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MEETING MINUTES

- Juanita Vargas: uncoordinated services - not enough information on programs. Language, Transportation, no prior experience in the workforce
- Catherine Hart: Confidence and Resilience
- Susana Mateo: reliable transportation and consistency in punctuality and attendance, which can also be linked with sense of responsibility.
- Dr. Syreeta McClain: Q1. Youth are not always exposed to the possible career options available. They need constant exposure to a variety of jobs. They also need the hard skills, soft skills so that they can get and sustain employment.
- Marissa Caponera: Soft Skills and possible criminal background
- Elizabeth Ramos: transportation, limited to no work experience, and knowing their options

Youth Discussion:

How might partnerships enhance, and support service delivery related to: Supportive services: mental health, substance abuse, housing, transportation, childcare services?

Jasmine Lee, Simon Youth Academy, many students do not know how to take the public transportation system, don't want to wait for buses, or public transportation is unreliable.

Juanita Vargas, United Way of Greater Union County, is there a possibility to collaborate on creating a transportation system for those programs that work together so the kids can be picked up and dropped off for training and jobs. There is no affordable housing in Union County. We need to know where we can refer clients to, like Community Access Unlimited for emergency housing services. Need to have a full understanding of what's available to young people. Their program is doing a case management approach to find out what is going on in the youths' lives relating to their family. United Way can provide them funding so the youth can participate in a program. Need to get youth information in a respectful manner. Need to have a coordinated approach.

UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
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MEETING MINUTES

Catherine Hart, Housing Authority of the City of Elizabeth, they have had to build transportation into the Job Plus program into their budget. In Princeton NJ they have a free bus service, regular like clockwork for kids and seniors and takes them all around the municipality. Housing is a major concern for families because clients are one check away from becoming homeless. Housing should be the main priority due to unstable homelife. Rutgers University will be conducting a study on housing and hospital services. Students will analyze how to match up housing and supportive services.

Susana Mateo, Elizabeth Board of Education, mentioned the youth and their families need to know what the steps are to get services. She added going through Social Services to get help sometimes is a barrier because many of the youth do not have the required documentation needed to get support from Social Services. The 4 C's program was giving client paperwork on what Social Services need to get benefits. Many programs are still working in silos and there needs to be a central resource hub for families to use but then there needs to be a navigator who can help families move through the various system.

Dr. Syreeta McClain, Simon Youth Academy, substance abuse and mental health go hand in hand, and it is important to set up preventative measures, need to understand the system of care, understand how to connect young people to treatment, and finding an advocate so that person can help the youth and their families navigate the system. They have a high school that focuses on youth that have had issues with substance and their services are embedded in their service delivery.

Hawa Bonds, Youth Forward, explained the family crisis intervention unit which supports youth who have issues with substance abuse.

How does Union County expand the provision of the 14 program elements through One-Stop Career Center activities, procured youth programming and services that are leveraged through co-enrollment or other non-WIOA funded partnerships?

Jasmine Sowah, Youth Forward, Youth who participate in their program have access to all 14 elements. There are special programs that will focus on work

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Youth Partners Focus Group
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MEETING MINUTES

experience, additional mentoring opportunities, entrepreneurial Shark Tank opportunities.

Juanita Vargas, United Way of Greater Union County, there needs to be more clarity on Co enrollment procedures and there have been challenges with accessing supportive services. Right so those discussions are ensuring that young people that we're working with that are we are eligible are Co enrolled in a streamlined way where there's no duplication of you know the enrollment piece which we've been working out on with the Youth Forward team, then looking at how do we access these resources once they're co-enrolled. United Way clients have not been able to access those resources up until recently. Need to do an inventory of elements and who is running it, is it in person or remote.

Shannon Frank, The Gateway Family YMCA, the elements that stand out for her program are the work experience, occupational skills training, and leadership development opportunities. Her program does not know how to advertise what we have available, or they are not advertising it in the right way.

Catherine Hart, Housing Authority of the City of Elizabeth, inventory is critical due to COVID changing things around.

Susana Mateo, Elizabeth Board of Education, Shaping Up Elizabeth had a resource list for Elizabeth, and it was very easy to use. Need to identify who would be updating the list, whether it's updated once a month whether it'll be a specific person, county or entity but someone must manage the list.

How can Union County set up systems to prepare an educated and skilled youth workforce to meet the needs of local employers/industries?

Dr. Syreeta McClain, Simon Youth Academy, Programs need to bring people and opportunities to students and those opportunities should be embedded in the programs. Having people come into us usually helps a lot more than telling them to go somewhere. Most youth gravitate to working in retail or restaurants but programs need to find out what they want to do beyond the five or six types of careers. Youth need to be exposed to the other types of jobs and other

UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
Youth Partners Focus Group
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MEETING MINUTES

industries that they may actually like or be qualified for upon graduating from high school.

LaChelle Thompson, Housing Authority of the City of Elizabeth, scheduling very specific events such as healthcare day and companies are going to come talk to you about what that field actually looks like and what you'll be doing in that field, the different things you can do in healthcare, and these are the requirements and criteria will help the student understand they have options.

Juanita Vargas, United Way of Greater Union County, we need to help a young person understand what a career pathway is and what is the career trajectory to understand what they need. Students do not understand career pathways or how to get there.

How can the Workforce Development Board and One Stop facilitate the engagement of employers, including small employers and in-demand industry sector employers and occupations, in workforce development programs?

Jasmine Sowah, Youth Forward, lots of the employers were excited and engaged. Many employers took on the mentor role. Youth were also matched up with their interest. Need to help youth learn skills on communicating certain needs. There is a focus on Science Technology Engineering Math base work sites.

Juanita Vargas, United Way of Greater Union County, we need to expose youth to certain occupations that interest you but first programs need to know what is available to them.

How can Union County expand access to employment, training, and education while promoting and ensuring diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workforce?

Jasmine Lee, Simon Youth Academy, many school districts have been looking to have diversity job fairs, and many job postings for schools have been looking for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion staff.

UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
Youth Partners Focus Group
January 25, 2023 10:00am Via Zoom
MEETING MINUTES

Dr. Syreeta McClain, Simon Youth Academy, many schools are trying to be more comfortable in terms of being specific on asking for a diverse background. Their program is constantly looking for male school staff to help.

Elizabeth Ramos, Union College, we need to create a future pipeline of workers that are diverse. This would start in the schools by exposing young people to different occupations and allowing them to see themselves working in these fields.

Juanita Vargas, United Way of Greater Union County, we need to understand the population and develop a initiative that is mindful of various language learners.

How can Union County support youth within the LGBTQ community? What are some of the outreach strategies?

Dr. Syreeta McClain, Simon Youth Academy, many students have identity issues which leads to mental health issues. Programs need to create and foster an inclusive culture. This allows students to understand they are accepted so they will need to accept others. In their school they have groups every day which allows them to discuss those topics in a structured setting.

What are some of the training priorities for supporting Youth Services Staff?

The attendees agreed the previously developed strategy works to cross-train youth providers on Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act services and regulations.

How can we ensure to integrate the voices of those served into program development, design, and operation?

The attendees agreed the previously developed strategy works for incorporating youth voice. Conduct frequent surveys and focus groups on capturing youth perspective and invite youth to committee meetings.

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Youth Partners Focus Group
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Meredith Barracato reviewed a slide on the next steps in the strategic plan process. Meeting was adjourned.