

UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
YOUTH COMMITTEE
SCOTT KUCHINSKY, CHAIRMAN
Thursday, March 2, 2023, 10:00AM Via Zoom
MEETING MINUTES

Committee Members

1. Scott Kuchinsky - Committee Chair, Plainfield Public Library
2. Carolina Marin, American Job Center
3. Jasmine Lee, Simon Youth Academy
4. LaChelle Thompson, Elizabeth Housing Authority
5. Jasmine Sowah, Youth Forward
6. Helen Alvarado, Plainfield Public Schools
7. Elizabeth Ramos, Union College
8. Nik Young-Bagley, YouthBuild
9. Marie Alston- New Jersey Youth Corp
10. Agnes Ekama, NJCOURTS
11. Georgeann Reyes, NJCOURTS
12. Nasrene Mondol, American Job Center
13. Perle Almeida, American Job Center
14. Marie Chase, Boxwood Learning Center
15. Susana Mateo, Elizabeth Board of Ed K-8

UCWDB Staff

Meredith Barracato

Meeting Summary

I. Welcome and Introductions

Chairman Kuchinsky welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked if everyone could add their name and organization to the chatbox.

II. Review and approval of the December 8, 2022, Committee Meeting minutes:

A motion was made by LaChelle Thompson and seconded by Jasmine Lee. Motion carried.

III. Certiport Discussion-Communication Skills for Business

Chairman Kuchinsky discussed a Certiport program called Communication skills for business which the Plainfield Public Library deemed the program was geared for young adults who do not have a work history. Chairman Kuchinsky said the product would have a higher youth value more than adult. He offered the committee members the opportunity to set up a meeting to discuss the program more. Chairman Kuchinsky said the program would offer the youth a soft skills certificate.

IV. Strategic Planning Update:

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Meredith Barracato reviewed a slide which discussed the strategic plan update which includes the following information:

- Draft Plan has been completed and will be posted on the Union County Workforce Development Board website for public comment soon.
- Regional Strategic Plan Extension was issued and will be finalized by the end of March 2023.
- Public Comment is the next phase and all partners and community members are encouraged to review and provide comments.
- Public Comment Period will begin Mid-March
- Final Submission will be completed after the Union County Workforce Development Board approval at the April 12, 2023 meeting.
- State Employment and Training Commission will receive the final plan.

Meredith Barracato then discussed the partner snapshot initiative and mentioned that all the partners will be contacted to capture their organization's information to share with all the partners. Meredith Barracato mentioned that the Workforce Development will continuously meet with program participants to ensure their voice is incorporated into the workforce system. Quarterly focus groups will be scheduled and she ask all Committee Members to join in facilitating these sessions. Marie Alston, Jasmine Sowah, and Nasrene Mondol mentioned Sharon Best would be able to assist with developing the partner snapshot.

V. Youth Focus Group Feedback

Simon Youth Academy Participant Focus Group

01/18/2023 10:30am, 6 Students

- Many students have experience working in retail, restaurants, or churches.
- Going to school in the mall has many benefits, especially finding a job.
- Some students felt overwhelmed due to managing their school, work schedules, and personal lives.
- Many students felt uncomfortable advocating for themselves and relied on school staff to guide them or speak to employers on their behalf.
- Students discussed their plans after graduating, which included going to truck driving school, Union College, finding a permanent job, or studying abroad.

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- Students expressed dissatisfaction with traditional schools due to the large class sizes, the need for more one-on-one attention, and the lack of activities that interest them.
- All the students agreed they need staff who will care, motivate and help them to do things such as getting a driver's license or help them with work/college applications.
- Many students talked about being inspired by the staff at Simon Youth Academy, which has led them to want to help youth in the future.

Jasmine Lee provided feedback on how useful the focus groups are and how the youth appreciate sharing their voice and incorporating their choices into programming. Jasmine Lee discussed the partnership with Youth Forward and the American Job Center on the IKEA employment opportunity. Carolina Marin and Jasmine Sowah shared feedback about the IKEA job opportunities.

Youth Corp Participant Focus Group

01/25/2023 1:00pm, 13 Students

- Many students expressed they did not like traditional school due to their inability to express themselves, personal issues, lack of attention from school staff, feeling unsafe due to fighting, and no activities that interested them.
- Many students stated they wished traditional school focused on “real life” situations such as learning how to cook, how to manage money, real estate, how to get a job, and how to take care of children.
- Many students stated they would like to see more incentives offered, which would keep them motivated. Incentives include scholarships, driving lessons, help for their family, swimming classes, and IT lessons.
- Only a few students had experience working; some jobs consisted of Fed Ex, retail stores, and restaurants.
- Many students stated their main goal was to graduate and felt working would not allow them to focus on school work.
- Many spoke about their future and had specific career options. The following is a list of occupations;

Nursing	IT	Flight Attendant
Cosmetology	Career in Sports	Funeral Home Owner
Social Worker	Warehouse	Security

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Marie Alston shared that after the focus group United Way changed their enrollment questionnaire and incorporated the questions used by the Workforce Development Board to understand the youths needs better. One major change in their program came from offering Zelle or gift cards which the students couldn't use at laundry mats. What they did instead was used incentives to get gym memberships, driving classes, enrollment fees for daycares and they updated their incentive forms. They are also starting a parent advisory board so they can speak to parents on what support services are available to them.

Meredith Barracato mentioned the Union County Workforce Development Board will host quarterly focus groups will be scheduled and we ask all Committee Members to join us in facilitating these sessions. Helen Alvarado from Plainfield High School mentioned Meredith Barracato should speak to Elizabeth Clark regarding a focus group. Marie Alston mentioned Youth Corp would also be available to host another focus group.

VI. Program Updates

- **CAU- NA**
- **Job Corps- NA**

- **NJ COURTS-** Georgeann Reyes mentioned her program works with a few of the providers on the call and she will be able to share more information at the next meeting.
- **Roselle Public School- NA**
- **Union College-** Elizabeth Ramos mentioned there were no updates.
- **American Job Center-** Sharon Best mentioned there were no updates.
- **Plainfield Action Corp: NA**
- **Elizabeth Public School:** Donald Stewart continues to try to find opportunities for their students to obtain experience with industries.
- **Plainfield Public School:** Helen Alvarado mentioned there was nothing to report.
- **NJ Department of Labor: NA**
- **Youth Forward:** Jasmine Sowah mentioned they are starting to look into the summer youth employment program and are focused on having more employers in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math fields.
- **Boxwood-** Marie Chase mentioned they are having graduation on May 5, 2023 at 4:00pm. Marie Chase will send out a save the date.
- **Elizabeth Housing Authority-** LaChelle Thompson mentioned they have an afterschool program for their residents and will let committee members know if they can open it up to others. They will be reaching out to

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everyone for next round of recruitment and have been working well with their partners.

- **Plainfield Public Library:** The chairman mentioned they are still doing GED testing and are still scheduling more testing. The Chairman added they have some open days to accommodate certain groups for testing. He added he has seen an increase in minors looking for testing services.
- **Make the Road New Jersey- NA**
- **Elizabeth Public Schools K-8-** Susana Mateo mentioned her program has seen an increase in youth living with grandparents and those individuals needing services. Meredith Barracato informed the members she would share with the committee a contact person with the Division of Aging.
- **International Rescue Committee - NA**
- **UC Educational Services Commission- NA**
- **United Way of Greater Union County-** They are planning a yearly graduation and will try to plan a prom.
- **Union County Department of Human Services- NA**
- **Youth Forward- Union County Division of Youth Services-** Jasmine Sowah they are preparing for the summer employment program and are focused on STEM opportunities. Meredith Barracato suggested the AJC report the summer youth employment opportunities.
- **Elizabeth Development Company- NA**

VII. Meeting Schedule 2023:

~~March 2, 2023~~ 10:00am

April 19, 2023 10:00am

Optional Date

June 8, 2023 10:00am

September 27, 2023 10:00am

December 7, 2023 10:00am

VIII. COMMITTEE ADJOURNMENT