

UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD  
YOUTH COMMITTEE  
SCOTT KUCHINSKY, CHAIRMAN  
Thursday, June 8, 2023, 10:00AM Via Zoom  
MEETING MINUTES

**Committee Members**

1. Crystal Ahearn, Elizabeth High School
2. Clarissa Anderson, Plainfield High School
3. Carolina Marin, American Job Center
4. Cathy Hart, Housing Authority of the City of Elizabeth
5. Cecilia Meyers, Housing Authority of the City of Elizabeth
6. Georgeann Reyes, NJCOURTS
7. Helen Alvarado, Plainfield High School
8. Jasmine Sowah, Youth Forward
9. Jasmine Lee, Simon Youth Academy
10. Juanita Vargas, United Way of Greater Union County
11. Juanito Chiluisa, New Jersey Department of Labor- Employment Services
12. Latoya Bennet, Youth Forward
13. LaChelle Thompson, Elizabeth Housing Authority
14. Lisbeth Faustino, Elizabeth Development Company
15. Nasrene Mondol, American Job Center
16. Elizabeth Ramos, Union College
17. Sharon Best, American Job Center
18. Nik Young-Bagley, Housing Authority of the City of Elizabeth-YouthBuild

**UCWDB Staff**

Meredith Barracato

**Meeting Summary**

**I. Welcome and Introductions**

Meredith Barracato shared with committee members that Chairman Kuchinsky had an emergency and might be joining the call if available. Meredith Barracato welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked if everyone could add their name and organization to the chat box.

**II. Review and approval of the March 2, 2023, Committee Meeting minutes:**

A motion was made by Crystal Ahearn and seconded by Cathy Hart. Motion carried.

**III. Standing Agenda Items:**

**Performance Data**

Meredith Barracato presented the youth performance data from FutureWorks. The data was collected from Americas One Stop Operating System, the main data entry system used by the American Job Center and the youth program. The data was pulled on May 10, with the last registration date being March 31 and the exit date January 10, resulting in a lag of a couple of months. The data showed the number of youth who have exited the program, and overall performance was positive, except for credentials and measurable skills gains, which are expected to improve as individuals receive their diplomas and

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certificates towards the end of the school year. The client flow for program year 2021 was shown, indicating that many individuals enrolled in 2021 were carried over into program year 2022. The trendline of enrollments and exits spiked during the summer, indicating the Summer Youth Employment Program. The customer flow for program year 2022 showed 21 new enrollments and carryover from the previous year. Meredith Barracato mentioned the expectation of seeing a different trendline for program year 2022 in the next meeting and asked if there were any questions regarding FutureWorks.

### **Program Year 2021 and Program Year 2022 Budget**

Meredith Barracato presented the budget for program year 2021, which is set to close on June 30. She mentioned that it was a successful year as all the allocated funds were utilized, leaving only \$4,000 unspent. As for program year 2022 funding, there are remaining balances that need to be spent down. The numbers presented were as of March 31, and Meredith Barracato mentioned that updated figures will be provided at the upcoming Workforce Development Board meeting on June 21, 2023.

### **IV. Youth Corp Presentation:**

Juanita Vargas presented an overview of the Youth Corps program. The program is a 20-week GED program funded by the New Jersey Department of Labor, targeting youth aged 16 to 25. It offers the opportunity to obtain a high school equivalency diploma and improve math and reading scores, while also developing workforce skills and career planning. Life skills and community service projects are provided to strengthen resilience and foster a sense of giving back. The program requirements include two phases: a 20-week in-person phase and a six-month follow-up phase. Academic support, job readiness, financial literacy, pregnancy prevention, GED preparation, and community service are offered, along with stipends and counseling. The program aims to serve 40 youth annually, with an 80% completion rate. The first phase requires a minimum of 410 hours, and youth must show improvement in reading and math based on their grade level. Completers attending less than 90% of the program must also attend another supportive program. The program initially had one classroom and later transitioned to using APA Essential, an individualized academic tool. In the second phase, 34 students were enrolled, with 10 earning their high school equivalency diploma. Some obtained occupational skills, enrolled in college or vocational school, or pursued other paths. In the second year, the program became fully bilingual and expanded to three classrooms based on grade levels. Efforts were made to address food insecurity, transportation barriers, and parental engagement. After-school clubs, internships, mental health support, and partnerships with external organizations were also established. Year two enrolled 53 students, with 49 completing the program and achieving positive outcomes in reading, math, GED exams, employment, and college attendance. Year three will have two larger cohorts to extend the program to 20 weeks. Additional funding will be used for supportive services and certifications, with a focus on enhancing relationships with certification providers and employers. The program also includes field trips and events to expose

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participants to new experiences. There is a waiting list for the program, which is open to youth aged 16 to 25 in Union County, regardless of legal status.

Meredith Barracato asked Juanita Vargas about the most commonly requested supportive services in the program. Juanita mentioned that childcare is a common request, and they work with CCCC to help with the certification and application process. Transportation is also a significant challenge for participants. The Department of Labor will be able to cover some mental health services, which is crucial for many young people. Juanita suggested including Prevention Links in the youth committee meetings as a way to leverage mental health services in Union County. Youth Corp also addresses food insecurity by purchasing food or receiving donations from the food bank, as many participants do not have money for meals outside of the program.

Cathy Hart shared that she recently applied for family unification program vouchers for the Housing Authority. These vouchers aim to assist kids aging out of foster care and families reuniting, such as when a parent has been institutionalized. They are hopeful to receive 50 vouchers and highlighted the importance of rental assistance in addressing the challenge of finding affordable housing, especially with the current real estate market. Cathy mentioned applying for additional vouchers through the foster youth to independence program. She emphasized the significance of wraparound supportive services and expressed confidence in the collaboration between the Housing Authority in Elizabeth and the participants on the call. Cathy indicated the possibility of reaching out to specific individuals on the call if they identify eligible youth through the Department of Children and Families (DCF), emphasizing the need for increased support and vigilance in assisting these individuals. She acknowledged the coordinated efforts in Union County during the COVID-19 pandemic and suggested that other parts of the state may not have the same level of coordination.

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## V. Program Updates

- **CAU: NA**
- **Job Corp: NA**
- **NJ COURTS:** Georgeann Reyes mentioned they were going to celebrate youth who are graduating regardless of its whether it's with a GED or from high school that had been court involved at the end of the month.
- **Roselle Public School: NA**
- **Union College:** Elizabeth Ramos mentioned they have wrapped up the spring semester and they had their commencement in the middle of May. They are having a few classes over the course of the summer, just to accommodate needs for students. They continue offering ESL classes over the course of the summer as well and planning for the fall. They are moving forward with providing courses for the summer and getting prepped for the fall semester. Summer session continues on until the end of June. And then they have another summer session that begins in the beginning of July and ends in August.

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- **American Job Center:** Nasrene Mondol mentioned they are continuing to offer services both virtually and in person to their customers, in both locations, which is in Elizabeth and in Plainfield. They offer services to any qualified individuals for WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker and there's criteria that people need to meet to qualify for the program. The American Job Center collaborates with a lot of different partners as well. Carolina Marin, shared information on a job fair coming up on June 22. It is targeted for transportation, logistics, and supply chain demand. Carolina put the link to the flyer in the chat box.
- **Plainfield Action Corp: NA**
- **Elizabeth Public School:** Crystal Ahearn mentioned they spent a lot of time focusing on work based learning opportunities and certifications. And this year, they saw improvements in the passing rate for the cosmetology exam, for the AC T exams for auto tech. And were excited to offer Cisco Networking exam for the kids. They also have been working on the advisory board.
- **Plainfield Public School:** Helen Alvarado mentioned the graduation is coming up June 22. They will also be participating in the JAG program next year, which is jobs for American Graduates, which is the first year that they are going to have that program and it's going to be administered by Miss Clark.
- **NJ Department of Labor:** Juanito Chiluisa mentioned that caregivers, students, and employers are to go to the New Jersey Department of Labor website as of June 1, to obtain their working papers. Juanito put the link to the website in the chat box.

Juanita Vargas mentioned there was a drastic change from the Department of Education processing the working papers, because now the effort is driven by the youth, they actually have to start the application. And then the employer has to complete a component. And once those pieces are completed, then the parent, caregiver, or Guardian has to then complete a component. It's all web based, there isn't an actual place for people to go. Juanita added that the new procedures eliminated the need for the health exam and the need to get the school to sign off on the Working Papers. The New Jersey Department of Labor is expecting the one stops to support the youth in guiding them through this new transition. Juanita asked Jasmine Sowah if the Youth Forward program was helping youth with their working papers. Jasmine said yes and to refer youth over to her program.

Crystal Ahearn mentioned they were worried of kids dropping out, because now youth are bypassing the schools as part of the process. Crystal added that previously they would know who is working and who is not working and that would help them track those students who were being affected by the extra working hours and how it's affecting their ability to graduate.

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- **Youth Forward-Union County Division of Youth Services:** Jasmine Sowah mentioned they should be receiving a statement from the Office of the Director regarding the Summer Youth Employment Program. And if anyone has any additional questions about summer youth employment, they can contact the office of the director as well.
- **Boxwood: NA**
- **The Housing Authority of the City of Elizabeth:** LaChelle Thompson gave a presentation announcing the third annual Journey to Jobs Plus event on June 29 from 11:30 AM to 3:30 PM at the Mravlag Manor location. The event is free, and individuals or organizations interested in attending can request a table by emailing LaChelle. She also mentioned the Rich Environment Program, which aims to promote literacy among youth residents and surrounding areas. They are planning a book fair in July and are open to partnering with others for events like having guest readers. LaChelle also highlighted their food pantry, which operates on the first Thursday of every month and provides food to anyone in need without requiring identification or proof of address. Additionally, she mentioned the availability of free mental health services at the Kane Community Wellness and Counseling Center located at Mravlag Manor, with in-person services currently offered. LaChelle shared her email address for further inquiries or to request information on any of the mentioned initiatives. Nik Young-Bagley mentioned the YouthBuild program is currently accepting students between the ages of 16 to 24. They are looking for students who are looking for GED and as well as a trade or concentration in CNA or construction.
- **Plainfield Public Library: NA**
- **Make the Road New Jersey: NA**
- **International Rescue Committee: NA**
- **UC Educational Services Commission: NA**
- **United Way of Greater Union County:** Juanita Vargas presented information about the services provided by the Hillside Family Success Center. The center focuses on assisting families in Union County who are experiencing financial crises, specifically those with children under the age of 18 or with a child with a disability. The maximum amount of support currently offered is around \$1,200 for one-time emergency situations. While the center primarily helps with utilities and rent, they are open to aiding for other needs as well. Juanita shared an example of how they recently helped a client by paying for a new car battery, which enabled her to continue working. Families in need are encouraged to reach out to the center for support.
- **Union County Department of Human Services: NA**  
**Elizabeth Development Company:** Lisbeth Faustino presented information about the classes and funding opportunities provided by their organization. They offer a range of

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classes, including CDL (Commercial Driver's License), solar panel installation, and hospitality. They are also starting a new hospitality class on the upcoming Monday. The organization accepts applications from students and individuals residing in Elizabeth or Union County, and they provide financial assistance to those in need. Lisbeth mentioned that they have flyers for an upcoming OSHA 30 class on June 10th and 11th, and she encouraged the audience to spread the word to anyone who might be interested.

- **Union County Vo-Tech-Simon Youth Academy:** Jasmine Lee discussed the graduation of students and the changes it brings to her role. She mentioned that this is the first time in four years that her roster will start from scratch due to the graduation of all students. Jasmine also shared that she will be leaving the position, as she became a principal in December. She expressed mixed feelings about this transition, as the youth academy holds great importance in her life.

**VI. Meeting Schedule 2023:**

<del>June 8, 2023</del>	<del>10:00am</del>
<del>September 27, 2023</del>	<del>10:00am</del> Cancelled
October 4, 2023	10:00am New Date
December 7, 2023	10:00am

Meredith Barracato mentioned the need to reschedule the September 27 meeting due to the Workforce Development Board meeting that had to be rescheduled. The next youth committee meeting will be October 4, it will be held virtual and committee members will receive two notifications prior to the meeting.

**VII. COMMITTEE ADJOURNMENT**