

UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
AMERICAN JOB CENTER PARTNER COMMITTEE
James Brady, Chairman
WEDNESDAY, June 28, 2023, 10:00AM Warinanco Sports Arena
MEETING MINUTES

Committee Members

1. Adekoya Brown, NJ Vocational Rehabilitation Services
2. Cathy Waters, Urban League of Union County
3. Carolina Marin, Union County American Job Center
4. Colleen Clayton, The Gateway Family YMCA
5. Eva Altidor, Union County Department of Human Services
6. Isaias Rivera, Union College of Union County, NJ
7. Jim Brady, Chairman
8. Jennifer Byczkiewicz, Union County American Job Center
9. Juanita Vargas, United Way of Greater Union County
10. LaChelle Thompson, Housing Authority of the City of Elizabeth
11. Lisbeth Faustino, Elizabeth Development Company
12. Lyle Moseley, Elizabeth Board of Education
13. Marissa Caponera, Housing Authority of the City of Elizabeth
14. Marlene Loff, Union College OF Union County, NJ
15. Nasrene Mondol, Union County American Job Center
16. Dr. Randolph Sconier, New Steps Counseling
17. Scott Kuchinsky, Plainfield Public Library
18. Robert Croom, Union County American Job Center

UCWDB Staff

Meredith Barracato
Gina Tuesta

Meeting Summary

Welcome and Introductions

Chairman James Brady welcomed everyone to the American Job Center partners meeting. The Chairman asked everyone to introduce themselves.

Review and Approval of March 15, 2023 Minutes:

Robert Croom asked a question regarding a comment Anthea Williams made about the Port Authority event during the March 15, 2023 meeting that were referenced in the meeting minutes. Robert Croom acknowledge that since Anthea Williams was not present he would not be able to get clarification as to what she was referencing during the meeting. Meredith Barracato noted that since Anthea Williams was not present to discuss her comment, Robert Croom could contact Anthea Williams directly to get clarification about the Port Authority comment she made, but what was reported in the March 15 minutes is

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what Anthea Williams mentioned. Robert Croom stated he would email her directly to get clarification. Juanita Vargas asked Meredith Barracato if the minutes were going to be approved even though there is a question. Meredith Barracato stated she will add the statement and it will be reflected in the current minutes.

Motion was made by LaChelle Thompson to approve the **March 15, 2023** Committee Meeting Minutes. Colleen Clayton provided the second motion. Motion was carried.

Elizabeth Development Company Presentation:

Lisbeth Faustino begins her presentation by introducing herself and discussing the Elizabeth Development Company and its various programs. Lisbeth mentioned a recent program called CDL training that has been in high demand. She highlighted the success of two students who recently obtained their CDL licenses after completing the training. The students started the program two weeks ago, obtained their permits, and successfully passed the road test with minor challenges.

Lisbeth Faustino proceeds to mention other programs offered by the company. She mentioned OSHA classes, specifically OSHA 30 for technician classes, which span 15 weeks. She also mentioned a 4-week hospitality training, which takes place on Mondays and Wednesdays for two hours. Lisbeth concludes by mentioning that the program has been successful so far.

Isaias Rivera asked what was the name of the CDL training program provider. Lisbeth mentioned Worldwide was a training school in Jersey City. She added that students are required to take various tests for different training programs.

Nasrene Mondol asked if the training is only for Elizabeth residents. Lisbeth mentioned that certain programs are only for Elizabeth residents but are looking to expand services outside of Elizabeth.

Juanita Vargas asked if there were fees associated with trainings. Lisbeth mentioned there were no fees and mentioned some of the requirements which includes two forms of identification.

Marissa Caponera asked if they would help with placement if someone has a SORA certification. Lisbeth said they would help the clients but they would have to fill out an application.

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Isaias Rivera asked if the company's main source of funding was UEZ? Lisbeth mentioned their main source of funding is UEZ and CWG.

Nasrene Mondol inquired about the referral process for clients interested in a program that isn't in-demand and cannot be funded by her organization. However, Elizabeth Development Company has the capacity to support such programs. Lisbeth responded by offering her contact information to Nasrene, suggesting that she could directly communicate with the client to further discuss their desired course of action.

LaChelle Thompson asked when would the next SORA class be taking place. Lisbeth said that she does not have a date yet.

Isaias Rivera asked who was the solar panel training provider. Lisbeth said she would need to get back to him with that information.

Marlene Loff asked if they work with any particular union for the pre-apprenticeship program. Lisbeth mentioned she believes they do and offered some information on the pre-apprenticeship program.

New Steps Counseling Presentation:

Dr. Randolph Sconier also known as Dr. S, gave a presentation on his program called Mental Hop, which focuses on mental health education through hip-hop culture. He emphasized the importance of engagement, education, empowerment, and enlightenment in addressing mental health issues. Dr. Sconier highlighted the significance of checking in with individuals and asking how they are feeling, as well as expressing gratitude. He discussed the stigma surrounding therapy and counseling in communities and the need to address it.

Dr. Sconier explained his motivation for combining hip-hop culture and mental health, aiming to utilize the universal appeal of hip-hop to break down barriers and promote understanding. He emphasized that hip-hop is not just about music but encompasses various aspects such as knowledge and entrepreneurship. Dr. Sconier stressed the importance of building trust and connections with young people, valuing their voices, and creating healing spaces. He discussed the ups and downs of the healing process and the need for continued support and understanding. Dr. Sconier also highlighted the importance of self-care and its relevance from an early age. He emphasized

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the cultural relevance of his program and its potential to demystify mental health topics through genuine and authentic conversations. Scott Kuchinsky shared his concerns and challenges working with youth and the need to effectively work together to ensure youth are adequately receiving all the services from the various partner agencies.

Dr. Sconier shared examples of topics covered in the program, such as trauma, self-care, emotional intelligence, and conflict resolution. He emphasized the resilience of young people and the transformational potential of their stories. The program is designed to be easy to implement and adaptable to different settings. Dr. Sconier also mentioned the positive feedback received from participants, including returning citizens and individuals experiencing homelessness. He expressed his vision for mental health education to become a standalone course and a requirement in schools, promoting a better understanding of mental health and reducing stigma. The presentation concluded with a discussion on mental health campaigns and the involvement of adults who have overcome challenges as guest speakers, providing valuable insights to young people.

Meredith Barracato commented on the impact of mental health sessions Dr. Randolph Sconier provides to the recently graduated students from Simon Youth Academy. The graduating class was one of the largest since the academy's inception. In a focus group conducted a few months ago, the students were asked about their thoughts on mental health as part of the Union County Workforce Development Board strategic plan. Many of the students expressed dissatisfaction with the traditional therapy route which they were required to participate in. Instead, the students praised the effectiveness of Dr. S and how they observed positive changes in themselves through their interactions with Dr. S. The students expressed a strong desire to continue working with Dr. S after graduating from Simon Youth Academy, suggesting that there will be staying in touch or working for him in the future. Meredith Barracato reminded committee members that mental health services is part of the WIOA youth 14 program elements and part of supportive services. Meredith Barracato mentioned that the New Jersey Department of Labor and the Union County Workforce Development Board recognize the impact of mental health on the workforce, especially as we transition from COVID. The lingering effects of the pandemic and the Shelter in Place mindset still affect many individuals in the workforce. Meredith Barracato wants to ensure that programs take advantage of the mental health services available.

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Committee Updates:

- **Disabilities Committee:** Meredith Barracato mentioned that recently, a subcommittee has been formed to focus on an employer survey aimed at understanding the needs and concerns of employers regarding working with individuals with disabilities. The survey aims to highlight the support required for individuals with disabilities, including mental health, physical, and emotional support, and how Union County and the American Job Center can provide these services. The survey is set to be released in July to coincide with the 33rd anniversary of the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act).
- **Youth Committee:** Chairman Scott Kuchinsky highlights that it has been a good year and one of their main goals was to increase representation from school districts. They have been focusing on strengthening connections between school youth providers and in-school youth connections. They want to ensure that students who are not with their program can still access their services by establishing better connections with other providers. They have successfully brought in representatives from most major districts. Scott mentions the importance of achieving uniformity in their processes to avoid fragmentation within the network of service provision. They want all service providers to share the same paperwork and standards. The main focus moving forward is to continue improving connections between service providers and schools, ensuring a smooth transition for students accessing services.
- **Adult Education and Literacy Committee:** Meredith Barracato and Marlene Loff offered some updates regarding the committee. Meredith mentioned the committee is actively working on developing co-enrollment processes to ensure a smooth transition for individuals from Title Two programs to Title One programs. Title Two programs focus on ESL (English as a Second Language) and adult basic literacy, while Title One programs provide occupational training and on-the-job training through American Job Centers and other partners. Marlene, who heads the literacy consortium, mentions the progress made this year and emphasizes the

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importance of continuing the relationship with Title One and the American Job Center to facilitate co-enrollment. Additionally, she mentions that the upcoming Title Two grant requires capturing all enrollment information in the state's LACES database, allowing for enrollment updates throughout the grant year, not just at the beginning.

Partner Updates: Chairman Brady expressed his goal is to have everyone on the same team and to change direction if needed. He believes they are gradually achieving this by increasing understanding of individual and group roles. Chairman Brady expressed satisfaction with the progress made and thanks everyone for their participation. He emphasized the importance of listening. He expressed gratitude and assure his availability. Overall, the Chairman Brady considers it a good year for listening and appreciates the collaborative efforts.

Adekoya Brown, NJ Vocational Rehabilitation Services mentioned they are seeing a lot of youth who are interested in preemployment/summer employment services. He has been working closely with Community Access Unlimited with employment event.

Cathy Waters, Urban League of Union County discussed the partnership with the American Job Center in terms of their Financial Literacy program that will be based at the American Job Center. Cathy also discussed the rental assistance benefits they have but there is a lack of landlords and affordable housing.

Carolina Marin, Union County American Job Center discussed the transportation, logistics and distribution job fair in which they had 12 employers come and over 160 attendees. They are still waiting for hiring results. She also discussed a hiring event with Farmland that will take place in August and a business summit in September. Carolina Marin mentioned she will share details.

Colleen Clayton, The Gateway Family YMCA thanked everyone for the support with her program. Colleen mentioned they still have availability in their summer camp and the program offers government subsidy. They are having an open house July 15 and 16 at all their locations.

Eva Altidor, Union County Department of Human Services no updates at the moment. They are making sure their programs are operating well.

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Isaias Rivera, Union College of Union County, NJ will be planning a job fair with Apple Green and the American Job Center and will share flyers with everyone.

Juanita Vargas, United Way of Greater Union County will have a completion ceremony for 52 clients and will host a prom. United Way of Greater Union County Youth Corp contract has been renewed. There is a new CEO Julienne Cherry.

LaChelle Thompson, Housing Authority of the City of Elizabeth are still having the food pantry events for the public. They have a Jobs Plus event on 6/29/23 and have about 20 vendors available and have over 100 clients attend. LaChelle discussed the close out of the Job Plus program and they have been successful with disregarding almost half a million dollars in rental payment. The Chairman asked what help is needed to keep the program going. LaChelle mentioned she will be connecting her clients with the partner programs to ensure they continue getting services.

Lyle Moseley, Elizabeth Board of Education mentioned his program opened a computer lab for students and that has been beneficial. They are looking to adjust their hours for their students. They are looking to increase their number of GED students and ask for referrals for September. For those interested in contacting Dr Moseley you can email him MoseleLy@epsnj.org. Marlene Loff mentioned they have been concerned with GED enrollment and have been training their staff on different teaching approaches to ensure the student doesn't drop out of the classes. The Chairman asked about if there is data on the value of the GED versus without GED. Marlene said yes there is a lot of data. Marlene discussed the troubles with the GED testing centers in the state. Scott Kuchinsky mentioned Plainfield Public Library is the only one in the area doing testing.

Marlene Loff, Union College of Union County, NJ mentioned they were recently awarded an opportunity partnership grant for certified medical assistant and will be holding an information session today. Marlene mentioned the interesting part of the grant is the need to partner with employers so they will be involved in the whole process.

Robert Croom, Union County American Job Center will be partnering with Urban League to provide financial literacy services which includes financial coaching. They will be partnering with Union College on the hiring events on July 12, 2023. Robert Croom discussed the expungement event that had 136 records

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expunged and 66 were American Job Center customers. They will be doing more expungement clinics quarterly. They had a hiring event with Fed Ex and 35 individuals are in the hiring process. Robert encouraged everyone to contact them if they are interested in having a hiring event or need help creating flyers for the event.

Scott Kuchinsky, Plainfield Public Library mentioned they are booked up with GED testing for the summer but if anyone is in need please call him. They will be expanding ESL services and hope to have that up in the Fall. They will also be working with Americorp Seniors. They have filled their summer session and they have been packed with the digital literacy services for Spanish speakers. Scott mentioned they have hired a soft skills student and a CWEP client at the library.

Meeting Schedule 2023: Meredith Barracato noted a change in the meeting schedule for 2023.

Wednesday, July 19, 2023 9:00am Cancelled	Warinanco Sports Center 1 Park Drive, Roselle, NJ
Wednesday August 23, 2023 9:00am New Meeting Date	Warinanco Sports Center 1 Park Drive, Roselle, NJ
Wednesday, October 18, 2023 9:00am	Warinanco Sports Center 1 Park Drive, Roselle, NJ

COMMITTEE ADJOURMENT