



YOUTH COUNCIL

MINUTES

Wednesday, April 13, 2011

11:30 a.m.

Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board

439 South Union Street

Lawrence, MA 01843

Youth Council MEMBERS PRESENT:

Janet Allison, Howard Allen, Kristine Blum, Lisa Coy, Beverly DeSalvo, Ed Fitzgerald, Brad Howell, Linda Piergeorge, Heidi Riccio, Megan Shea, Michael Strem, Cal Williams

MVWIB Youth Council MEMBERS ABSENT:

Tom Casey, Irene Chalek, Howard Flagler, Melanie Mericle, Barbara Richards, Vinnie Ouellette, Ed Warnshuis

MVWIB STAFF PRESENT:

Deborah Andrews, Rafael Abislaiman

GUESTS PRESENT:

Cristy Gomez, Todd Frey, E.D.

I. Call to Order

A quorum being present, Youth Council Chairman Cal Williams called the meeting to order at 11:45 a.m.

II. Approval of March 9, 2011 Minutes

Cal then called for a motion on the minutes of the March 9, 2011 meeting.

Motion by Brad Howell seconded by Megan Shea to approve the minutes of the March 9, 2011 Youth Council meeting as submitted. Motion passed.

III. Legislative Funding Update

Rafael Abislaiman said that in the latest continuing resolution it appears that workforce development activity funding will be cut somewhere between 7% & 11%. This will not impact core services but will impact a variety of extra programs. Rafael also said the most notable

cut is the 15% money from the federal government to the state. This money is used for statewide initiatives, such as the High Performing WIB. It has been reduced to 5%. Significant cuts could affect staffing, physical space and vendors. He said that we can deal with an 11% cut, but a 22-25% cut or much above that would require serious decisions to be made. He also said that he is worried about the \$100,000 High Performing WIB Award, as we haven't received the funds to date.

Cal said Chili mentioned that if these cuts go through we would lose a career center. Ralph said that even with total elimination of WIA there is still money for unemployment which would allow for one career center to remain open in this area, but maybe not at this size.

Deborah said that the House voted for -0- funding for WIA, but the Senate and President included the funding in their budgets. Ralph noted that youth funding got a higher (15%) cut than other categories. Current funding goes through either June 30th or September 30th. The good news is that the Career Center received money for Trade clients, who are workers whose jobs have gone overseas. Federal law funds these eligible workers with separate and more intense training. The Career Center received \$2M for Deb Staffing and Sunoco, who laid-off 600 workers from this area. Solo Cup Company is also leaving and is taking 400 more jobs from Mass.

IV. Program Updates

- **YouthWorks, WIA , Externships**
- **Construction Career Day**
- **Youth RFP**

Deborah said that the youth department is beginning the process for the Summer YouthWorks Program and asked Lisa Coy, ValleyWorks Career Center Youth Program Director, to give the update. Lisa introduced Cristy Gomez, Youth Services Coordinator at ValleyWorks, who is overseeing the YouthWorks and Connecting Activities programs. Lisa said that we should serve about 230 individuals this year, similar to last year. The youth are from Lawrence and Haverhill, with 10% from Methuen. Commonwealth Corporation made a decision to change the eligibility criteria this year. In previous years, youth had to meet income requirements AND have a barrier to employment. This year, 85% of summer youth need only meet the income eligibility criterion. Fifteen percent of the summer youth must be considered at high risk, which requires both income eligibility and a barrier to employment. YouthWorks required barriers include homelessness, in state custody, or court involved. We expect applications to be released on April 19th during school vacation. They will be available on the website and at the Career Center. The application process requires parent signatures and an I-9, among other documents. Staff will be available in the schools to assist with the paperwork. Applications are due on May 20th and there will be a lottery drawing with notification by letter. All youth will be required to participate in a workshop on work readiness and safety. Jobs will begin July 6th and last for 6 to 7 weeks. Participants will earn \$8 per hour.

Mike Strem asked how we find the businesses. Lisa said that there is a Business Service Representative team at ValleyWorks as well as WIB staff to reach out to businesses. If there

is a good match, the business gets free labor for the summer while they are mentoring a youth. It is also an opportunity to test the match for permanent employment. We have had a variety of placements over the years in organizations such as the Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA and City Hall. We do prefer private business placements when possible. We have more private employer partners in our area than most WIBs. Mike Strem mentioned that he never had so many inquiries for summer internships as this year and wondered why.

Rafael Abislaiman said that most youth haven't had jobs, as there is 67% unemployment for youth overall. The unemployment number for Black and Hispanic youth is 85%. He wondered if our efforts are directed in the right area. If 35% of high school graduates don't get a job, why not focus on kids who are graduating? We can help them get a foot in the door. He said that we proposed to focus on graduating youth, but this was rejected by the state. He did say that the reason the state changed the eligibility policy this year was because Mayor Lantigua sent letters to the Senate, House and legislative leadership at the State and asked them to advocate for a change in the eligibility regulation. This is why 85% of YouthWorks participants do not require a barrier for eligibility.

Cal asked if we know how many youth who participated last year had graduated. Lisa said that there is a report online that she can access and get the information for him. Megan Shea said that employment is a way to keep kids in school and the Youth Council's job is to look at the education and employment pipeline. Employment experience is vital to youth obtaining and keeping jobs.

Cal said that he feels that the lottery is the best way to go this year. He also suggested having employers come in and speak to the youth about expectations.

Ralph said that we can fill 230 slots because there are so many youth whose family incomes are below the poverty rate in all the neighborhoods served. In addition, we need to find out why some employers don't want to explain the rudiments of a job to a youth and don't participate in summer jobs. There are many capable kids who can't get their foot in the door. The best case is that the kids get jobs and become motivated. If kids are unmotivated employers won't hire them. We need to look at how we can help kids in a shrinking economy.

V. Merrimack Valley Sandbox Initiative Presentation

Deborah introduced Todd Fry, Executive Director of the Merrimack Valley Sandbox Initiative at the Merrimack Valley Center of Innovation & Entrepreneurship at UMass/Lowell. Introductions were made around the table. He started in December and is familiarizing himself with the area. Mr. Fry said that he would give an overview of this initiative and then answer any questions.

The initiative was launched by the Deshpande Foundation, founded by Desh Deshpande and his wife Jaishree Deshpande, immigrants from India who now live in Andover. It is based on the success of the Foundation's initiatives at MIT and in Northwest Karnataka, India. This new initiative is meant to build up the innovation ecosystem in the Merrimack Valley through

partnerships that promote innovation and entrepreneurship in business and the community. The initiative is adapted from the concept in Hubli, India. The Sandbox will coordinate activities between the university and colleges, local non-profits and the business community. It grows out of a partnership with the four regional colleges: UMass/Lowell, Merrimack College, Middlesex Community College, and Northern Essex Community College. Todd said that on a recent trip to Lawrence he came upon Cambridge College and plans to contact them to participate as well.

Todd said that they will not be a grant funding entity but will support innovation by individuals, institutions, non profits, companies and entrepreneurs to address the challenges of the region and hopefully lead to economic activity and create new businesses. The Foundation seeks to transform the region into a place where entrepreneurs and civic leaders are rapidly identifying solutions to local problems and implementing them for the benefit of their communities and society at large.

Mr. Fry said that students apply with the community need application, are given a \$500 grant, and work in teams of 2-5 people. As they start the project with plenty of ideas, there is no concern about failure. As they show promise there is more mentoring and maybe something successful will come out of the Sandbox. The object is to seed entrepreneurs from the ground up. He noted one experiment working with a local college to expand and to work with out-of-school youth through Lawrence Community Works, and another with Greater Lawrence Technical High School to learn vocational skills and make college accessible and affordable. Mr. Fry also reported on their leadership piece. They are working to have a business plan competition by next January, modeled on the Mass Challenge. He said that they are not replicating the India sandbox, but are trying to build a pathway for change and grab some can-do energy. He said that he has recently hired staff. They are Janine Duran from Lawrence, Leanna Cushie from Lowell, and Pavel Payano, recent Lawrence School Committee member. This is a \$5m, five year commitment and Todd said that he welcomes any ideas or concerns.

IV. Program Updates (Continued)

- **Externships**

Howard Allen thanked Cal for the connection at UPS and said that Bronwyn Boyle from Haverhill High School will be participating in an externship at United Parcel Service. He also said that he is pleased to report that Dr. Mark Kauderer from Lawrence High School will be participating in an externship at Strem Chemical in Newburyport. He thanked Mike Strem for being a long time supporter of this initiative. Howard said that the teachers hope to be able to take the students on a tour of the externship site. Howard noted that the next phase is to fund summer externships.

- **WIA**

Deborah reported on two WIA Youth Programs. The first is the OSY Education & Food Service 2nd cycle. Plans were for fifteen youth and current enrollment is eight. Seven have OSHA certification with one still working toward certification, and one has completed her GED. The

program ends the last week of April, with internships to begin in May. The second program is the OSY Education & Medical Assistant. Eight were planned and eight enrolled. Six of the eight students are in need of a GED. All have their CPR/1st Aid Certification and one has been offered a position at Mass General at \$14.25 per hour. This program ends in May.

Deborah then reported that Construction Career day is May 5th and close to 80 youth from Lawrence, Amesbury, North Andover, and across the area will be participating.

Deborah also reported that we did not release the RFP because there were concerns with WIA funding levels going forward. In addition, we have many youth seeking ITAs. Youth funds were transferred to the ITA account. Five youth started last week. Rafael said that the RFP would be a fourteen month plan and we were not sure we would be around due to potential WIA funding issues. There is less than \$100K in funds and there is a need for ITAs. Lisa said another consideration is that if we went ahead with the RFP in 2011, we would be working under both the old and new measures.

Lisa Coy mentioned that ITA trainings include electronics and CNA training and the current cap is \$15,000 but the average cost is around \$4,800. There is an ongoing discussion on lowering the cap. Megan Shea said that participants in ITAs must obtain a recognized certification.

Megan Shea asked if the Youth Council could have monthly written reports on the program performance.

VI. DCS WIA Title I Youth Program Quality Assurance Review

Deborah reported that the Division of Career Services (DCS) is currently conducting the Title I Youth Program Quality Assurance Review which is going well and will conclude the end of this week.

VII. Adjournment

Having no further business Howard Allen made a motion to adjourn seconded by Megan Shea. Motion passed.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Kivell

Mary Kivell
Recorder