

## **UPDATE OF ATLANTIC CAPE MAY WIB YOUTH PLAN**

**July 15, 2002 - June 30, 2004**

### **I. MISSION**

#### **Mission Statement:**

“The Atlantic Cape May Youth Investment Council, under the auspices of the WIB, will plan for and oversee the workforce and career service delivery system for young people in our WIB area.”

The Youth Investment Council (also referred to as the YIC or Youth Council) will be responsible for setting a clear policy direction in creating employment opportunities and career pathways for all youth ages 14-21, who may be in or out of school and who may or may not meet Workforce Investment Act (also referred to as WIA) eligibility requirements. Special emphasis has been and will be given to the WIA target populations and to youth residing in the local Abbott District of Pleasantville. Youth One-Stop Career Centers will operate in locations that are accessible to youth of all ages and provide comprehensive services on-site or through a referral process for any youth. The Youth Council will advise the Atlantic Cape May Workforce Investment Board (also referred to as the WIB) on youth workforce issues, concerns and current programs. In addition, the Youth Council will promote collaboration among all organizations who apply for WIA Youth funds and be the conduit for information that will link services for youth in Atlantic and Cape May Counties. The Youth Council will collect relevant data on an ongoing basis for WIA youth target populations and for the employment and support services that are available and accessible to youth. Funding and coordination of services will be predicated on the findings in order to ensure that a comprehensive network of quality services is in effect in both Atlantic and Cape May Counties. The Youth Council will assess the service delivery system and conduct monitoring of WIA-funded youth programs on a regular basis.

### **II. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR YOUTH SYSTEM OF SERVICES**

The Youth Council will address the following goals up to and including June, 2004. The YIC identified these goals based on a process that included a survey of area youth service providers, a specially prepared report by Atlantic Cape Community College's Center for Regional & Business Research, experience with WIA-funded youth programs over the last two years and a variety of focus groups conducted with youth, providers and employers.

A. The Youth Council will coordinate youth employment and support services in the areas of Atlantic and Cape May County that are under-served based on recent and ongoing surveys and data collection.

Under-served areas include those with a majority of the following characteristics:

- few employment and support programs for youth;
- a high concentration of out-of-school youth;
- communities which have been designated as having high levels of poverty and unemployment.

These include: Woodbine, Middle Township, Lower Township and the Wildwoods in Cape May County and Egg Harbor City, Galloway Twp., Buena Boro, Buena Vista Twp., Atlantic City and Pleasantville in Atlantic County. There are also a number of these communities in concentrated areas throughout both Counties.

The Youth Council will achieve this through the following methods:

- A follow-up survey will be completed and additional data will be gathered regarding the current numbers of youth, employment and support services in each community.
- Demographic information will be collected and assessed on the youth who are now WIA-funded program participants to determine if we are meeting identified needs. Data will be tallied either electronically or manually beginning with Program Year 2002.
- The Planning Committee will make recommendations based on the findings to encourage the coordination of and/or the creation of programs in the identified areas.
- Additional focus groups will be conducted to gather additional input from our customers.
- Other relevant plans will be studied for the purpose of better coordination of services, i.e. Youth Services Commissions, Human Service Advisory Councils, etc.
- A determination may be made to hire a consultant to conduct further studies.
- Recommendations may be made to utilize WIA funding in the identified communities.

B. The Youth Council will ensure that WIA-funded programs utilize the best practices for raising basic skills levels in program participants who are deficient.

The following methods will be utilized to reach this goal:

- Data will be collected for the 14 - 21 year old population who are currently enrolled in WIA-funded programs and for the general population. This will include test scores, Individual Service Strategies for program participants, and data related to national and state average skills levels based on certain reports, yet to be identified.
- The Education Committee will convene and assess current practices and make suggestions for improvement.
- Any new approaches will be in effect by June 30, 2004.
- Comparisons will be made between program and non-program participants.

C. The Youth Council will assure that students can achieve job specific skills in entry-level positions indigenous to our Atlantic Cape May region through participation in meaningful workplace readiness experiences in the top job clusters in our region.

The following methods will be utilized to reach this goal:

- Specific sets of skills, commonly referred to as Skill Sets and Standards for Credentialing, in current programs will be assessed.
- The Education Committee will convene and make recommendations regarding standardization across programs.

- The Youth Council will work in conjunction with SETC requirements and new initiatives in Standardization and Credentialing.

D. The Youth Council will create a successful means for marketing and promoting its Youth Programs and Services to youth, parents, providers and employers who may have had no reliable means for accessing the system to date.

The following methods will be utilized to reach this goal:

- The Planning Committee will create a Youth Marketing Plan as part of the overall WIB Marketing Plan by Fall, 2002.
- The Marketing Plan will address promotion of the “YouthWORKS” website, newsletter and the soon-to-be-published Youth Services Resource Guide.
- The Marketing Plan will include youth and employer recognition events that will take place on a scheduled basis.

E. The Youth Council will expand the Youth One-Stop concept and create a network of employment services for all youth ages 14 - 21 who are residents of Atlantic and Cape May Counties.

The following methods will be utilized to reach this goal:

- The Youth One-Stop ad hoc Committee will reconvene in August, 2002, to develop a plan for the overall Youth One-Stop System of Services.
- The first Youth One-Stop Career Center will open in Pleasantville by September, 2002, and with continued documentation, become a model for the Bi-County system..
- The Committee will survey the area to assess the need and potential utilization of a One-Stop Mobile Unit to access remote and under-served areas of each County.
- At least one additional Youth One-Stop anchor site will open in Cape May County by September, 2003.
- The Youth One-Stop System will be fully operational according to the plan by June 30, 2004.

F. The Youth Council will implement solutions, whenever possible, to transportation barriers faced by youth in both Atlantic and Cape May Counties in their efforts to find employment and be responsible employees.

The following methods will be utilized to make improvements:

- The Youth Council will gather data and information from youth, program coordinators, employers and transportation entities concerning the problem.
- The Planning Committee or an ad hoc group will assess the findings and make recommendations to address the issues.
- Solutions will be implemented on an ongoing basis which may include seeking additional funding sources and working with agencies who have the responsibility to provide transportation.

G. The Youth Council will raise employer awareness to ensure more job opportunities for youth of all ages.

The following methods will be utilized to achieve this goal:

- The Youth Business Partners' Coalition will continue to meet and will continue to address and solve problems regarding youth employment, such as job readiness and job opportunities for special needs and younger youth (ages 14 and 15).
- By June, 2003, more employment opportunities will be available through expanded relationships with employers, including more widespread use of the "YouthWORKS" website to post jobs for youth.
- The Youth Council and the Business Partners will work hand-in-hand with the Chamber of Commerce "School Counts Program," now in the formative stages, and other character building programs, to expand job opportunities through students' participation in a recognized program and through an employment certification program to be implemented by the YIC in both Counties.
- The WIB Marketing Plan will include a special section to address this goal.

H. The Youth Council will continue to identify and to address any barriers for youth to education and employment opportunities in Atlantic and Cape May Counties.

The following method will be utilized to reach this goal:

- The Youth Council will host an annual meeting with Bi-County representation from Youth Council Committees and other planning boards in order to identify new or previously unidentified barriers.
- WIB staff and Youth Council members who serve on other planning boards (Youth Services Commission, Human Services Advisory Council, Children's Interagency Coordinating Council, etc.) will bring issues concerning youth in the workplace to the YIC for further consideration.

### **III. CURRENT STRUCTURE OF YOUTH INVESTMENT COUNCIL**

There are currently 37 members on the Atlantic Cape May Youth Investment Council which operates as a standing committee of the Workforce Investment Board. The Youth Council membership complies with the representation that is mandated by the State. The representation is quite varied, although the YIC would like to include more private members, more parents and additional representation from Cape May County. The Youth Council is CO-Chaired by two private WIB members. The Youth Council seeks input on an equal basis from both counties and there are committees of the YIC that are chaired by or have Cape May County representation.

The Youth Council meets bimonthly and any necessary committee or ad hoc meetings convene in the interim. Committees include:

- Planning

- RFP
- Youth Committee
- Youth Program Coordinators
- Education/School-to-Careers
- Out-of-School Youth
- Youth Employer Partnership

**ATTACHMENT A** outlines the membership

The activities of each Committee are as follows:

Planning: The Planning Committee has been charged with setting the parameters of the Youth Planning Process and then developing the Youth Plan. Once the long-term goals and objectives have been established, the Committee will proceed to develop an action plan for each one. The Committee will meet monthly.

Year-Round In-School and Out-of-School RFP: The RFP Committee has provided input into the development of the entire RFP Process in conjunction with the contracting agency, Job Connection. Many members of the Committee have sat on the review panel multiple times. The Committee has assisted in refining the document and the scoring process over the two-year period and will continue to do so. In order to create a system for youth, it is crucial that the process be consistent with the goals and objectives that the Youth Council sets in the creation of this plan. The Committee will meet as is necessary.

Youth Advisory Committee: The Youth Committee, comprised of youth 14 - 21 years of age, is charged with making recommendations to the Youth Council regarding issues, concerns and successes. Representatives from the Youth Committee will sit on the larger Youth Council. The Committee will meet quarterly at a minimum.

Youth Program Coordinators: The Committee is made up of representatives from the currently funded WIA Youth Programs. The group meets monthly to discuss relevant topics and bring issues of concern to the table. Most of the coordinators also attend the regular Youth Council meeting.

Education/School-to-Careers: The Committee has had several challenges during the last two-and-one-half years. Originally two distinct groups, the Committees were joined together when the School-to-Careers initiative came to an end. Not mitigating the need for a school-to-career support system, the Committees joined forces. The Committee has met, though, on an irregular basis to address issues and will begin to meet again to address the parameters of this plan.

Out-of-School Youth: The Committee is charged with collecting data and making recommendations on issues regarding this population. The Committee will be instrumental in creating avenues to address any gaps in service or recruitment problems.

Youth Business Partners: The group is in the formative stages after only two meetings. Forming a coalition for the purpose of increasing job opportunities for youth and meeting the needs of employers is the goal. The group will meet on a quarterly basis at a minimum.

#### **IV. FUNDING PROCESS, REQUIRED PROGRAM ELEMENTS and PROGRAM DESIGN**

The WIB has implemented an RFP process to procure WIA-funded services for youth in Atlantic and Cape May Counties. The process has evolved over time and we recently combined our Year-round In-School and Out-of-School RFPs. The WIB utilizes members of The Youth Council along with representatives from the public and private sector who are non-conflicted. During our recent review process 12 programs were approved for funding with Program Year 2002 funds. Four of the 12 are Out-of-School Programs. All providers are required to provide access to the ten WIA required youth program elements which include:

- Tutoring, study skills training and instruction leading to high school completion;
- Alternative secondary school services;
- Summer employment opportunities directly linked to academic and occupational learning;
- Paid and unpaid work experiences, including internships and job shadowing;
- Occupational skills training;
- Leadership development opportunities, which may include such activities as positive social and soft skills, decision making and team work;
- Support services;
- Adult mentoring;
- Comprehensive guidance and counseling, as appropriate to the needs of the individual; and
- 12 month follow-up services.

All programs must have the involvement of business and/or business purpose organizations in the design and implementation of the proposed program and an objective assessment of academic levels, skill levels and service needs of each participant, including the development of an Individual Service Strategy. It is expected that proposers will utilize resources to the fullest extent through partnerships and collaborations.

All programs are required to submit goals and objectives that are consistent with the appropriate goals for Older and Younger Youth as mandated by the Workforce Investment Act.

Programs incorporate elements of other successful programs, including School-Based Youth Services, Youth Corps and our own local Atlantic County Children and Families Initiative which provide an array of case management and support services. Three of our current programs are operated in school districts in conjunction with the School-Based Programs.

The local WIB contracts with Atlantic Cape May Career Centers, Inc. operating as Job Connection, to be the “administrative arm.” The organization acts as the contracting agency and the WIB works in partnership with the agency to conduct the RFP process. Job Connection

provides technical assistance, monitoring and training to all organizations providing WIA-funded Youth Programs. The Youth Planner of the WIB conducts monthly meetings for all Youth Program Coordinators and a variety of topics are addressed. Presentations by local employers, state representatives, the Job Connection staff and others are made on a regular basis. Youth and staff from each program have made presentations to the entire Youth Council during the past year. It is the intention of the Youth Council to have each member perform a site visitation and review of one or more Youth Programs during the coming program year.

Youth who are selected to be Star Award recipients are those from our locally funded programs. More recognition awards will be disseminated as part of a variety of functions that will be initiated by our new Public Relations and Marketing staff person. Program staff are encouraged to include special recognition as part of their ongoing initiatives.

## **V. DOCUMENTATION AND EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT IDENTIFICATION OF GOALS**

### **A. PROCESS**

The Atlantic Cape May Youth Investment Council has been in existence since December, 2000. The Council strives to meet the requirements of the Workforce Investment Act through an ongoing, steady, yet flexible, progression of activities. The Youth Council has been dedicated to adhering to the regulations while at the same time assessing and attempting to meet local needs. There has been, without exception, a dedication by the Council members and the WIB Staff to both the WIA funding allocation process and to the general need to serve all youth ages 14 - 21 in Atlantic and Cape May Counties who may or may not meet the WIA eligibility requirements. The Youth Council has released four Requests for Proposals since July 1, 2000. In the attempt to best serve our local WIA target populations we realized that more definitive information would be necessary in order to plan methodically and strategically. We have discovered over time that the funding process itself is difficult and we have sought to make ongoing improvements with each RFP.

At the end of 2001, the Youth Investment Council Planning Committee decided to hire a consultant to collect data on the location of our eligible youth, most importantly our Out-of-School population. The WIB simultaneously conducted a Youth Resource Survey to gather information on where workforce and support services are located in our Bi-County WIB area. The results of the process are identified in various sections of the plan. Included as well are the results of various focus groups conducted with youth, employers and providers. The preliminary results paint a picture of the youth network of opportunities, needs and services in Atlantic and Cape May County. The outcome of the data collection process and our initial experiences with the RFP process will provide the basis for setting our goals and creating a plan to guide us through the next three years.

### **B. TARGET POPULATIONS**

The Youth Council is committed to building a system of workforce opportunities for all youth and focuses on the WIA target populations. These include income eligible youth, ages 14 - 21 who have one or more of the following characteristics:

1. Basic skills deficient
2. A school dropout
3. Pregnant or parenting
4. An offender
5. Homeless, runaway or foster child
6. An individual who requires additional assistance to complete an educational program or to secure and hold employment (includes youth with disabilities)

The guidelines of the State's Five-year Unified Plan indicate that youth in Abbott Districts are to be "fully integrated into the workforce investment system." The local Abbott District (Pleasantville) is one in which there are significant risk factors which produce problem behaviors associated with future success in the workforce. The city of Pleasantville has current designations as an Urban Enterprise Zone, Weed and Seed Area and Abbott District. Additionally, the State Department of Human Services has deemed the High School eligible for a School-Based Youth Services Program and the County has operated a Family Center in town for many years. It is also easy to see from the statistics presented in this plan that the city of Pleasantville has the highest percentage of basic skills deficient youth (nearly 70%) and the second highest dropout rate in Atlantic County, in addition to having high unemployment and low income. Individuals, especially youth, living in a community with significant risks factors such as these are especially vulnerable.

Dr. J. David Hawkins, and Dr. Richard F. Catalano of the University of Washing have developed a prevention planning system for healthy communities called "Communities That Care." The program is designed to reduce risk factors for problem behaviors, such as school dropouts, teen pregnancy and substance abuse in individuals and communities. The key is to increase the protective factors which serve as a buffer between healthy lifestyle and behavior problems. Bonding to peers, school and neighborhood/community are protective factors that are elements of our In-School Youth Programs, including the one in Pleasantville. The Atlantic Cape May Youth Investment Council, in recognition of the particular risks associated with the Abbott District of Pleasantville, recommends that any youth living in the Abbott District (Pleasantville) be eligible as "an individual who requires additional assistance to complete an educational program to secure and hold employment."

Additionally, many Out-of-School Youth who are in need of WIA activities and services may not meet the income eligibility criteria. Therefore, the local Youth Council recommends that a maximum 5% of these youth be eligible if they possess one or more of the following barriers:

- Reside in an Abbott District;
- Live in a municipality or housing project identified as a high-crime area;
- Live in a municipality identified in Census 2000 as having an unemployment rate that is higher than the county average; and/or

- Live in a municipality identified in Census 2000 as having an income level that is below 80% of the average.

These barriers are additions to the WIA barriers that are noted in the State's Five-year Unified Plan.

Information on the aforementioned groups has been collected and this data can be found in **ATTACHMENT B**. Local data on the homeless and runaway population is not readily available, nor is information on the difficult-to-serve population. We will continue to reach out to local organizations for this data as part the goals and objectives we have selected.

Findings from the collected statistics indicate that the following is true regarding our local youth target populations:

- There is currently a very high percentage of youth in both counties who are basic skills deficient.
  - The highest percentage of basic skills deficient youth are located in the Atlantic City, Pleasantville and Absegami High Schools' sending districts in Atlantic County and Middle and Lower Townships sending districts in Cape May County.
  - The number of youth ages 15 - 19 who are parents is approximately 49% worse than the State rate in Atlantic County and 66% worse in Cape May County.
  - In 1998, Atlantic City accounted for 147 of the 395 teen births (37%) in Atlantic County
  - Approximately 10% of the youth 14 - 21 in Atlantic County and 12.4% of the same age group in Cape May County are classified as "Special Needs" students. This does not take into account the students attending private schools and/or dropouts/out-of-school youth which would raise the percentage.
  - The highest numbers of potential out-of-school youth may be found in Atlantic City, Galloway Twp., Pleasantville and Egg Harbor Twp. in Atlantic County and in Lower Twp., Middle Twp. and Wildwood City in Cape May County. (ATTACHMENT B and B1)

For Program Year 2002 the WIB will serve a proposed 608 youth in 12 programs. There will be 362 younger youth ages 14 - 18 and 246 older youth ages 19 - 21 served, which is an increase from previous years. The Out-of-School funds will serve 176 youth and the In-School Year Round funds will serve 432 students who are currently enrolled in middle or high school. Better data collection for our programs, which will include demographics and characteristics of the participants, will further assist us in our long-term strategic planning.

Job Connection staff has reported that nearly 100% of the youth served through WIA funding are basic skills deficient with one or more additional eligible characteristics. The 12 programs that are currently funded in Atlantic and Cape May Counties are serving youth from each eligible population, including high numbers of offenders, teen parents, homeless and runaway youth. At least four programs serve special needs and disabled youth. However, without the capability to run reports from the current data entry system (OSOS) the WIB has been unable to tally the percentages. The numbers will be calculated manually for the 2002 program year if necessary.

## C. DATA COLLECTION AND YOUTH RESOURCE SURVEY RESULTS

Dr. Richard C. Perniciaro, Director of The Atlantic Cape Community College Center for Regional & Business Research was hired by, and prepared a report for, The Youth Council in April, 2002. The report was entitled: "Identification of the Current Number and Location of Eligible Youth and Projections of Demographic Trends for Service Planning." The report also reflects the results of a "Youth Resource Survey" conducted by The Youth Council and the WIB Staff during the same time frame.

Dr. Perniciaro's findings indicate the following:

- Current services are delivered in the geographic locations where the highest probability of finding eligible clients exists. There are other clusters of potential clients, but they are more geographically dispersed.
- Future clusters of eligible youth will be in the same general locations because economic conditions do not change quickly and usually become embedded.
- There is very little information on where the unmet demand exists. The location and delivery of current services is driven by the geographic clustering of eligible clients in a few larger communities. Transportation is a limiting factor.
- Service providers see little duplication of services but they do see little coordination among providers. Of those polled, 18% believe there are gaps in provision of services.
- There is no consistent or thorough means of collecting data to ensure that the demand for services is being successfully met.
- There is a glaring lack of information for potential clients not now in the YIC system.

Although it is impossible to collect completely accurate information on the numbers and location of youth who have dropped out of school prior to graduation, the report utilizes the most current "NJ School Report Cards" reports for the WIB area High Schools. The dropout rates in our report are felt to be conservative estimates due to the accumulation effect of out-of-school youth who left school in the lower high school grades.

It is estimated that there are 2,695 youth ages 14 - 21 who are out-of-school in Atlantic County and there may be 725 in Cape May County. In the following municipalities the potential number of out-of-school youth is high compared to the actual numbers of youth ages 14 - 21: Atlantic City, Buena Borough, Buena Vista Twp., Egg Harbor City and Pleasantville in Atlantic County. For Cape May County the highest numbers are in Cape May City, West Wildwood and Wildwood. However, when looking at the actual numbers, the highest concentrations of out-of-school youth are found in Atlantic City, Galloway Twp. and Pleasantville in Atlantic County and Lower Township and the combined Wildwoods in Cape May Counties. This is the category that should be considered for the delivery of services. When taking the unemployment rate into account for meeting conditions of eligibility, the previously cited municipalities of Atlantic City, Buena Borough, Egg Harbor City and Pleasantville in Atlantic County are the highest and in Cape May County with very seasonal unemployment, the municipalities are Lower and Middle

Township, Sea Isle City, all the Wildwoods and Woodbine. **ATTACHMENT “C”** is a map that shows the distribution of potential Out-of-School Youth by municipality and was derived from TABLE 2, **ATTACHMENT “C1.”**

The maps, **ATTACHMENT “D” and “D1”**, show the areas of high Unemployment and Poverty in each County and data was derived from **ATTACHMENTS “D2”, “D3” and “D4”** which list poverty, income levels and unemployment for all municipalities. Sending districts are indicated on the maps through the use of arrows for each High School in the WIB area. **ATTACHMENTS “E” and “E1”** map the locations of current youth programs/services. When compared to Dr. Perniciaro’s map (**ATTACHMENT “C”**) highlighting the numbers of potential out-of-school youth, we can demonstrate that there are some gaps in services to areas with these characteristics. Particularly apparent is the Egg Harbor City, area with high unemployment, poverty and high numbers of out-of-school youth.. Galloway Township (Absegami High School) has a rather high rate of out-of-school youth as well and is the receiving district for Egg Harbor City. It is clear from the data that further services may be necessary in these municipalities that have a majority of at-risk characteristics. The Youth Council should carefully assess the conditions in each and make recommendations based on the findings. In Cape May County we see that there are high numbers of potential out-of-school youth in Lower Township which has a high unemployment rate and in Middle Township which has both high unemployment and low income. Although we do fund programs that are available to all Cape May County youth, the Youth Council should work diligently to be sure the needs are being met.

The Youth Council in partnership with the WIB Staff conducted a youth survey during the early part of 2002 to assess the location and number of workforce and support services that are provided by organizations and schools in the two Counties. It was anticipated that the survey outcomes would show the supply and gaps in services. The survey was sent to approximately 160 service providers, high school and middle schools that serve youth ages 14 - 21. Over 54% of the surveys, or 87, were returned. In his report, Dr. Perniciaro stated that the statistics should be considered to give a very reliable picture of the services provided to youth in our area. The items surveyed included all of the WIA-mandated ten program elements as well as the WIA target populations. A copy of the survey results may be found as **ATTACHMENT “F” and “F1.”** The services that are most frequently delivered by the respondents are life skills training, substance abuse, assessment and testing, ESL, mentoring and work experiences. Less than one-third of the organizations serve dropouts and 19% serve post-secondary youth, but 43% serve pregnant or parenting youth, 47% serve those deficient in basic literacy skills and 43% serve youth involved with the justice system. The survey revealed that at least one-third or more of the organizations in Atlantic and Cape May Counties serve each of the WIA target populations.

Results of the survey are helpful, but paint a distorted picture despite the high percentage of surveys that were returned. The surveys only indicated the agency and school locations, which may or may not be the program and/or service sites. A follow-up survey should be done in the following year that will more clearly identify the exact location of agencies’ services. However, considering that every school returned a survey along with a preponderance of agencies, we are able to identify those municipalities that seemingly have many or with few services available to youth. In Atlantic County, Egg Harbor City, Galloway Twp., Buena and Buena Vista Twp. are

high risk communities with few services and in Cape May County, Lower Twp., Woodbine, Middle Twp. and Lower Twp. are the communities most in need. **ATTACHMENT “E”** and **“E1”** map the results. Further mapping of the actual services has been assigned to the Atlantic County GIS Department and may not be available for submission with this document.

In addition to statistical information, the Youth Council also collected comments. The following are the most noteworthy:

- Gaps in Services: Transportation, locating post-grad students, employment opportunities for younger students, restricted eligibility criteria for WIA-funded programs
- Duplication of Services: Poor communication between services, no checks or follow-up on the system - However, very few thought there was actual duplication of services.
- Recommended Improvements: Ability to be responsive and timely, increase partnerships among agencies and better transportation
- Additional Services Provided by Your Agency: Services to developmentally disabled and handicapped youth and behavioral counseling
- Knowledge of Other Organizations Providing Services to Youth: Church-based organizations and casinos

Note that faith-based organizations were not included in the survey unless they met the following characteristics: currently receive grants from various funding streams to operate a youth program, have a proven track record, are known to the local system of providers or have approached the WIB for inclusion or for the purpose of applying for WIA funds. Other faith-based initiatives were not surveyed at this time for several reasons: lack of stable funding sources may limit the viability of the programs, programs may be informal in nature and lack of WIB resources to conduct the survey with so many churches in two counties. However, the Youth Council seeks out and invites all faith-based organizations to provide input and to apply for funding.

Casinos were not surveyed although the WIB and The YIC have many ongoing casino partnerships. Many of the Atlantic City casinos are now providing training, job shadowing and job opportunities through relationships with the programs that we currently fund.

#### D. FOCUS GROUPS

The Youth Council is currently in the process of hosting focus groups with the various entities that encompass the youth services network. The entities include employers, parents, youth and providers, including educators. Thus far three focus groups have been held and feedback has been provided from youth, employers and a small group of our program coordinators. A parent focus group was recently scheduled but canceled due to lack of interest, despite having offered child care, dinner and transportation. It will be rescheduled during the summer of 2002.

## 1. Youth

Two youth focus groups were held during May, 2002, with participation of approximately 30 youths from both Counties. Ten specific questions were posed to the youth, including:

- Have you had a chance to look at the youth website? What did you think?
- Do you feel that you are receiving all the necessary services in school, in your program or in your community?
- What services or programs would help you get a job and keep a job?
- What are the best places to find youth who have dropped out of school? What is the best way to reach them?
- Do you have a job now? What are your likes and dislikes about your job? If you don't have one, why not? Are you looking for a summer job?
- Have you ever utilized the adult One-Stop Career Centers?
- What kinds of services and programs would you like to see at the new Youth One-Stop Career Center?
- What are some things you would like to tell adults who are trying to create employment programs and services for youth 14 - 21?

The responses varied somewhat by County. The majority of youth in both Counties agreed that the new website would be helpful to them and that they would visit the site again. They were also interested in the fact that youth jobs would be posted on the site in the near future, which has now begun to occur. Some felt they would be more likely to visit the site if there was additional information on recreation in the area in addition to education and job-related information, which has now been included.

Most youth felt that they are receiving most of the services they need, but feel that there should be more career opportunities and mental health services. Additionally, transportation is a limiting factor in their ability to get a job and it is a multifaceted problem. It is not enough to have transportation routes to and from jobs, but the schedules very often present a problem, especially at the end of a work day. Returning schedules may not coincide with their needs and very often they complete the trip at night and must walk home from the drop-off point which can be dangerous. One of the youth in our programs was recently hit by a car while bicycling to his job. One solution that was suggested was to implement a car pool program.

In order to get and keep a job, kids cited a need for more money, more benefits, a job that is interesting and one that will provide an opportunity for learning or certification. Youth told us that a primary method for recruiting out-of-school youth to a program would be by referrals from current participants and some were prepared to provide that information on the spot! Also this population can be found on the boardwalk, but not necessarily at malls because they do not have the resources to get there. It would be helpful to advertise on particular radio or TV stations which they identified. However, some students said that many don't want to be helped because some of the youth they know are making more money by dealing drugs and are not interested in traditional employment. Eventually, though, they feel this population will need services or be involved in the criminal justice system.

Most of the youth had really never used the One-Stop Career Centers even if they were involved in one of the WIA-funded programs, nor had they felt encouraged to do so. They did have definite opinions on services and programs they would like to see implemented at our new Youth One-Stop and these included educational presentations, computers that work and other programs especially designed for youth.

The youth would like adults to know that if they are creating employment programs to include the following components: transportation, increased stipends, educational trips, on-the-job career trips, on site child care, increased jobs for younger youth and money for clothing and other essentials. However, many expressed that even if they were involved in a program, they were still having difficulty finding a job. All of the youth involved in the groups said that they wanted and needed to work. They told us that it is important to work with people you like and have respect for your employer, however there seems to be a lot of social problem-solving that is needed in the workplace.

## 2. Youth Program Providers

One group of program providers in Cape May County responded to the youth questions from their perspective. Additionally, Youth Program Coordinators Surveys were distributed at our recent Business Partners' meeting.

Providers feel that they are faced with limited employment opportunities for their lower level students and that the WIB might do more to reach out and market to employers in their County. However, most seem to feel there should be more job and job shadowing selections for all youth and more employers who offer full-time hours positions with benefits.

The lack of a Community College (Atlantic Cape Community College is building a new facility in the County but there have been many construction delays for a various reasons, mostly environmental concerns) is seen to be a hindrance for those wishing to move on to post-secondary education. Many of the students involved in our programs or who are enrolled in an alternative school are ineligible to attend the Vocational Technical Schools in our county for the very reasons they were excluded from their own high schools, i.e. attendance, drug issues, etc. However, some of the providers stated that many of the students have overcome their problems and should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

There are problems with job retention once youth are exited from programs. Although the WIA-funded programs require a 12-month follow-up period for all participants, even that follow along may not enough to address the retention issue.

The lack of viable school-to-career programs and the loss of funds for the programs that had existed under that initiative is seen as a major problem in the ability to prepare youth adequately for the workplace.

## 3. Employers

In April, 2002, the first meeting of a Youth Business Partners' Coalition was held by the Youth Council and hosted at the Trump Taj Mahal. Approximately 40 employers and youth service providers were in attendance. The coordinator of a similar initiative in Camden County was the guest speaker and the new youth website was unveiled at that time. In addition, information and applications were provided for posting youth jobs on our site. There were articles in the local paper and in a small local business coalition newsletter. As a follow-up, more articles appeared and the Atlantic County Mainland Chamber of Commerce sent information to all of their members. At the first meeting, employers were given a survey to complete and a follow-up focus group was held in May. Results from the focus group and the Employer Surveys revealed the following issues:

- Attendance and showing up for work on time are the two major issues of employers
- Many young people have very poor interview skills
- Job readiness and life skills training are lacking for youth just entering the workplace
- Employers do not have the resources to conduct one-on-one mentoring, though youth in the workplace need some support services to be successful
- The WIB should develop a marketing plan and incorporate youth employment and business partnerships
- Employers would like to reduce the pool of job applicants; there are too many unqualified candidates to interview.
- In the near future there will be many more jobs in Atlantic County than there are potential employees
- Transportation is an issue
- All employers feel that youth are a promising source for future labor

The focus group included two of three Chamber of Commerce Directors, recruitment personnel from Commerce Bank and Richard Stockton College of NJ and the General Manager of Hamilton Mall. In response to employers' concerns a pilot youth Job Readiness class will begin during the summer or fall of the current program year. Ten youth from the Pleasantville High School will take part in a Job Readiness Program. Their perfect attendance will result in a Certificate of Completion and a job opportunity with the College, Commerce Bank or Hamilton Mall. If successful, the program will be replicated at various convenient locations throughout the two Counties. Another outcome from the meeting will be a follow-up with the Hamilton Mall manager to discuss the prospect of opening a Retail Skills Center on-site at the mall.

## **E. CURRENT LABOR MARKET**

Recent commercial development in both Atlantic and Cape May Counties indicates that the Tourism and Hospitality, Retail, Health and the Construction industries are strong markets for employees. In Atlantic City alone there are hundreds of thousands of square feet which will become upscale retail space. Most of the major hotels are expanding room, entertainment, retail and dining facilities. On the Mainland, there are hotels, golf courses, shopping plazas and same-day surgery centers and a New Home Depot that will welcome new employees. In Cape May

County the Convention Center in Wildwood and Congress Hall in Cape May recently opened. There are plans afoot to build a major shopping mall in Rio Grande.

Despite declines this year in 200 manufacturing, 1,700 service sector and 2,000 casino jobs, both Counties have experienced an increase of 1,100 jobs during the year. The increase was attributed to gains of 1,900 jobs in the good producing sector, 1,700 in construction and 1,000 in wholesale and retail trade as reported by the South Jersey Economic Development District. The 1998 local WIB plan projected a BI-county increase of approximately 24,000 jobs through 2008. According to Chet Sherman, NJ Labor Market Analyst, the numbers indicate that the projections have been fairly accurate to date with approximately 6,800 new jobs reported for the first three years.

Needless to say, in Atlantic County alone, the numbers needed for future employment will be more than the current available number of potential employees. The Youth Council can work with the demand side to help meet the supply. It will be necessary to expand training and job readiness opportunities for youth while at the same time addressing basic skills deficiencies and other characteristics which may interfere with career attainment.

At least two local projects, the Women and Minorities in Construction Program (Atlantic County) and a local Retail Skills Center are in the planning stages and will address, to some degree, the local needs.

A recent assessment of labor market needs demonstrates that employers will hire youth for entry level positions, even with minimal job readiness training. The organizations will then customize training to meet their own particular needs.

We have started to pave the way with our first Job Readiness certification program but we will have to be sure that our programs meet their goals to provide youth with the education and credentials they will need to be successful. Our area is replete with opportunities and with a workforce development network that wishes to make a difference.

## **VI. COMMITMENT TO SERVING ALL YOUTH**

A Youth Council ad hoc Committee met on and off over the last year to grapple with the concept of developing a Youth One-Stop system that will meet the needs of all youth, WIA-eligible or not. The system should be accessible, youth-friendly and provide an array of services that would promote job opportunities for youth and increase the labor market for employers.

In response, The Atlantic Cape May Youth Council has developed a youth website and a newsletter, both titled "Atlantic Cape YouthWORKS". The website and newsletter may be accessed at: [www.youthworks.info](http://www.youthworks.info). A plethora of employment and educational resources may be found on the website, including job postings for youth by local employers.

We have approved the first Youth One-Stop Center at the current site of the One-Stop in Pleasantville, at Job Connection. Space is plentiful, there is public transportation to the location and the Pleasantville high school and middle school are directly across the street. Additionally, a

Youth Corps program now occupies a portion of the space in which the new Center will be located.

The Committee will reconvene to create a Youth One-Stop System plan to take us into the future. Utilizing the pilot project in Pleasantville as a model, we hope to expand into Cape May County and possibly branch out with the use of a mobile center, much like the bookmobile concept. The mobile unit would bring employment services to youth at locations they frequent and can easily access such as shopping centers, recreation facilities and schools.

## **VII. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The members of the Youth Investment Council of the Atlantic Cape May Workforce Investment Board have developed a clear strategy for providing all youth in Atlantic and Cape May Counties with the employment, educational and support services necessary to become successful participants in the workforce of the future. The strategic plan has been developed under New Jersey's "Guidelines for Youth Investment Councils." Local data and reports have been collected along with community feedback to provide the most accurate information possible upon which to create this plan. However, the plan itself is one that will be ever-changing to meet the demands of the youth and the employers in the local WIB area.

The Youth Council has worked diligently over the last two-and-one-half years to coordinate services through its RFP Process, data collection, creation of a Youth One-Stop Career Center and a youth website. The YIC has developed partnerships with our youth providers, schools, employers and with youth themselves. The goals of this plan have been formulated by analyzing the experiences and data that have been gathered. The Youth Council will strive to meet to goals of the plan by June 30, 2004. These include: coordination of services, raising basic skills levels of program participants, creating job readiness certifications and job specific skill standards, marketing, creating a network of employment services and eliminating transportation and other barriers.

Only through dedication and ongoing assessment of the youth employment and support services network, can this be achieved. It is the intention of the Youth Investment Council to complete the goals of our plan to the greatest extent possible by June 30, 2004.00