



# YOUTH COUNCIL

## MINUTES

Wednesday, February 8, 2012  
Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board  
439 South Union Street  
Lawrence, MA 01843

### **Youth Council MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Nicole Austermann, Megan Shea, Cal Williams, Steve Noroian, Brad Howell

### **MVWIB Youth Council MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Marina Acosta, Irene Chalek, Beverly DeSalvo, Tom Connors, Ed Fitzgerald, Vinnie Ouellette, Barbara Richards, Donna Rivera, Ed Warnhuis, Howard Allen, Janet Allison, Lisa Coy, Linda Piergeorge, April Lyskowsky, Heidi Riccio, Michael Strem

### **MVWIB STAFF PRESENT:**

Rafael Abislaiman, Corina Ruiz, Alicia (Dartmouth College intern)

### **OTHERS:**

Arthur Chilingirian, Amanda McCarthy, Alicia Rodriguez, James Helliwell

#### **I. Call to Order**

Youth Council Chairman Cal Williams called the meeting to order at 11:35 a.m. and introductions were made around the table.

#### **II. Approval of January 11, 2012 Minutes**

Cal then called for a motion to approve the minutes of the January 11, 2012 meeting.

**Motion by Megan Shea seconded by Brad Howell to approve the minutes of the January 11, 2012 Youth Council meeting as submitted. Motion passed.**

Cal said the Youth Council has a lot of talented members and that he wanted to start something new. He wants to give the members an opportunity to present their initiatives and the agencies they represent. He then introduced Jason Parry from Shriver Job Corps.

#### **III. Shriver Job Corps Program Presentation**

Jason gave a brief description of the services that they offer at Job Corps. He continued by saying that by no means are they claiming that Job Corps is the answer for youth issues in the area but that they strongly believe they are part of the answer.

Nicole Austermann then gave an overview of the services they offer. She explained that Job Corps is a free education and training program that serves young adults between the ages of 17-24. The upper age can be waived if there is a documented disability. The program offers an online high school diploma program and also a GED program but students can come into the program possessing either. Job Corps also offers a variety of technical trainings such as an onsite driver's education that is free so students who come in without a license can leave the program with a license. They also offer life skills training so students can leave the program and be successful in society. Students can stay in Job Corps for up to two years and it is self paced. Students can learn more than one trade and after graduation they are offered career transitional services for twenty-two months. There are four eligibility requirements that students must have. First, they need to be between the ages of 17-24 but the upper age can be waived with documented disability; priority enrollment is given to veterans. Second they must be legal to work in the United States. Third, they must be low income, such as a recipient of any public assistance (food stamps, fuel assistance, etc). Even if the household income is \$100,000 they can call that individual low income. They also have the ability to work with someone with a disability to meet the low income standard. Fourth, there must be no open court involvement. They can be on administrative probation but not face-to-face probation and for no more than six months.

Steve Norian asked if they could talk a bit more about the life skills. Jason said they do social development programs, academic and vocational programs. They have career success standards that are modeled around good interpersonal skills, workplace and relationship ethics, personal growth, etc. They do this in facilitated groups run by career counselors in the evenings. They have excellent partnerships with employers in area communities where students can do internships during the day.

Chili asked if the income eligibility is for everyone or random samples and if it's WIA eligibility. Jason said that 100% of the applicants are required to meet income eligibility related to poverty guidelines.

Megan Shea asked what kind of services they offer for students with documented disabilities. Jason said it is based on the disability. When someone with a disability applies the application is reviewed by the wellness staff and disability coordinator. They look at the needs of the applicant and if they are able to meet those. It is not a treatment program and they cannot do a lot of one to one education in some areas but they do have staff that can work with them. Megan asked if they hook up with other services like DMH. Jason said they that they do and that they currently have a good relationship with Mass Rehab. Steve said they have a number of people at Job Corps.

Jason talked about the outcomes and what happens to the students when they finish the program. He ran statistics for all their graduates from February 1, 2011 through January 31, 2012. Job Corps had an 88% employment rate within 9 months of graduation. The average wage of a graduate was \$10.75 to start and the number of students that received jobs in their field of training was 71%. Employment retention was 82% after 6 months and the average wage at 6 months had gone up from \$10.75 to \$11.15. Rafael asked how many students they served. Jason said that last year they had approximately 300 graduates in their Shriver Job Corps Center that enrolled primarily from north central Massachusetts, Greater Lowell and Merrimack Valley.

Rafael asked what type of funding they obtain to serve 300 students a year. Jason said they are funded through the Department of Labor. One of the nice things of being funded through DOL is

that they are not held to the same guidelines as WIA. They don't have an academic proficiency requirement for entrance, which means that they can bring in a student who is reading at a fourth grade level and still go into their GED program. Rafael asked what their annual budget is in order to work with 300 students. Jason said the center operates roughly around \$3 million [This was later corrected to \$7.5-\$8M per year].

Cal said that he had spoken to Jason at a past MVWIB quarterly meeting about some of the issues we had in getting kids in the GED programs because of the long waitlist. Jason said they have a school bus that picks students every day in Lowell at Gallagher station and transports them back there at the end of the day. Unfortunately, they have not been able to expand that to Lawrence but are hoping to do so in the next 6 months. When that happens they will be able to come up to McGovern station.

Megan asked if they find that Lawrence students are more successful when they reside on campus. Jason said yes, that it's always challenging with non-residential students because you don't know what is going to come up at home. They have a dedicated counseling staff that will make home visits to those students who do not show up. Megan said that the controlled environment at Job Corps adds to the probability of success. Jason explained that they have strict rules and expectations for their students. Students need to realize that Job Corps is going to house them, clothe them, feed them, train them, help them obtain a drivers license if they don't have it, help them get a job, and build relationships with employers to vouch for them, and it's at zero cost for the students. Because of that they need to stay on point, behave, be professional, treat each other with respect and be able to pass a drug test. Every student that comes into the center gets a drug test on their second day. If the test comes back positive for some substance, they are retested in 45 days. A second negative test and they are kicked out of the program. There is a potential that students can be drug tested at any time during the program. Rafael asked if the center is a barracks type center. Jason said it's similar to a freshman college dorm; typically four men or women to a room sharing a bathroom with their own furniture. Megan said it's a relatively new structure and that we had a WIB meeting at the Shriver Center in the past. Jason said its one of the newest Job Corps in the region. It was built to be a Job Corps which is different from a lot of other centers in the region that are sometimes converted buildings.

Steve asked if the counseling service is strictly vocational or if the counseling also relates to emotional, social, and relationship needs as well. Jason said they do have a mental health consultant that meets with students that need those services on a regular basis. Whenever possible, we encourage students to remain with their primary provider for those things. Their counseling is more vocational and the counselors are called career counselors. If there is a need for more, Job Corp has some additional ability.

Rafael asked if non-residential students have to comply with all the things resident students do. Jason said absolutely; the expectations are 100% the same. Rafael asked if they apply for separate funds other than DOL. Jason said they do not.

Cal asked what would happen to a student who needs a GED, has a fourth grade reading level and for whom two years of training is not enough. Jason said they have the ability to apply for up to a one year extension for students who have outstanding academic or vocational needs. Rafael asked if they exclusively recruit or take referrals. Jason said they recruit heavily and take referrals as well.

Referrals are always helpful but we want to make sure that the person being referred is as interested in the program as the person doing the referral; we always look for willingness from the students. Rafael asked if students that already possess their high schools diplomas can be considered for membership for any reason other than disability. Jason said yes. Someone with a high school diploma can still meet the low income guidelines. They get a lot of students who want training and know that college is not the right next step for them.

Megan asked for some examples of the nationally recognized certifications they offer. Jason said that every training they offer has an industry recognized certification which students obtain after completing the program. For their computer technology program at the basic level, students earn their A+ certification; for carpentry they earn OSHA 10; for auto mechanic they earn ATECH certification with 200 hours towards their ASE certification; for CNA's they leave the program with their Massachusetts State CNA license; for culinary they get ServeSafe certified. Megan asked if they do career assessment as students come in the door. Jason said they have a five week orientation program where students get to shadow up to three trainings. They also do a career assessment in their second week of the program. They also do internships which we call work based learning programs.

Rafael asked what percent of the students are residential. Jason said about 85-90% are residents and that's what they prefer. We are in a remote place and during the day if they are non-residential students, their cars are parked in the state police barracks which is 500 feet from the center. When students arrive at the center, they have to sign over their keys to the records department. Rafael asked if the \$3 [\$7-8.5] million dollars they get for funding is just for training. Jason said that their funding covers the entire operation. Rafael asked if they have a Board or a chain of command within the federal government system. Jason said strictly chain of command. The DOL bids out contracts and all centers come up for bid every five years. Adams & Associates, which is the company that operates Shriver Job Corps, has been operating it since inception - for twelve years. Cal asked if they have an ESL program. Jason said they work with a local outside program for ESL classes and have several bilingual instructors on site. Rafael asked if Job Corp pays competitive wages to its staff to which Jason said yes.

James Helliwell asked how their program needs are determined. Jason said that the programs Job Corps offers vary from center to center. Offerings are dictated by DOL and are based on their research on area employer needs. James asked if the DOL was open to new programs. Jason said yes and that DOL is in the process of evaluating the three centers in Massachusetts to make sure they are meeting need. The other two centers are located in Grafton and the other near Springfield. There are two other centers in Maine and one in Vermont. Enrollment is done regionally by cluster regardless of which center the student wants to go to. Rafael asked if they have had to reject someone because they ran out of slots. Nicole said they don't reject anyone who meets the requirements; they are instead put them on a wait list. The average wait for males is 8-10 weeks. We have no waitlist for females. Job Corps contract goal is to enroll 330 new students annually and then DOL breaks that down in terms of what they are looking for males and females. It has rolling admission and 90% of the students that need a GED or high school diploma get it. Right now it is seeing more applicants that have their GEDs which is a reflection of last year's economy. About 75% of the students complete the program within two years and 25% are given an extension. All students in their construction trade programs are partnered with unions. Job Corps does not place a student in an internship if that is going to displace a full time employee from his or her job.

Cal said the facility is beautiful and will coordinate with Jason to host a Youth Council meeting on site in the future. He thanked Jason for a lot of good information.

#### **IV. LPS Stakeholder Group Info and Innovation Grant Proposal**

Rafael began by saying that three staff from this area's workforce development team are part of the stakeholders group at the Lawrence Public School system now that Lawrence is the only school system under receivership in the Commonwealth. He shared some of the tentative findings in the Business Management and Finance (BMF) academy. The BMF academy is considered the thug school. It has the highest incidence of discipline issues. The International school has the lowest incidence of discipline issues which may be a reflection of the seriousness with which education is viewed in the Dominican Republic. Sad to say there is no coordinated curriculum development in Lawrence High. There is an expectation that teachers will use the Curriculum Frameworks as their guideline to develop their curriculum and this causes a sequence problem between classes. Steve asked if this was the case in other high schools. Ralph said probably not. People usually identify part of the problem being the strength of the teachers' union but every union person he encountered was pretty sharp.

The six academies were created to foster student interest. But it has been problematic because the six academy division has helped create a situation where some classes that twelve students and the bulk of the classes have about thirty. Once students start in an academy they can't change. The biggest problem is that there are only three differentiated levels or class categories: the scholars and AP program which has about 9% of the kids, the special education program which has about 20% of them and then all the rest of the students are in undifferentiated classes.

Alicia Rodriguez said that her freshman year at LHS was more successful because she was at the old LHS. They had the honors program, the scholars, the college prep and the special needs. It worked well because the higher upper class worked together and then you had the distinction of people who were working and those who weren't. In her sophomore year at the new LHS, students either went to the top part or just stayed in the undifferentiated group. If a student wanted to take a course offered in another academy, that option was not available. Steve asked if she felt prepared for college. Alicia said not at all; during high school she did not write an essay more than three pages double spaced. It is difficult to start college and not be able to write a longer thesis; most people get discouraged and that is why there is a low college retention rate.

Rafael added that if Lawrence High School freshman fail a couple classes; chances are they won't finish high school in four years. There is a surprising number of people who repeat ninth grade three times. One of the stakeholder group recommendations will be that the counseling system currently in place should change to offer intensive counseling freshman year. Currently counseling normally starts during their junior and senior year. But there is a 30% dropout rate between Freshman and Sophomore year. Alicia said that her college counseling began senior year and that she only saw her counselor when she needed her college recommendation. It is difficult for guidance counselors to see such a big group of students. Steve asked if college was discussed or was it something she pursued because of academic excellence. Alicia said there are college posters but a lot has to happen at home. Brad said we should start the intervention early; as early on as 8th grade.

James said that maybe there should be an increase in guidance counselors and ways to inform more parents on the importance of an education. Rafael said that one indicator of a students' academic success is the involvement of at least one parent. The WIB will be applying for an Innovation Grant that is due March 22<sup>nd</sup> and we hope to focus on the current Lawrence Public School situation. Our hope with this proposal is to pilot a Lawrence Career Center entity within Lawrence High School to reinforce the need to stay in high school and graduate. We will guarantee that if a student passes their MCAS test and wants a job, we will work with them until they get one. Under the proposal, parents who participate in their child's education will have prioritized services at the new Career Center. Megan said that Andy Sum did a presentation a few years ago and identified that the biggest challenge youth face when going into the workforce is lack of clear orientation.

Chili clarified that they are not moving the Lawrence VWCC youth department, they are building a new career center at LHS with wrap around services. Brad said it is a good idea to put wrap around services in areas where kids frequent such as Boys & Girls Clubs and YMCA's. James said that what has been most effective is inter-generational mentorship and there is not enough mentorship at the YMCAs. Megan said the YMCA has the Teen Achievers. Alicia said she was part of the Teen Achievers program and that the kids who really needed the mentoring were not targeted.

Cal asked if the stakeholders group will be reaching out again to the business community. Rafael said yes, there will be an overarching employer stakeholder group but he is not yet sure what the composition will otherwise be.

#### **V. Other Business**

Megan said they will be having a 2<sup>nd</sup> annual event to hook up parents with services and youth are invited to find out about careers and the importance of staying in school. The event will be on March 31<sup>st</sup> from 10-2PM at Lawrence Boys & Girls Club.

Rafael said that the next YC meeting may be rescheduled because Cal and he will be going to NAWB in March.

Cal thanked everyone and said that we will put Brad Howell on the agenda next week to give a brief presentation about his agency.

#### **VI. Adjournment**

**Having no further business Megan Shea made a motion to adjourn seconded by Brad Howell. Motion passed and meeting was adjourned.**

Respectfully submitted,

*Corina Ruiz*

Corina Ruiz  
Recorder