



Serving Out-Of-School Youth through a Youth One-Stop in Gloucester County, New Jersey

Youth Council: Gloucester County, New Jersey Youth Council

Element: Comprehensive Youth Development Approach

Function: Coordinating Youth Services

Subject: Youth Friendly One-Stops

The Challenge

There was no second chance program or system for dropouts and the dropout rate was getting higher in Gloucester County, New Jersey. Furthermore, in 2003, changes were being made to WIA during the reauthorization process; it looked as though the funding ratio of 70% for in-school youth and 30% for out-of-school youth was going to be reversed (70% of funding for out-of-school youth; 30% for in-school youth).

The Strategy

Given these circumstances, the Gloucester County Youth Council decided to refocus their funding on serving out-of-school youth. The Youth Council established a comprehensive program for out-of-school youth. Called the Gloucester County Youth One-Stop, the program is housed in the Gloucester County Institute of Technology (GCIT), which includes a comprehensive high school, vocational school, and an alternative high school. The program includes assessment, youth development supports, education, and vocational/job access.

The youth are required to put in at least 15 hours per week in basic skills education and vocational training. They must participate in two hours of vocational exploration and training after school hours. The trainings available to them are the same ones offered during the school day at GCIT: Cosmetology, Culinary Arts, Construction Technology, and Transportation Technology. Teachers are paid overtime to work with the youth in the program.

The Gloucester County Youth One-Stop operates as an open entry/open exit program. Students must meet the weekly hour requirements in order to receive a monetary incentive; if they don't, they enter into a progressive discipline process. The first and second times they do not attend for the required number of hours, they meet with the principal. The third time they are suspended for 90 days.

The out-of-school youth program is funded with WIA Youth and NJ Adult Literacy dollars so that youth who are not eligible for WIA can also participate. Non-WIA eligible youth aged 16 or older can be served with NJ Adult Literacy dollars. Since most of the participants are 17 to 19, the adult funding source has not created a barrier.

Recruiting, screening, and retaining youth have each required a special strategy. The key to successfully recruiting young people has been to hire a youth-oriented recruiter/mentor who goes out into the community. The current recruiter is herself a young person; she just



graduated from college. She talks with youth at the local hangouts, establishes a connection with them, and encourages them to check out the program. Once youth enroll, she serves as their mentor, helping them go through the system.

Giving youth an opportunity to try out the program has also proven to be a necessary strategy. Young people are given two weeks to settle in; if they are not really serious, it becomes apparent during that time. This approach benefits all concerned. Staff members are able to dedicate their time to the youth who have actually made the commitment, serious participants get more attention, program dollars are better spent, and program outcomes reflect more accurately the proportion of the youth who complete the program.

Using monetary incentives helps retain youth in the program. Youth are most interested in earning money; many would prefer just to get a job and skip all the other components. “[Youth] want cash, not certificates,” says Eileen Gallo, Program Development Specialist for the Gloucester County Economic Development Workforce Investment Board. The program offers participants a monetary incentive for putting in the required 15 hours each week.

Another retention strategy involves running the program during hours that fit youths’ schedules. The Youth One-Stop is open from 8:00 am until 9:00 pm; however, most activities begin after 10:00 am because a number of youth have jobs, or don’t want to participate until after 10:00 a.m., or lack of transportation. “We try to accommodate them,” says Gallo.

Finally, the Youth Council engages youth by encouraging their participation on the Workforce Investment Board. There are several youth who have served on the Board.

Outcomes

The recruitment approach has proven to be very effective. The program has caught on among youth. One hundred youth signed up during the first year of operation. During the first year, before the two-week screening process was instituted, the program graduated 47 youth out of 100 registrants. Currently, 80 youth are enrolled; 25 are WIA eligible. On average, 5 youth receive their GED or Adult High School Diploma each month. Gallo notes, “We have a waiting list because we have opportunities for non-WIA eligible youth. They want a job.”

Next Steps

The Gloucester County Youth Council is currently developing an employer advisory group. This sub-committee would assist the Youth Council overall planning, vocational planning, and developing connections with apprenticeship programs. “We are hoping [members of this sub-committee] will help make connections to apprenticeships,” Gallo reports. They have unions involved, including a representative from the electricians union who serves on their WIB. They also have a representative from CVS [the pharmacy chain], and they are in conversation with Mobil Oil regarding summer internships.

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