



---

## Partnering with a Housing and Redevelopment Agency

**Youth Council:** Solano Youth Advisory Council

**Elements:** Career Preparation, Academic Excellence, Youth Development and Support, and Youth Leadership

**Function:** Coordinating Youth Services

**Subjects:** Innovative Programs, Serving Special Populations

**The Challenge:** The Workforce Investment Act requires local areas to contract with community-based and other agencies to provide youth in WIA programs with ten required program service elements. In May 2000, the Workforce Investment Board of Solano County, Inc. issued an RFP to every known youth-serving community-based organization, city manager, and recreation department in and near the county, looking for proposals that sought to address the ten WIA youth program elements, which were new to them.

**The Practice and the Evidence:** One response came from the City of Vacaville Housing and Redevelopment Office, which saw an opportunity to create a new kind of partnership between the WIB and their very successful Youthbuild Program, then in its second year and funded by Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Vacaville wanted to leverage and expand their Youthbuild program by linking it to WIA-funded GED tutoring, leadership training, mentoring services, and paid work experience through the WIB. “It’s kind of unusual for a workforce program to work with a housing program,” observes Lynette Gray, Planning and Youth Development Manager for the WIB of Solano County and staff to the Youth Advisory Council. “But this was truly what Congress intended: for communities to connect and leverage programs and funds with each other.”

Vacaville’s Youthbuild program serves approximately 100 high school dropouts annually. Each year of the partnership about 25 percent of the youth served were WIA enrolled, increasing the number of youth enrolled in the Vacaville Youthbuild program by better than 30 percent. All Vacaville Youthbuild/WIA enrolled youth received GED preparation tutoring and HAZMAT (Office of Hazardous Materials Safety) training, and most transitioned into apprenticeship programs and/or direct job placements. “At least 75 percent completed their GED, and we consider that hugely successful,” Gray reports. Some youth have gone into more advanced training programs, and others went to work for local contractors. One young graduate worked on the Youthbuild program as an employee of the City of Vacaville.

**The Details:** HUD funds Youthbuild in communities around the country. Their program focuses entirely on dropouts from ages 16-24 (the WIA population is for ages 14-21), and teaches them the building trades; they build low-income, retirement housing, and perform graffiti abatement

(continued)



community-wide. The City of Vacaville did tremendous direct outreach, first city-wide and then county-wide, to high school dropouts. All participants went through GED preparation and took the GED. All also went through the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and HAZMAT training, learning how to deal with graffiti abatement and hazardous-waste clean-up, and they received a HAZMAT certificate that made them employable. Youth worked on different aspects of building projects, depending on their age and their ability to use power tools.

The Solano Youth Advisory Council added in WIA program service elements to make the Youthbuild program more comprehensive: alternative education, mentoring, tutoring, and leadership training. Gray notes that this population, older youth who have already dropped out of school, “is very, very, very difficult to engage and keep engaged. Getting them drug-free is the first barrier.” The program employed both carrots and sticks: cash payments for passing each installment of the GED (the money comes from Youthbuild, which has more incentives built in than the WIA), deadlines, and penalties. When one of the “good kids” was caught selling drugs during a break, he was kicked out. “You have to have zero tolerance,” Gray counsels. “You have to obey your own rules. If a youth is more than ten minutes late, she’s locked out and doesn’t get paid. It’s the real world. You give them all the tools they need to succeed, but they have to show effort and consistent progress.” Mentoring was a key element. The impact of a caring adult in a young person's life was seen firsthand. They came in clean and on time because their good behavior was noted and rewarded by the mentor.

From an administrative point of view, Gray emphasizes the importance of being very clear with program elements. All the program contractors had to understand all of the WIA requirements, which entailed a constant, ongoing communication and training process. “But that’s the way you succeed,” Gray points out. “You all have to understand each other’s programs.” She also had representative contractors and youth present their successes to the Youth Advisory Council and the Health and Social Services Agency. “They come in with their gang tattoos and their scary faces and say what the program has done for them, and get applauded. It’s about recognizing the successes, and also about putting a face on those who receive the services. Otherwise it’s just a number.”

Another factor behind the success of the program was that it had a comprehensive wraparound element. Family resources in the City of Vacaville provided additional counseling and support. The WIB and indirectly the Youth Advisory Council in turn covered expenses like childcare and transportation. “We fixed the brakes on one young man’s car, so he could get to work,” says Gray. “We did those extra things to let the young people know that they mattered, and that their success is our success.”

**Breakthrough Moment:** The Solano Youth Advisory Council got to hear first hand from a young man who went through the program, and whose story exemplified the outcomes they intended. He was very unsure of his future plans and his ability to attain a GED when he entered the Youthbuild program. He completed his GED with the support of WIA-funded tutoring,

(continued)



completed OSHA certificates, and worked with a Youthbuild mentor to acquire the necessary skills to apply for and secure employment with the City of Vacaville's Office of Housing and Redevelopment. Initially he was so shy that he had a difficult time speaking to adults, but as he participated, the young man blossomed. He concluded his training with a heartfelt presentation to the Council, thanking them for their support of the Youthbuild program.

**What's Next for this YCidea?** On September 30, 2004, after six years, the City of Vacaville reached the end of its HUD funding. WIA monies alone were not sufficient to run the Vacaville Youthbuild comprehensive program that included GED training and mentoring. However, the Solano County Youth Advisory Council continued to serve as a cross-referral agency. The WIB and the Youth Advisory Council will work with any city in the county that wants to implement a similar program. While more of the funding and program management for the current program was borne by the City of Vacaville than by the WIA, the county benefits, as Gray points out: "These young people earn money, put it back into their community for the most part, and learn the satisfaction of a good day's work."

## **Where to Go for More Information**

Solano Youth Advisory Council

Lynette Gray  
Planning and Youth Development Manager  
(707) 863-4606  
[lgray@solanowib.org](mailto:lgray@solanowib.org)

Marion Aiken  
Manager of Youth Programs  
(707) 649-3603  
[maiken@solanowib.org](mailto:maiken@solanowib.org)

Lorraine Fernandez  
Marketing Director  
(707) 863-3540  
[lfernandez@solanowib.org](mailto:lfernandez@solanowib.org)