

Improving the effectiveness of the youth employment system (for Rochester area business) by increasing the pool of qualified and eligible workers

HISTORY

The Monroe County/Rochester Youth Council serves to advise the local Workforce Investment Board (WIB) on the development and implementation of workforce development services to youth throughout Monroe County. The Council's mission is facilitating the integration of services provided to youth in order to make more efficient and effective use of community resources.

RochesterWorks, the operational agent of the WIB, has difficulty adequately serving youth (young adults) between 16-24 years of age with criminal backgrounds, due primarily to a lack of coordinated efforts by youth serving agencies, program and training providers and youth advocacy groups. This population has been identified as a priority in the Workforce Investment Act. Subsequently, in March of 2007 the Youth Council formally began to examine ways to vastly improve employment outcomes for this growing population of hard-to-serve youth.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

It is estimated that one in twenty Rochester residents are incarcerated at any given time. 3,000 individuals return to Rochester each year from the justice system. These individuals represent an untapped workforce. And yet, the recidivism rate for this population is 75%.

Every year, thousands of dollars & hours are expended by public, private, non-profit, and volunteer organizations that work to assist ex-offenders to re-enter the community and pursue economic self-sufficiency and independent living. **These efforts present the critical components of a workforce development system. The potential is there to be vastly more efficient, simply by providing an effective means of coordination among them.**

In acknowledging less than marginal success, these agencies and organizations (public and private) enthusiastically participated in identifying structural barriers that if effectively mitigated; will provide a structure for reclaiming these community members as a job ready workforce therefore filling the growing needs of local industry.

Current State:

- a. Young adults are unable to obtain identification and other important government documents necessary for 'legal' employment.
- b. Many individuals lack the guidance and support to maintain consistent, healthy living arrangements. Their employable skills notwithstanding, the continuing threat of homelessness undermine the capacity of many to maintain successful employment.
- c. Most of the targeted youth have not had success with the traditional educational system.

- d. Most of this population have experienced trauma and/or deprivation and never received treatment.

Desired State:

- a. A more streamlined system that will help troubled youths navigate bureaucracies and that also allows them to heal and develop during incarceration.
- b. Disparate funding sources to be better aligned to create more holistic social service opportunities and to close service gaps.
- c. Job training and alternative education programs to focus more on competency-based instruction, individual aptitudes and talents.
- d. Counseling and effective mental health services need to be an expanded part of workforce preparation and on-going employment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are emerging opportunities within the re-entry community to build collaboration between employers, job training resources, and re-entry support services. The critical need is for a coordinated effort, reshaping and integrating these existing resources, to provide for a clear, consistent pathway from the justice system to successful community employment. The Goal: Build on the competencies of this population to increase the pool of qualified, eligible workers to Rochester area businesses.

By better serving this WIA identified “at-risk” population; a coordinated system will be developed and implemented, using the youth works model (*formerly known as Emerging Worker Model*) that can better serve the needs of all youth in the community.

RochesterWorks and the WIB are positioned to play critical roles in the design and development of an effective At-Risk-Youth Employment System:

- Role of the WIB: **provide job connections** and **develop the policies** that empower RochesterWorks, its operational agency, to coordinate the efforts of those public, private, nonprofit, and volunteer organizations – resulting in a more ‘collaborative/responsive ‘youth employment system’ - **in an effort to fill job vacancies.**
- Role of RochesterWorks (staff) – **convene and lead** an effort to streamline and improve coordination among service providers who are funded to help transition **at-risk youth/young adults** towards employment and independent living. Link this coordinated system to key opportunities in high demand fields such as: healthcare, manufacturing and retail services.