



# **YOUTH COUNCIL**

## **MINUTES**

**Wednesday, September 10, 2014**

**YouthBuild Lawrence  
355 Haverhill Street  
Lawrence, MA 01841**

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

Francisco Brea, Irene Chalek, Superintendent John Lavoie, April Lyskowsky, Wilberto Mejias, Sonia Morales, Steve Noroian, Tom Raiche, Megan Shea, Michael Strem, Ellen Weinhold, Cal Williams

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

Howard Allen, Janet Allison, Marina Acosta, Michael Bevilacqua, Beverly DeSalvo, Tom Connors, Brad Howell, Ed Fitzgerald, Maria Miles, Linda Piergeorge, Lisa Remington, Donna Rivera, Ed Warnshuis

### **MVWIB STAFF PRESENT:**

Rafael Abislaiman, Cristy Gomez, Mary Kivell

**OTHERS:** Lisa Coy, Dale Holingshead, Rosemary Cabrera

### **I. Call to Order and Introductions**

A quorum being present, Cal Williams called the meeting to order at 11:45 a.m. and introductions were made around the table.

April Lyskowsky welcomed Youth Council members to YouthBuild and invited folks to tour the building after the meeting. April said that YouthBuild serves out-of-school, 16-24 year old youth by providing education, construction training and life skills training that helps them obtain job credentials and jobs. The program just received \$1.1M for 2 and ½ years for 68 participants over 2 years. April also noted that this building is 153 years old and the oldest in Lawrence. LFDEF, Inc. acquired the property in 1997 and construction was done to restore the building. Cal thanked her for hosting the meeting.

Francisco Brea said that he would like to recognize April and YouthBuild after listening to the testimony of a participant at the recent event on West Street. He said that he

was moved by the words of Rosemary Cabrera and what YouthBuild has meant to her. Tom Raiche said that he would like to reiterate Francisco's words and how this program affected this person's life. Tom said that the word needs to get out on how good this program is.

Cal mentioned having the young woman stop by if she is available.

Rafael Abislaiman thanked Mike Strem for sponsoring three Summer Youth participants.

## **II. Approval of June 11, 2014 Minutes**

Youth Council Chairman Cal Williams called for a motion to approve the minutes of the June 11, 2014 meeting.

**Motion by Megan Shea, seconded by Francisco Brea, to approve the minutes of the June 11, 2014 Youth Council minutes as submitted. Motion passed.**

## **III. Youth Programs Update**

Youth Programs Director Cristy Gomez presented the update on the 2014 Summer YouthWorks program. She said that 8 staff worked on it. There were 580 applications. 42 instead of the planned 62 enrollees had the 20% risk factors (DYS, DCF or homeless). There were 281 in the more general 80% Summer YouthWorks category which exceeded the planned number. In the Mayor's Initiative, there were 21 youth, mostly from the Boys and Girls Club and 11 youth in the FY15 Summer BOG. Cristy said that we requested more funding to allow youth to complete their hours by the end of September and are applying for Year Round YouthWorks. Ten to 15 kids got unsubsidized jobs from the program.

Cristy continued stating that there were 89 worksites. 336 youth attended the original 10-hour signaling success orientation and 163 youth completed it and the additional post program survey and portfolio. The number of youth attending less than 10 original hours of signaling success was 11 and the number who completed a Work Based Learning Plan (WBLP) was 355. Commonwealth Corporation provides the curriculum workbook.

Workshop topics include workplace safety; dependability /professionalism; effective working relationships; mock interviews; and financial literacy. Cristy said that students opened 150 bank accounts and she is compiling the information for a report to Commonwealth Corporation.

Rafael said that this report will be updated for the October board meeting. We benefited by partnering with some organizations that we hadn't partnered with in the past. There were a few issues with participants from the Boys & Girls Club because a few of the participants were more interested in succeeding at sports than at work. But it is a fine organization and we want to grow our partnership with them.

It is important that the board knows that we keep reaching out to help youth who could benefit from the program. Youth are paid for working and given bonuses for attending workshops. This program is work intensive for staff. Imagine hiring over 300 people over a couple of months and making them job ready.

Next year we are looking to automate payroll functions so staff will only have to focus on time sheets that deviate from plan. This should be easy to do and will help staff avoid going through over 355 timesheets each week. This year we automated enrollment and tax forms which saved a lot of time. The next step is payroll and that innovation will save even more time so we can focus on the kids and not on pushing paper.

Irene Chalek wondered, if after completing working in the program, there is any connection or communication with the kids' schools. Cristy said that we maintain the connection through the Connecting Activities Program. Out of school youth are invited to the Career Center who will try to link them with jobs, college or job skills training. We also have a Facebook page that anyone can check.

Rafael Abislaiman said that the new Mayor's Initiative was originally designed so if a business paid for 1 youth they would get 1 youth through the program. But this will take a while to ramp up. Rafael said that we can build from this year's 21 to larger numbers in the future. We also want to place youth with reliable businesses with which we have had a reliable partnership in the past. Rafael said that it's good news that 15 kids came out of the summer with unsubsidized private sector jobs which is a small percentage but better than past years.

Lawrence Public Schools matched 30 kids and we gave them an additional 25 or so subsidized youth. As far as private sector donations, Board member Mike Strem of Strem Chemical made a donation that covered three kids at \$1,550 per youth. Because his business in Newburyport, we weren't able to place a youth at his business due to transportation issues. Ron Contrado also funded a youth and Juan Yopez is looking to hire youth in the future.

Sonia Morales spoke about a youth in the BOG program who needed to return to school and was able to get a modified schedule and credit for vocational hours through a nice collaboration. Ellen Weinhold said that the BOG youth have a great relationship with their supervisors in Methuen who mentor them.

Rafael thanked the staff for putting off vacations and for working nights and Saturdays to make the program a success. He especially stressed that Cristy was working 12 to 14 hour days and that we are very grateful for her work.

#### **IV. Special Presentation**

Cal then introduced Wilberto Mejias, Job Corps Representative at ValleyWorks Career Center. Mr. Mejias explained that Job Corps is a federally funded through the Department of Labor (DOL) which began in 1964. He said that they recently celebrated Job Corps' 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Wilberto said that they will accept students over 24 with a documented disability or IEP. He further stated that their placement/graduation rate is 88.6%.

Job Corps offers education and career training in a variety of programs for youth ages 16 – 24 in 125 centers across the nation. The programs are self-paced and last up to two years; longer if a youth has a documented disability. There are three centers in Massachusetts at Devens, Grafton, and Westover. In January, 2015 a center will be opening in Manchester, NH.

He spoke about a Linkage Program which is a partnership between a high school and Job Corps in which youth are enrolled in both entities. Cal wondered who is responsible for the Linkage Program youth. Wilberto answered that both the high school and Job Corps, who work together on curriculum and both get credit when a student gets a diploma, or a trade or job.

Rafael asked how many live in the center and Wilberto said 87%. Superintendent Lavoie asked if students who are at risk of dropping out are eligible and Wilberto said anyone in the Merrimack Valley is eligible as they have youth from Gr. Haverhill and Gr. Lawrence Vocational High Schools. Megan Shea said that she thought that Massachusetts changed requirements to encourage student to complete their education whether or not the high school gets credit.

Rafael Abislaiman asked what the average yearly cost is and Wilberto said \$40,000 per student. Rafael noted that that is a considerable taxpayer investment, especially when coupled with another \$20,000 or so from a public high school in the Linkage Program. But it is a wonderful way out of very bad situations for some youth.

Wilberto then passed out a folder on TCU which is a partnership with the Transportation Communications International Union and Job Corps that offers training in several career paths that can lead to jobs that pay \$17 per hour. Wilberto said that there is zero tolerance of drugs and alcohol in Job Corps and that they do background checks.

Irene Chalek asked how the youth get to the training/job sites. Wilberto said that they have partnerships with local companies who pick them up for work based learning. He said that they can recruit from Maine to New York and if you have your own transportation then the participant can travel back and forth. Supt. Lavoie asked if they receive help getting a job on completion and Wilberto said yes and they have to

complete the high school program. They also receive a stipend every two weeks. Rafael asked where the majority in this region come from and Wilberto said that close to 80% of the youth in Devens come from Lawrence, Methuen and Haverhill.

Cal thanked Wilberto and said that the Youth Council may come to Devens again to visit the students and see the facility.

#### **V. Partner's Information/Other Business**

Lisa Coy from YouthBuild introduced Rosemary Cabrera, the student who spoke at the recent check presentation event at West Street. Ms. Cabrera spoke about her experience at YouthBuild and what it has meant to her. She said when she came to YouthBuild she expected it to be like every other school but she found out that they mean business here. She said that she has been able to build relationships with teachers for the first time and that they made her feel that she could accomplish something and wanted her to succeed.

She said that in time they were able to knock down walls and she let them in. She became first aide certified and wants to help other people. She said that this is like her second home and she tells all her friends that they should come to YouthBuild because they helped her and now she is more hopeful and open-minded. She said that going forward she wants to study criminal justice and become a probation officer.

Cal Williams thanked her for her remarks and called on Supt. Lavoie for an update on the opening of school at Greater Lawrence. Supt. Lavoie said that they had a rough start with the summer heat because their HVAC is undergoing renovation but overall the opening went smoothly and things are moving along on track. He said they are looking to support the community with any youth projects and are open to helping any organization.

April Lyskowsky said that this past summer YouthBuild partnered with Greater Lawrence and said what a wonderful experience it was for their students. Supt. Lavoie said that 30 students (3 from YouthBuild) received training for 30 hours per week for a 4 week program installing solar panels and learning about solar energy. They received \$9 per hour and got hands on experience as well as theory.

Lisa Coy wanted to echo April's gratitude for Greater Lawrence having YouthBuild students there as they enjoyed it so much and want to pursue working in this field. Lisa also said that the teachers were outstanding. Supt. Lavoie said that if they are ready to work he can help them connect with three companies.

Francisco Brea said that on August 15<sup>th</sup> there was a graduation ceremony for 13 kids at the Labor Training Center in Hopkinton sponsored by the Mass AFL/CIO for a great program with the participants now certified in construction.

Rafael gave a WIOA update on the new law which he said raises the eligible youth age to 24. It focuses on out of school youth, dropouts and high school graduates. Rafael continued stating that this year we had a small increase in funding (8%) but there is hope that funding will go up with the new WIA's consolidation of programs. If funding does not go up we will be expected to provide services to new categories of people with the same or less funding.

The federal government stresses that WIOA is employer focused while at the same time charging us to focus on the hardest to serve. But employers want to make money so they want people that don't require a lot of supervision and who driven to succeed. It is hard to square that circle unless we remember that WIOA has different parts.

We should stress that there are two 'Titles' in WIOA. Title II deals with academic remediation, GED and ESOL. We are in Title I that focuses on getting people good jobs and in helping businesses compete in the global economy. Rafael said that our focus should be on preparing people for employment. In times of high employment we can focus more resources on helping difficult to serve get jobs. When there is high unemployment, or few resources, we should focus on helping folks get into, or back into, tax-paying jobs. He noted that youth unemployment is the highest since the great depression and that we need to focus on helping well prepared low-income youth get jobs.

Cristy said that Connecting Activities funding is down 70% at the state so we were level funded and won't be able to expand the program at this time.

On September 25<sup>th</sup> there will be a Job Fair partially sponsored by Timberland with 18-20 employers at the Everett Mills, 15 Union Street – 1<sup>st</sup> floor from 12:00 pm – 3:00 pm.

## **VI. Adjournment**

**Having no further business Francisco Brea made a motion to adjourn, seconded by April Lyskowsky. Motion passed and the meeting was adjourned.**

Respectfully submitted,

*Mary Kivell*

Mary Kivell  
Recorder