



Bay Area Workforce Development Board

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**STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP COMMITTEE
of the Bay Area Workforce Development Board
Meeting Summary
August 23, 2007**

Present: Joe Hilke, Larry Harkness, Mike Troyer, Brian Pelon, Gwen Schuyler, Heidi Schaible, Brian Ognacevic
Others: Betty Gregory-Paasch, Ann Franz, Patty Branton, Jim Golembeski

Mr. Hilke called the meeting to order at the Northeast Wisconsin Job Center at 11 AM. A quorum was present along with several guests. Patty Branton, the Disability Navigator for the Bay Area was introduced and welcomed. The Minutes of the two previous meetings (May 24, July 26) were approved as submitted.

The topic of the discussion was work readiness programs for individuals who are underemployed. Ms. Schaible noted that even among the individuals chosen for the Basic Industrial Skills Training in Marinette, there have been some barriers to employment that were not evident at the beginning of the training. These barriers include one person with a felony conviction and several with disabilities. She also noted that some WIA enrollees are resistant to going to school because of past experiences or personal preferences. The job centers do offer job search assistance, both one-on-one and in group settings to develop the “soft skills” that promote job retention.

The question arose about how do the underemployed (i.e., those judged unfit for training) survive financially? While there was agreement that most people work in some capacity, the answers were: temporary jobs, disability payments, roommates, cash employment, participation in the underground economy, and through programs such as food stamps and energy assistance. Many are regular job center customers.

There is a great deal of discussion in Wisconsin at the present time about establishing “career ladders” that assist a lower skilled individual in taking smaller, realistic steps toward a more rewarding career. This is at the core of the RISE Initiative that is funded through the Joyce Foundation in a new grant to DWD and WTCS. There was discussion about the ways in which some workers get trapped in low paying jobs and are unable to spare the time to do much to improve their employment situation. This could be due to child raising responsibilities, lack of funds, or simply the unavailability of services outside of their working hours. Career ladders are set up to help people improve their skill levels and help them advance through their employment. Employer participation is a key element of this approach. Some workers are also limited by their own perception of what is possible and many job seekers come to our centers focused only on getting “a job” but not thinking about career advancement.

Members reviewed the “Quality of Life Assessment” that Forward Service Corp. has developed. This is a unique approach to determining a job seeker’s needs because many of the questions are asked in the context of: “Are you happy with....” Ms. Schuyler indicated that their case managers find the tool very useful and have had success in motivating people using it.

There is also the reality that individuals become comfortable with the supports they receive in a low paying job such as Medicaid, rent subsidies, and food stamps. As they begin to earn more, the subsidies are usually reduced, so a worker can actually be worse off initially. It isn’t until a worker gets to \$15 or more an hour that the benefits of working begin to be felt. There is also the simple fear of the unknown.

Ms. Franz described the “Work Certified Program” used in Florida that is based on 50 competencies delivered in nine modules during a 90 hour training program. The nine modules are:

- Reading Comprehension
- Business Tools (Computers Plus)
- Pre-Employment
- Customer Service
- Business Writing
- Job Skills 1 (Work Maturity)
- Job Skills 2 (Employability and Advanced Work Maturity)
- Business Math
- General Business Knowledge

She asked whether a program such as this would meet our needs. A number of suggestions followed such as the potential involvement of business leaders in providing the presentations. Dr. Troyer suggested adding a performance review component to the process to simulate work performance evaluation.

There was solid interest in an approach like this one from Florida. Freeing up job center resources to do it will be a challenge. The committee asked Ms. Franz to gather additional data about this approach and agreed to review it in more detail at the September meeting.

Lunch arrived and the meeting adjourned at 12:15. The next meeting will be prior to the full Bay Area WDB meeting on September 20.