



Workforce Development Board
County of Middlesex

Reentry Employment Committee
May 17, 2016 – 9:30 AM

Present:	Amy Bellisano, Julio Briones, Luis Fernandez, Yvette Molina, Angel Perez, Peter Ruffini, Kathy Shaw
Staff:	Kevin Kurdziel, Melinda Walton

1) Introductions

- a) Members introduced themselves to new member Julio Briones. Mr. Briones, who was formerly incarcerated, spoke about his business, “Answerman Specialty Services” which offers personal crisis management.
- b) Kevin Kurdziel mentioned that we will probably have a greater partnership with DVR as Career Connections gets underway.

2) Approval of Minutes from April 19, 2016 Meeting

- a) A motion was made by Peter Ruffini to accept the minutes as previously distributed, seconded by Angel Perez and approved unanimously.

3) NJ DOLWD Reentry Notice of Grant Opportunity

- a) Kevin Kurdziel informed the committee of a grant announced on April 29 for construction apprenticeships for incarcerated women based at the Mendham facility for \$100,000 for one year. They are looking for union participation. Middlesex County College (MCC) expressed an interest in this and Mr. Kurdziel will speak with Roseann Bucciarelli at MCC and Sue Schultz of the Carpenters union.
- b) The Workforce Development Board (WDB) would lead others providing training and curriculum. There are other opportunities on the Department of Labor (DOL) website and everyone should take a look at them.

4) Updates on Apprenticeship

- a) The US Department of Labor and EP met last week concerning apprenticeship programs. Yvette Molina said she was excited about the opportunities and they will also be meeting with other community based culinary schools about stackable credentials and attracting more potential students.
- b) Mr. Kurdziel did meet with Catherine Starghill (NJ Dept. of Labor) concerning apprenticeships for ex-offenders. The Department of Labor is open to it; we should submit a proposal when ready and they will consider funding it.
- c) It was emphasized that upon release, one of the most important things an ex-offender needs is a source of income. Apprenticeships give income and training. Educating employers help.
- d) Mr. Kurdziel suggested running an event for employers to explain the apprenticeship programs to them. Amy Bellisano recommended that we don’t run it ourselves, but work with some of the Chambers of Commerce at one of their events. The more employers who can talk about good experiences with apprenticeship programs, the better. Almost any trade can be adapted to apprenticeships.

5) NJ Career Connections

- a) The new Career Connections on the Department of Labor website will be running by this summer and will be used by job seekers and staff. “Jobs 4 Jersey” is seen as not being user friendly and outdated. “On Ramp” will be changed later.
- b) It clarifies the structure of the local One-Stops so that State and County workers can work seamlessly to the public. The One-Stop Director will report to the WDB Director and other partners (ES, DVR) work in partnership with the One-Stop Manager.
- c) Each One-Stop will be tailored to the needs of the location. Middlesex is a test site.

6) Guide by Cell, Constant Contact

- a) Kathy Shaw explained the new text application, “Guide by Cell” which allows people to text us in order to receive updated information about our services. It will allow feedback from and analytics about the people using it.
- b) Amy Bellisano was interested in how this could be tailored for the reentry population.

7) New Business/Miscellaneous

- a) Mr. Briones feels that vocational training programs and HSE (if needed) should be available in the prisons because they lead to work after release. While some prisons do have programs, they are hard to get into and many prisoners wind up sitting around doing nothing. There is no pressure to better yourself if you do not have self-discipline. Luis Fernandez noted that when the question is asked why there are no programs before release, the answer is usually that there is no interest. However, if the goal of prison is to “correct” behavior there should be some pressure from the Department of Corrections and the Courts making these programs mandatory.
- b) Ms. Molina reminded the committee members that many of the prisoners have addictions and need care first.
- c) Mr. Kurdziel stated that one year before release is too late to start these programs. They need to be in place as soon as someone enters the system at the County level. The time in jail should be used to train for employment. Candidates should be pre-screened, especially at first, so the program to start off with some success. Employers would be more willing to work with us if we can deliver good candidates to them. At some point we will probably join with the THREAD committee on some topics.
- d) The GSETA Conference this year will feature some reentry workshops. More information will be available on the website.

8) Summer Meeting Schedule

- a) There will be one meeting over the summer in July. The meetings in June and August are cancelled. The regular schedule will resume in September.

9) Adjournment

The next meeting of the Reentry Employment Committee will be Tuesday, July 19, 2016.