



LITERACY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, October 7, 2014

9:30 a.m.

550 Jersey Avenue, New Brunswick, NJ 08901

Attendance

Present: Gloria Aftanski (Chair), Baden Almonor, Thomas Crane and Jessica Tomkins

Staff & Guests: Kevin Kurdziel and Melinda Walton

Review of Minutes of March Meeting

The members had no corrections or additions to the minutes from the March meeting.

Review of Committee Goals

Before going into the goals, Kevin Kurdziel introduced himself and gave the members some of his background at Essex Community College and Essex County. He then expressed to the committee that it was time to establish new goals and this was something that should be reviewed and done at the December meeting or even wait until the new WIOA regulations are written and make sure our goals line up.

Mr. Kurdziel met with Middlesex County College and will continue to do so because there will be more to come. There needs to be an ongoing review of labor market information with regards to the College programs.

The new County Web page will be up this month. An email will be sent to committee members and we can have a demonstration during the December meeting.

Gloria Aftanski asked Jessica Tomkins if there was a list of every literacy program in Middlesex County. There is not really a list but it would align with her agencies' list which is basically the consortium. Ms. Aftanski said United Way has a large number of clients who are immigrants and in need of basic ESL and asked that the available information be emailed to her.

Learning Link Update

The Notice of Obligation was received and it was increased to \$189,000 from \$155,000 in previous years based on the formula of \$1,000 per person and a goal of serving 189 people. There are staff changes going on in New Brunswick and the Learning Link may be staffed with two part-time employees instead of one full-time.

Baden Almonor mentioned that the computers have been updated to Windows 7 and there have been some software running problems. Ms. Tomkins asked what “positive terms” meant in reports and was told that it meant that the client completed our programs and obtained employment. Mr. Kurdziel asked what the average wage was for clients from Perth Amboy and was told that they would have a better sense of that by December and that they had 6 – 8 new enrollees currently.

WIA Reauthorization and transition to WIOA

The regulations are being written now. There will be a comment period and they will be reviewed in January. Mr. Kurdziel does not believe there will be any significant changes. However, there is no longer a required Youth Investment Council but that since we have a strong one, it will probably be kept. The WIOA is more “employer driven” and we are not sure yet how that will affect the Literacy Committee. There is a series of webinars offered on this transition and a conference in Boston. Anything urgent will be shared by email. Ms. Aftanski asked if WIBs would still be organized by counties. The SETC has yet to decide that and the Governor’s office has some say in it. It might happen but probably not in Middlesex.

WIB Goals

Mr. Kurdziel will review some of the goals at the October 28 WIB meeting and explain how they line up with WIOA.

Miscellaneous

Our Office is again doing presentations at local libraries. A schedule will be sent to members.

A job fair was held on September 30 in South Brunswick. We requested some general results from the attending employers and will reach out again later to find out if employer hired many attendees. How we run job fairs was explained and that we noticed a more mature group of job seekers this time. There will be a press release sent out by the County about this event. One suggestion was that we try organizing a job fair around a specific industry.

A Marketing Committee is being formed so that the Office of Workforce Development can be seen as having a consistent “brand” to the job seeking public. We are open to any suggestions from Board and Committee members. We have 30,000 unemployed in Middlesex County but they are not using our services. We need to offer them the “Who,” “What” and “Where” of our office. Ms. Aftanski noted that when a new CEO took over United Way ten years ago a very similar thing was done.

Ms. Aftanski talked about a service United Way will be offering on Citizenship and attaining legal residency on November 18 and a joint effort with the Jewish Renaissance Foundation in Perth Amboy offering no cost dental and health screenings with follow up for clients to make appointments. No dates were set yet.

Ms. Tomkins spoke about Literacy Programs. One in Sayreville was closed but the clients went to Metuchen. There are about 200 students and it is a semester schedule. The programs are all full now and admittance is usually by “word of mouth.” Ms. Aftanski inquired if there was any program that offered Spanish to English but was told no, it was organized by community. It is not felt that they need to do much outreach since the programs are full. They have 700 – 800 adults registered for Basic Skills. At the request of the state, they doubled the amount of hours given to each client which reduced the amount of services they could offer. It is not sure yet whether or not this is helping and they don’t know where to refer other people. They are running the programs in three cycles: September to December, January – spring break, and spring break to June. They will be implementing “managed enrollment” to stop the “come and go” that was occurring and was detrimental to the students.

Thomas Crane spoke about the new HSE tests saying they have about 20 per month with some of them being re-tests. Most of the re-tests are for Math which they must pass by the second try. It is frustrating, but most do pass the second time. Mr. Kurdziel mentioned that ex-offenders frequently do better than outsiders and those who have already graduated high school but take the tests and he asked if there was any tracking done to see what students do after they pass and was told that they do a data match using social security numbers and also check manually. Mr. Crane also said that the Federal government wants employment outcomes for the ones we report as successful.

Mr. Almonor said they have seen a big pick up in the number of employers coming in to us. We need to encourage job seekers to register with us as soon as possible as they are seeing positions in all different areas. Mr. Kurdziel said that a new employer is locating right near our office at 571 Jersey Avenue. It is a bakery from Long Island and they will be hiring 100 to start, going up to 250 at all different levels.

The unemployment number for New Jersey is up because of the recent Atlantic City casino closings and the large number of layoffs from that.

Ms. Aftanski asked Thomas Crane if there was a profile of the majority of his students. He said they were generally between 20 and 30 years old and also in response, said they did not have to be “legal.” They can ask for a social security or tax ID number but cannot require it.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned. The next meeting will be Tuesday, December 9, 2014 at 9:30am at 550 Jersey Avenue, New Brunswick.