



Middlesex County Workforce Investment Board Meeting Tuesday, January 31, 2012 9:00 a.m.

PRESENT: Imthiaz Azeez (representing Gloria Aftanski), Fred Bruno, Roseann Bucciarelli, Lisa Fiore, Dan Frankel, Alan Haveson, Adrienne Keaton, Dawn Lystad (representing Brian Loughlin), William Nagy, James Perry, Jill Schiff, Tom Seilheimer, Carl Spataro, Michelle Suskind, Bernice Proctor-Venable, Elliott White (representing Tom Seilheimer) and Henrietta Wilson (representing Angela Mackaronis)

STAFF: Jane Brady, Nina Rios-Rivera, John Ross and Patti Seip

Call to Order:

WIB Vice-Chair, Jill Schiff called the meeting to order. Notice of this meeting was made pursuant to the Open Public Meetings Act, NJSA 10:4-10.

Minutes:

Bernice Venable made a motion that the minutes of the October 25, 2011 meeting be approved as written; the motion was seconded by Lisa Fiore, and the motion carried. Abstentions: Dan Frankel, Bernice Venable, Lisa Fiore, Carl Spataro, James Perry and Tom Seilheimer (not in attendance)

SETC Accountability Policy:

Jane Brady reminded members of the major concerns expressed by WIB Directors throughout the state with the SETC's Accountability Policy for Workforce Investment Boards. Suggestions to the policy were made; however, most of the suggestions were ignored by SETC. The SETC approved what they put forward, and the policy is now in effect. A meeting has been scheduled for February 21st with WIB Directors and Chairs, along with Michelle Horst, SETC Executive Director, and Dennis Bone, SETC Chair, to discuss the policy. Hopefully, our WIB Chair, Donna Jennings and Ms. Brady will be there to get the latest on how they see themselves monitoring and enforcing the Accountability Policy. Members were provided a copy of the Accountability Policy almost a year ago, but Ms. Brady indicated she would forward another copy of the policy in order for members to be kept informed.

WIB Report:

Members were provided a copy of the final version of the WIB Report covering Program Years 2009, 2010 and 2011. Ms. Brady commented that WIB Directors are required to prepare an Annual Report but this is the first report she has prepared since becoming Director. She indicated that she and other WIB Directors cannot see the purpose of issuing an annual report, as board members are continually provided copies of the reports throughout the year that are included in the WIB Report.

Funding Impact:

Members were reminded that at the last board meeting, policy decisions were made on who we would and would not serve due to funding constraints. Adrienne Keaton, One-Stop Manager, discussed the impact as a result of this policy change. She indicated that in order to ensure our funding lasts until the end of the program year, staff have been denying training for more clients, primarily due to the client already having marketable skills. Those clients with marketable skills are referred back to Employment

Service to help them in their job search. Others are being denied training if they have previously received training. It was felt that individuals need to have at least one opportunity for training, rather than some clients receiving two training grants.

In addition, some clients are being denied training due to their family income level being over six (6) figures. It was felt it would be easier for those individuals to fund their own training rather than those clients with less income.

Lack of funding has resulted in better screening by Employment Service staff. They are now informing clients at the beginning of the process that if they have marketable skills, they will not be referred to WIA until they have been on Unemployment Insurance for 16 weeks. As a result, counselors are seeing less people coming to the Career Beacon workshops.

A number of clients are also being referred to the Metrix Program, which is an on-line training program that only costs \$90 per license. Clients with significant background in IT are utilizing this program as an alternative to training. The feedback has been very positive. Lisa Fiore questioned if a client could take more than one training program. Ms. Brady responded that they are permitted to take as many training classes as they want. However, if they do not use the license within a 14 day period, the license is deactivated.

It was reported that staff are closer to having the Career Beacon workshop available on-line, which will free up our counselors from conducting the weekly workshop. Once a client has completed the on-line workshop, they will then meet individually with a counselor. It was mentioned that the program, as written, will have specific stops along the way in order to ensure they are going through each of the steps and not skipping to the end

Business Development Unit (BDU):

Jane Brady asked private sector board members to contact Nina Rios-Rivera if they have, or knew of another company that has any job openings. Ms. Rios-Rivera encouraged members to give the BDU team a chance to fill their job orders. BDU staff are making every effort to ensure that an applicant they refer for a job is appropriate before being sent out to an employer.

Dr. Venable asked if the job order form could be sent to the private sector board members. Ms. Brady responded that a copy would be sent to those members via email in the near future.

Nina stated they are continually hearing from businesses that they are not aware of our services. She and her staff have made contact with over 275 businesses in the past three (3) months. Forty-five (45) contacts have been in person. In addition, twelve (12) recruitments have been held at the One-Stop Center.

With regard to placements, Garret Gega, our Job Developer, works with graduates from our training programs. He has been working with several clients to revamp their resume and has conducted a few workshops on resume writing and interviewing skills. It was felt that by holding these workshops, the quality of the candidates referred to employers will improve greatly.

Meetings are being held every two (2) weeks with ES staff to go over job order lists to ensure that we are working collaboratively. They are also looking at how many job orders are received versus how many applicants are placed.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was entered into with the Middlesex/Mercer Chapter of the Small Business Development Corporation. This MOU was executed in order to provide workshops in the evening for employers. There has been a good turnout for the workshops that have been held. A

free Credit Clinic workshop is being provided on Thursday, February 9th, from 6:30 to 8:30 pm at the One-Stop Center in New Brunswick. Another workshop is being planned for late February. It is hoped to hold seminars twice a month. Herb Caesar, the speaker at these workshops, is in our office every Friday from 10 am to 2 pm for private, one-on-one consultations. Nina stated that part of this agreement is funded by Bank of America. Various Chambers have been notified and asked to post flyers announcing the seminars/workshops and one-on-one consultations on their website. Flyers have also been forwarded to all libraries asking that they post in a prominent location.

Nina reported that Dan Frankel had previously recommended we reach out to realtors within the county to inform them of the services we provide. As a result, a mass mailing was recently forwarded to all the realtors. Each realtor was sent five (5) Business Resource Center packets containing information about the BRC and One-Stop Center services.

In addition, she recently attended an Asian-Indian Chamber of Commerce event in which they had two (2) cable television stations present. She was interviewed by both stations which should result in free advertising.

There are clients who are willing to work, but unfortunately, many employers are now requiring two (2) years of work experience, which has created a huge problem. As an example, we have plenty of CDL drivers but they do not have the required experience. As most people are aware, the state established the six (6) talent networks. The Talent Network Coordinators attended a meeting recently at the One-Stop and the issue of experience being required by employers was raised. Board member Fred Bruno, from System Freight, Inc., agreed that this is a problem. Another problem his company has encountered is that some CDL drivers have indicated they do not want to be on the road for extended time periods, resulting in them being away from their families.

Ms. Brady mentioned that the testimonial DVDs will be forwarded to the various cable stations next week. There is no guarantee as to when the DVD will be shown, but hopefully members will be able to see it on their local cable station. The testimonials will also be available on our department website (www.co.middlesex.nj.us/employment). It is hoped that this will also result in more employers using our services. Dr. Venable commented that the videos are outstanding, and she hoped that the various chambers of commerce would receive a copy as it contains valuable information about the WIB and real life people. The video addresses not only what the WIB does, but the importance of getting information out to the people who need the services. She also thought it would be beneficial to forward a copy to each of the high schools' guidance departments.

Dr. Venable also commented that the Executive Summary included in the WIB Report describes exactly what this organization delivers and suggested that it might be a good idea to have a copy of this on each receptionist's desk.

Job fairs have been scheduled for February 22nd in Old Bridge Township from 10 am to 1 pm and in Edison on March 14th at Middlesex County College, Crabel Hall, from 10 am to 1 pm. Workshops will also be held at the Edison job fair. Nina will conduct one workshop on social media and Garret Gega will conduct another one on interviewing skills. The Old Bridge job fair is being co-hosted by Mayor Owens. She asked if anyone knew of a company with current job openings that would like to participate in the job fair, please let her know. She also mentioned that voice messages announcing the job fairs will be sent to all Middlesex County residents currently receiving unemployment insurance.

Ms. Brady wanted members to be aware of a problem encountered with companies that have applied for H1B visas (application used when a company wishes to bring in workers from out of the county). The company is required to post the job in our system for one (1) month. We could refer 25 qualified workers yet they will not hire them because they have no intention of hiring within the United States.

She noted that Middlesex County has five (5) times more H1B visa applications than any other county. This process takes up an enormous amount of employee's time, as once a job order is received, the entire job order process must be followed. We are unable to do anything about this problem, other than bring it to the state's attention. It was noted that Rutgers University is the 7th highest user of H1B visas in New Jersey. We are unable to determine who actually uses the H1B visas as it is handled by Homeland Security. Most H1B visa jobs are for IT positions, but what is surprising is the inclusion of Administrative Assistant positions. Companies are not required to prove their inability to hire within the United States.

Economic Development Study:

Jane Brady announced that the Economic Development Study has been released. Carl Spataro is now allowed to distribute the report. A copy of the report has been given to the Edison Chamber of Commerce as they are in the middle of completing their Strategic Plan as well as Middlesex County College who is working on their Master Plan. A copy will also be provided to board member Dan Henrickson from WMGQ/WCTC Radio Station.

WorkFirst (TANF/GA) New Jersey Report:

John Ross, WFNJ Director, reported that clients in public assistance programs, whether TANF or General Assistance, are required to participate in an activity if they are determined to be employable.

The General Assistance Job Search program enrollment increased 55% in one year. There has been a 73% increase in enrollment in the Community Work Experience Program (CWEP). We are also receiving more referrals for individuals who do not qualify for assistance, but do qualify for food stamps. If the client is employable, he/she is required to participate in an activity at the One-Stop Center. Unfortunately, there is not enough space in both of the One-Stop Centers to accommodate the increase in these programs.

Our vendors are required to develop worksites for the clients to gain work experience. They are unable to keep up with the number of customers to be served. However, we will continue to work with our vendors to increase their efforts in identifying worksites. If the clients do not comply with the regulations, they will be referred for sanction.

John Ross stated that if you look at how the program is supposed to be operating, it is not working due to space, staffing and resource issues.

Ms. Brady mentioned that WFNJ received a \$50,000 transportation grant to add to the money used to transport individuals. This is critical because the Middlesex County Department of Transportation has lost funding, and we need to help offset this funding cut.

Mr. Ross indicated that if Middlesex County were to initiate a waiting list due to the number of clients to be served, it could be several months before a client would be seen, as Employment Service only has one person allocated for these programs.

Members were informed that when individuals exhaust their unemployment benefits, they may have no place else to go except to apply for general assistance. However, before their application for general assistance may even be considered, they are required to attend 28 days of job search at the Employment Service office. It was thought that this requirement would defer people from applying for benefits, but it has not. In fact, it has only created an avalanche of clients who are going through the process in order to receive a small monthly check in the amount of \$142. Henrietta Wilson from the Middlesex County Board of Social Services confirmed the enormous amount of work and stress that employees are now dealing with each day as a result of the increase in clientele. John Ross stated that they have also needed to increase the number of shuttles from the Board of Social Services to the One-

Stop Center in order to accommodate the increase. Jane Brady indicated that as a result of the increase in numbers, stress level has increased, and security has become a problem.

Coalition for Workforce Solutions

Members were provided a copy of the CWS Solutions Forum Group Recommendations. She asked members to read the recommendations at their leisure as this will be discussed at a future meeting.

Planning Committee Recommendations

Jane Brady stated that she would like to have a discussion on an issue that staff need help and guidance with - - whether or not we should continue with the training programs we currently provide when we know it's fairly certain that our clients will be unable to obtain employment afterwards due to the issue of employers requiring years of work experience.

Members were provided copies of charts reflecting training programs with the number enrolled, number placed, percentage placed and hourly range. She indicated that the hourly rate is varied due to the fact that sometimes an individual may take a job purely out of desperation. It is also very difficult to determine if the job was training related. The question was raised if we should shift our focus and use the \$4,000 allocated for training to place people in on-the-job training (OJT) positions.

Discussions have been held with MCC about the possibility of including an internship/externship as part of their training program curriculum. Upon completion, clients would be provided a workforce readiness certificate to give to a potential employer.

Ms. Brady said that if members felt OJT would be the way to go, we have a system already in place. It would just be a matter of finding interested employers.

Alan Fialka from Roosevelt Care Center stated that he would personally like to utilize OJT. However, unions would need to be contacted and agree to the hospital using OJT before he could bring in an OJT applicant.

Alan Haveson stated he would endorse OJT but felt that vocational training is the best opportunity for young adults.

Barbara Roos felt that funding should be geared towards internships after completion of a training program.

Roseann Bucciaelli agreed with Barbara Roos, indicating that OJT is an option but felt that training providers should add internship/externship as part of their training component.

Ms. Brady stated that the MCWAG Team is specifically looking at placing youth in job shadowing, with us paying the salary for up to three (3) months for the young person. If they hire them, we would continue paying the salary for an additional three (3) months. This is at discussion stages only. Board members will be kept informed once a plan of action is decided upon.

Dan Frankel recommended that staff look at the industry and see what would be the best chance of success for each individual for employment.

Alan Haveson stressed the importance of having union involvement.

Bernice Venable suggested that perhaps staff could provide a brief study on this issue in order to help guide board members for future discussion. She stated, however, there is merit in having OJT as well as internship and externship programs – once again, depending on the field.

Ms. Brady reminded everyone that the board had previously chosen TDL, healthcare and IT as the three sectors to concentrate for training. Research was conducted in TDL and healthcare but after the IT sector fell through, the research was not done. However, she has noted recently that when signing off on placements, the IT individuals are receiving the highest salary.

Ms. Brady stated that she will be getting back to members very shortly on this matter and asked that everyone keep this discussion in mind. If anyone has any suggestions, she asked they contact her as staff are struggling with this issue. It is very difficult for counselors to provide career guidance if they don't know what careers to suggest that will result in employment.

YIC Report

Ms. Brady reported that youth enrollment is now close to 110. The goal is to serve 150 which should not be a problem.

Progress is being made on opening another Youth One-Stop Center in Carteret. Space has been identified that will be suitable, but until lease details have been worked out, everything is on hold.

The New Brunswick Youth One-Stop office recently moved from its location at Middlesex County College in New Brunswick to the Jersey Avenue One-Stop Center. It was felt this move would increase youth enrollment as the college type atmosphere may have been a deterrent for youth entering the building as well as being located immediately across from Family Court, which some youth may have had negative experiences. As a result of the move, we are now seeing more youth.

Ms. Brady stated that we have been informed that we should refer to youth as "candidate" because employers do not want to hire a "youth or young person".

Plans are underway to have another GED Graduation Ceremony scheduled for the end of May at Middlesex County College. As most members are aware, this ceremony was a huge success last year.

Lisa Fiore commented that her daughter is a sophomore at a Catholic High School, and she was surprised and thrilled to see that she was given our Youth Career Calendar as an assignment. Dan Frankel recommended that we use the curriculum part of the calendar and build on it as a marketing piece. Dr. Venable requested that she be provided copies of the calendar to distribute at Middlesex County College's Career Fair event that she will be attending for parents and high school students.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.