

Collaboration Opportunities

STRATEGIES WIOA YOUTH PROGRAMS CAN USE WHEN SERVING COURT-INVOLVED YOUTH

Court-Involved Youth is one of the targeted populations served in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Youth program. This tip sheet provides strategies that can be effective in supporting WIOA programs when serving youth in this population. Important to this process is creating a system of connections for these youth including outreach and recruitment, coordinated access to education, workforce, and support services. The strategies in this resource highlight key elements in the National Guard Youth Challenge (YC) /Job Challenge (JC) programs to prepare court-involved youth for success in education and employment. This document also contains examples that WIOA youth programs can consider when designing services for court-involved youth.

Strategy: Recruitment and Enrollment

Recruitment and enrollment play a vital role in the success of a program and to its participants. Identifying effective recruitment practices is essential to generate public awareness to attract youth. Recruitment strategies may include word of mouth, social media, radio and television public service announcements, and billboard postings. The key to a successful word of mouth recruitment is clear messaging of program eligibility, resources, and support systems offered by a local program.

Equally important is to ensure that outreach materials are placed in areas where youth have access to them, like public transportation, social media, and local hang outs, which are great places to post palm cards, flyers, and share information about your program. YC/JC program operators focused on word of mouth which has proven to be a successful way to recruit youth, specifically referrals for friends and family of program participants.

Examples:

Program staff used a mix of recruitment methods including frequent staff outreach and targeted conversations with youth, engaged families during family day events and sponsored mentor visitation, and visited schools along with intervention programs. In addition, staff sent letters to parents and occasionally received referrals from judicial entities. JC program operators also included peer recruitment to help market their program.

A marketing strategy used by the YC program involved staff eliminating language from recruitment materials referencing “court involvement”. This helped to divert the program from developing a negative reputation due to a perceived stigmas by the public. Staff members also reported maintaining previous relationships with justice system partners. Further, efforts were undertaken by YC programs to conduct outreach and foster new connections with the justice system.

Strategy: Promote Positive Youth Development

Youth development emphasizes that young people need support and opportunities to succeed and build competencies for adulthood. Positive youth development strategies focus on forging positive relationships, strengthening academics, soft and technical skills, and cultivating trustworthy safe spaces to help youth succeed. Incorporating a youth development approach in all activities for youth is key to fostering positive outcomes in their education and employment pursuits.

Examples:

YC staff incorporated practices to build youth confidence and maturity, taught practical life skills, and helped them obtain a high school diploma or high school equivalency such as a GED. In addition, YC program operators engaged youth in activities that promoted eight pillars: (1) leadership and followership, (2) responsible citizenship, (3) service to community, (4) life coping skills, (5) physical fitness, (6) health and hygiene, (7) job skills, and (8) academic excellence. Also, the program worked to build meaningful relationships for their participants through mentorship.

In the YC program, youth development curriculum was structured to promote positive youth engagement. Youth spent a large share of their day in education courses to gain secondary education credentials. The YC program also ensured young people were engaged by allowing them to nominate their own mentors during the application process. Additionally, youth also were involved in decision-making by participating in focus groups that provided input into the usage of terminology that negatively described participants in the program.

Strategy: Connect Court-Involved Youth to Employment and Educational Opportunities

Building strong connections to education institutions and businesses is critical to generate support from education providers and employers. Partnering with employers and education providers helps to ensure that youth have paths to good careers when combined with positive youth development strategies.

Several sources were used to compile the strategies and interventions that are most likely to increase connections to education and employer partners. A request for information on work-based learning from U.S. Department of Education revealed several strategies to promote positive employer experiences. These strategies include addressing employer liability concerns, and outreach to business intermediaries including industry associations and workforce investment boards. Another suggestion is to host an industry briefing with employers to expand their network into the workforce community. Workforce practitioners should consider adopting some of these strategies when engaging employers to build positive work experience opportunities for youth.

To connect and re-engage youth to education institutions, youth program operators may want to create a network of alternative educational opportunities. This network can provide an opportunity for programs to promote staying in school, reconnect youth to education and lifelong learning, and facilitate the earning of an educational credential.

Examples:

Education connections: Participants in the grant were provided access to intensive occupational training and supplementary education. Partnerships were established with community colleges to provide youth with educational training. JC staff determined the content and structure of the curriculum youth would receive focusing on secondary education and high school equivalency. JC participants were enrolled as college students for their educational training. Other strategies to connect youth to education included leveraging financial resources thru community partners to pay for training and accessing career counseling services through community college partners.

Occupational skills training and employer connection: The JC programs also partnered with community colleges to develop a curriculum and established occupational training programs for the youth. This allowed the youth to enroll as college students and receive academic and career mentorship. The programs also connected participants to employment opportunities and exposed them to work environments through field trips, job shadowing opportunities, and internship experiences. Certifications were designed to provide participants with a way to demonstrate to employers the job skills they learned and improve the employability of participants. The credentials that were obtained by participants included Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Forklift, Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation, Workeys, and others.

Strategy: Developing and Maintaining Partnerships

Partnerships are crucial to the success of programs that provide services for court-involved youth. Youth programs can play an important role in the coalition of partners to provide services for this population. Engaging with partners can offer youth access to an array services for education, employment and training, and support from key service delivery organizations. Partners may include juvenile justice agencies, district attorneys, local police, legal aid centers, public school systems, public and private secondary educational institutions, substance abuse treatment agencies, faith-based and other community-based organizations.

Examples:

JC programs offered participants a range of services to expose them to career options and provided them with the tools needed to find jobs. They also offered workplace experiences designed to give participants a more realistic picture of what employment would look like in different industries. Participants were exposed to work environments through field trips, job shadowing opportunities and internship experiences.

Partnership with community colleges: Participants were provided career counseling and job search assistance. Career counseling, offered formally through community college partners, was designed to help JC participants identify and achieve employment goals. Under the JC grant, programs established partnerships with their local community colleges in order to provide educational opportunities for their participants. The community colleges offered occupational training programs that prepared participants with skills for in-demand fields. Additionally, programs helped youth access financial aid offered to cover academic expenses. The JC programs were also able to use Pell grants and partner with college staff who guided both youth and staff members through the financial aid application process.

Partnership with employers: JC staff sponsored field trips to local employers and featured guest speakers. All three JC sites provided participants with opportunities to visit workplaces through field trips to local employers, such as local factories or culinary businesses.

Resources

Evaluation of the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe / Job ChalleNGe Program. This report developed by Mathematica covers the post-program evaluations of the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe and Job ChalleNGe programs. To view the report, visit: https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OASP/evaluation/pdf/NGYCJC_FinalReport_February2021.pdf.

Making the Right Turn: A Guide about Improving Transition Outcomes for Youth Involved in the Juvenile Corrections System. This resource highlights services related to improving outcomes for youth involved in the juvenile justice system. To view the document, visit: http://www.ncwd-youth.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/making_the_right_turn.pdf.

Reentry Employment Opportunities Community of Practice. The website features ideas and tools for improving transition outcomes for former offenders. To view the website, visit: <https://reo.workforcegps.org/>.

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) website provides information on research, programs, and training initiatives related to juvenile justice. For additional information, visit: <https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/>.