

Iowa Works

Making Education a Major Component of the Summer Youth Employment Program

Iowa Works (Iowa Region #16), a rural Iowa WIB comprising four counties, was determined to make education a major component of its summer youth employment program, the Youth Connection, and included work readiness, basic skills, GED preparation, occupational skills, and leadership skills in its lineup of activities.

All participants were required to take and pass a 10 to 15 hour online work readiness assessment and training program with six modules: interviewing, effective communication, good work habits, goal setting, getting along, and getting ahead, in addition to a three-hour safety program. Participants' work readiness skills were reinforced at their worksites, where supervisors were asked to evaluate those skills semi-monthly, as well as pre and post worksite participation.

Summer youth participants determined to be basic skills deficient had components built into their work experience and programming to address individual deficiencies. Those participants who had dropped out of school were required to attend GED classes twice weekly.

Extensive training options were offered to summer youth participants, based on their interest and skill level, and several of these provided industry-recognized credentials:

- Construction math: Covering blueprint reading, measuring, decimals, and percentages;
- Customer service: For youth interested in retail, business, and human services;
- First aid and CPR: For youth interested in education or child care;
- Food service: Serve Safe, a certificate for safe food handling;
- Green energy and science: Culminating in a green project to fry eggs using solar power;
- Health: Certified nursing assistant; and
- Information technology: Microsoft IC3 certification for hardware, software, and/or internet skills.

A significant leadership component was provided by Adventure Associates, a corporate training provider. This program addressed conflict management, problem solving, self exploration, communication, and risk-taking skills, and was designed to enhance youth's self esteem and prepare them to become community leaders.

What were the Youth Connection's results? The WIB spent \$841,000 and placed 229 youth in jobs at 92 worksites. Eighty percent of these youth completed their eight-week, forty hour-per-week placements. Participants who successfully completed and were interested in continuing education and training were considered for enrollment into the year-round WIA program. Thirty (30) older youth will continue to work with ARRA-funded wages through January 12, 2010. A number of employers hired the youth that worked for them during the summer. Four youth who completed the certified nursing assistant program were hired in those positions. Four of the ten older youth in GED classes received their GED; five are still in class.

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