

Pacific Gateway Workforce Investment Board Creating a Youth Driven Career Center

The City of Long Beach has a population of 500,000, with 29 percent under the age of 18, and 11 percent between the ages of 18 and 24. In order to better serve these youth, the local WIB decided to engage them in the development and delivery of its youth employment and training services. The most visible result: a Youth Opportunity Center designed – top to bottom – by the city’s youth.

Five teams of youth worked with an architect on the interior design of the Center, with ideas from each design ultimately being included in the physical layout and paint colors used in the Center. Youth designed the posters, flyers, and other communications materials for the Center. They also designed the Center’s outreach campaign entitled “Get Educated...Get Experienced...Get Employed.” To make sure the Center maintains its youth face, the front desk and resource room are staffed by youth.

The Center partnered with the YMCA’s social enterprise, youth staffed Change Agent Productions to create a 40-page, glossy magazine that translates the region’s labor market information into data more engaging for youth. “Youth Workforce Development Magazine” is now distributed to middle and senior high schools, libraries, bookstores, community and faith-based organizations, and other youth serving entities.

A less visible component of the WIB’s youth-centered services is the development and adoption of a formalized work readiness credential that ensures employers that youth from the Center are job ready.

More than 5,000 youth have proactively accessed services at the Center. In Program Year 08-09, more than 2,000 youth participated in the Center’s job opportunities fair; 660 participated in work readiness training; 200 gained work experience through the support of county supervisors; 350 were placed into industry internships; 300 participated in job shadowing opportunities at local employer sites directly connected to career technical education paths; 310 participated in WIA Youth Academies; and more than 200 received direct job placements with employer customers who took advantage of the Center’s preparatory efforts.

There were no building costs for the Center, as the WIB already had the facility. The Center’s look and materials were funded by a combination of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and WIA funds, along with private resources. The total annual cost to operate the Center is approximately \$225,000, and is funded by CDBG, WIA, and private funds, as well as some general funds from the City of Long Beach.

Youth continue to help shape the WIB’s policies. The city’s Youth Council had always included seats for “youth reps.” However, high school and post-secondary education students appointments were added to the Council, creating additional input and new ways of thinking about youth customers.

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