

Workforce Resource, Inc. Industry-Specific Youth Academies

During its summer youth employment program, Workforce Resource, Inc., ran youth academies in healthcare, manufacturing, and agribusiness, and community service work projects with exploratory career academies for younger youth (14-15 year olds), in addition to traditional work experience jobs. The WIB also created a public relations youth crew, supervised by a college marketing intern, which captured the summer youth activities throughout the program.

Workforce Resource is in west central Wisconsin, a primarily rural area adjacent to a major metropolitan area – Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN. The nine counties it comprises have a population of approximately 460,000. With unemployment at 9.7 percent, very few job opportunities were available for youth as the program was launched.

Workforce Resource served a total of 439 youth. Every youth in the program had a pre- and post-assessment, which was tracked on the WIB's proprietary work readiness tracking system. All youth participated in work readiness training, and work readiness skills were officially monitored and reported by the worksites every two weeks. Youth in the career academies received career specific training along with their work experience. Approximately 95 percent of youth attained work readiness certification.

Workforce Resource had significant private sector participation with a Youth Job Match program. The WIB even generated over \$154,000 of local private funding support from community foundations and others to supplement its ARRA (\$806,000) and WIA (\$313,000) funding, with the outside funds targeted particularly at its sector academy structure. In sum, the WIB invested \$1,274,000 in the summer program, for a cost per participant of \$2,900.

Workforce Resource served high proportions of disabled and ESL youth – including Hmong, Hispanic, and Somali young people – in numbers far beyond their incidence in the general population. The WIB closed its summer youth program with a gathering of over 400 youth, parents, supervisors, and staff to celebrate program accomplishments.

What made this program a “promising practice”? Effective and early preparation in youth recruitment and worksite development; automated client management systems, including employability planning, worksite agreements, and time and performance reporting; comprehensive services, including work readiness training and sector and career academies; and an extensive network of community public, non-profit, and private sector employment options.

Virtually all aspects of this program design are replicable and could be tailored to local conditions. In fact, based on its continuous involvement in the summer youth employment program extending back to 1984, Workforce Resource, along with the Milwaukee WIB, provided training for other Wisconsin workforce areas, helping them get their summer youth programs off the ground.

Contact: Dick Best

Executive Director
Workforce Resource, Inc.
401 Technology Drive East
Menomonie, WI 54751
(715) 232-7380 ext. 105
bestd@workforceresource.org