



Summer Youth Employment Program Profile Providing enriching and constructive professional experiences for economically challenged youth in Buffalo, New York

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The Buffalo Employment and Training Center's Youth Services Office continues to successfully serve the city's youth by providing them with the required skills needed to find meaningful employment in today's workplace. Diverse services provided throughout the year allow nearly 1,000 youth to participate in the agency's various employment and training programs, including activities such as career assessment, career guidance, job readiness training, and work experience opportunities.

Background

Throughout the past few decades, Buffalo has seen the rise and fall of many initiatives aimed at improving the lives of children and youth from low-income families. Plagued by high rates of extreme poverty and limited educational opportunities, Buffalo has strived to implement change by developing community-oriented programs. Through a wide array of cross-system collaborations, these programs have provided a backbone of support to the communities they serve. One such program is the city of Buffalo's Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). The program has been successful thus far, serving as a catalyst of change by annually providing training and employment for nearly 1,000 youth.

SYEP, managed by the Buffalo Employment and Training Center (BETC), primarily serves youth from low-income families, 50% of whom live with a single parent. Most of the youth enrolled in the program are from minority backgrounds. SYEP utilizes funding from two of the Center's major sources -- specifically Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) -- to help young people 14 to 21 years of age. SYEP focuses on aiding youth with their transition from high school into post-secondary education. The program helps youth attain work readiness and professional skills as well as advanced training that can lead to private sector employment. SYEP partners with community-based organizations, local colleges, and the Buffalo Public School System, to offer youth employment in diverse industries. The program offers qualified youth two months of experience at the current state minimum wage rate of \$8.25 an hour. Youth can sometimes earn a rate of \$10 an hour or higher, when placed with a private sector employer.

Program Model

Youth can apply for SYEP in two different ways, depending on the funding source. Children from TANF eligible families receive a general application, while a separate WIA application is available for youth not eligible for TANF. SYEP applicants tend to surpass the number of slots available by more than 1,000. The program utilizes an initial questionnaire to assess youth skill level and work interests, and determine work placements. SYEP attempts to place youth in jobs as close to their homes as possible, due to limited access to transportation for many program participants. The program does provide bus tokens to all WIA funded youth. TANF eligible youth may receive tokens for up to two weeks of travel.



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SYEP usually runs from the beginning of July until the end of August. Youth have the opportunity to work within a wide variety of organizations, dependent on their eligibility for TANF or WIA. WIA-funded youth work with one of the eight BETC partner organizations. Some of these organizations include the Buffalo Public Schools Career and Tech program, the Buffalo Urban League Youth Educational Support program, University of Buffalo's Liberty Partnership Program, and the YWCA. TANF funded participants are placed at one of over 80 partner organizations, including the Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority, the Children's Hospital of Buffalo, and various Boys & Girls Clubs and community centers. A full listing of these TANF agency worksites can be found on page 20 of BETC's *2013 Summer Youth Employment Program Annual Report* (<http://www.workforcebuffalo.org/youth/files/SY%20REPORT%202013.pdf>).

Each of the partners works with the BETC to provide youth with an employment orientation that, in addition to a two-hour presentation on job roles and responsibilities, includes instruction on professional etiquette (i.e., soft skills, peer engagement, time management, and work attire). They also present skits modeling professionalism at the workplace. Depending on the agency, each orientation can run from a few days to a week. Following placement, SYEP assesses program effectiveness through a survey distributed to participating youth.

Program Challenges and Lessons Learned

SYEP faces a number of challenges, and has identified effective communication between partners, staff, and youth participants as one of the most pivotal issues for ensuring future success. The program is working to enhance communication between the partner organizations and program participants. This communication is particularly important when connecting with new agency partners as well as when ensuring youth understand and comply with program rules and guidelines.

Program Outcomes

In 2014, SYEP served approximately 800 youth. On average, the program annually serves 1,000 youth. From 2008 - 2010, SYEP used expanded funding available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) to serve thousands of additional youth each year. SYEP program staff does not track ongoing outcomes for TANF summer employment participants, but they are responsible for reporting outcomes on WIA-enrolled youth, including: Attainment of a Diploma, Placement in Post-Secondary Education, Advanced Training, and Unsubsidized Employment. They must also provide follow-up services for at least one year after participants exit the program.



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Youth Success Story

Rashanae Bliss, a senior at East High School, is a former SYEP participant in the WIA program. During her enrollment in the program, she devoted her summer to working with the University of Buffalo's Liberty Partnerships Summer Workforce Development Program. During her time with the organization, she interned at the Women's Basketball Camp in the Athletics Department of Canisius College. Utilizing her unique skill set, Rashanae was able to make a positive and significant impact on the athletes and the department. She performed her duties enthusiastically, comparing favorably to the department's work-study students. Rashanae showed a consistent dedicated work ethic and willingness to go above and beyond, while providing a superior experience to camp participants.

