



Summer Youth Employment Program Profile Reducing violence and strengthening self-sufficiency pathways for economically challenged youth in Richmond, California

Title

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In 2014, Richmond YouthWORKS will celebrate the 10th year of the city's summer jobs program, a community-funded program serving low-income Richmond, California youth, ages 15 to 21, with up to 100 hours of career preparation and work experience over the summer months. The program is unique in that, in addition to supporting job training and placement, it also offers youth-focused training in communication, sexual harassment prevention, and other soft skills as part of the city's larger efforts to reduce violence among young people.

Background

In 2005, Richmond—a suburb of San Francisco, California—was regarded as one of the most violent cities in the nation. The intersection of high rates of extreme poverty, few educational opportunities, healthcare inequities, and unhealthy physical and social environments have resulted in a relatively small city becoming the second most dangerous metropolitan city in California, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's *Annual Crime Statistics*. Faced with this daunting challenge, Richmond implemented a series of programs to reduce violence and promote public safety. One such program, the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), began providing academic support, employment preparation, and instruction around conflict resolution and relationship building to mitigate the issues of violence among young people. Ten years later, with the introduction of programs like SYEP, Richmond has drastically reduced rates of criminal behavior and violence, particularly for juveniles and youth.

The Richmond Department of Employment and Training's YouthWORKS Division manages the SYEP program, which focuses primarily on youth at or below 70% of the national poverty rate. At the core of the program's juvenile detention and violence reduction focus is a commitment to assisting young people with finding and maintaining employment with local businesses, government agencies, and nonprofits. The program offers qualified youth 100 hours of career and work experience at the prevailing minimum wage of \$9 an hour.



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Program Model

The city releases their SYEP applications in early March and planned to accept up to 225 youth in 2014. Participant levels vary according to annual funding levels. The program conducts only limited marketing because each year they receive more qualified applicants than they can place. Once selected, SYEP youth work with YouthWORKS staff on pre-employment planning, attend workshops on preventing or avoiding sexual harassment, and undertake an academic assessment to gauge reading and comprehension levels. During this intake process, YouthWORKS staff works with SYEP youth on the need to understand and follow rules, which are critical skills for maintaining employment. YouthWORKS partners with local businesses to offer youth money management and financial literacy instruction. The SYEP program also uses counselors from the local Independent Living Skills Program ((ILSP) – one of several county-based agencies in California that serve foster youth) to provide youth with a soft skills training titled “Living on My Own.” Richmond highly values this partnership, since it allows the SYEP program to create more enduring connections with foster care youth served by ILSP’s. Prior to work site placement, youth attend resume writing workshops. Youth receive their work assignments two weeks prior to placement at a Saturday Youth/Parent Orientation, where participants are reminded of the high points of their training regimen and parents are provided advice on how to ensure a successful summer.

The SYEP program traditionally collaborates with 30 - 40 work site partners each year, including the local Chamber of Commerce, Chevron, and Richmond’s Department of Recreation. SYEP program staff use two key strategies to maintain strong relationships with their partners (although they still typically need to replace 10-20% of their work sites each year): first, emphasize to potential partners how upfront youth screening and a commitment to assuming workers’ compensation liability greatly reduces a partner’s liability and risk, and second, dedicate significant staff time to visit work sites to conduct ongoing youth monitoring and manage any needed conflict resolution. YouthWORKS covers all SYEP youth’s payroll requirements and administration.

Program Challenges and Lessons Learned

While funding remains a constant concern, one of YouthWORKS’ most persistent challenges is addressing youth who habitually channel blame for their problems onto others. YouthWORKS uses a mentorship approach and designs curriculum that instills in youth SYEP participants the concept that choices have consequences. The program has also found that closely engaging parents in a youth’s SYEP activities is a key to success. Parents and youth meet with SYEP staff to discuss the stages of the program, how parents can support youth during their enrollment, and important ground rules to obey. Parents are not allowed to call a youth’s work site and, to avoid misappropriation of funds, only youth are allowed to pick up their paychecks.



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Program Outcomes

The program served up to 700 youth a year while receiving American Recovery and Reinvestment (ARRA) funds from 2009-2010. On average, the SYEP program now serves 225 participants per year. While the program funds up to 100 work experience hours per youth during the summer, 20-25% of participants receive additional work hours from their job placement site. SYEP program staff does not track ongoing outcomes for summer employment participants. For those youth who transition from the summer program to Richmond's yearlong program, staff tracks education and employment outcomes all the way to college entrance.

Youth Success Story

Ashley enrolled in the SYEP program during her junior year of high school. During her stint with SYEP, she worked in child care, family services, and recreation, as well as with programs assisting female domestic violence victims. According to Ashley, the program helped her prepare for academic tests and transition to college, in addition to providing her with service learning and workplace experiences. One of her favorite memories is planting trees as part of her community service – she takes pride in watching these trees grow and improve the community's environmental quality. Ashley is a student at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, and in the summer of 2014, she served as the YouthWORKS Division's Lead Administrative intern.

