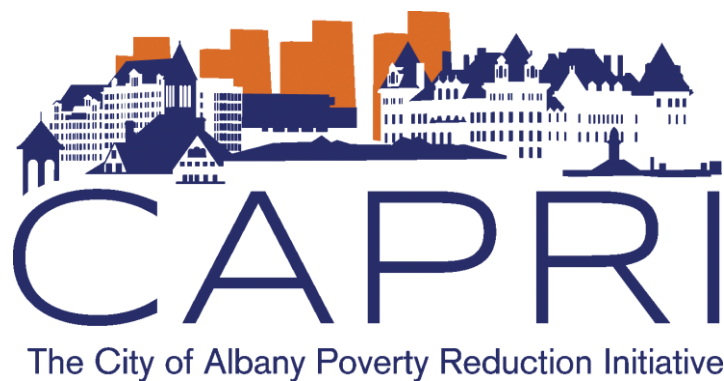The City of Albany Poverty Reduction Initiative (CAPRI)

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROVIDER FORUM

Break Out Session Summaries

July 12, 2017

200 Henry Johnson Boulevard, Suite 4. Albany, New York 12210

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Workforce Development Provider Forum Objective

The Workforce Development Advisory Committee works to identify the work being done in the community as it pertains to work readiness and enhance those supports. As part of their work with CAPRI, the Committee realized that an important first step was to bring together workforce development providers to gather information about what services are available in the community as well as increase awareness and collaboration among providers. Therefore, CAPRI planned and held a forum at University at Albany for workforce development providers to discuss issues related to workforce development and poverty within the City of Albany. This information and collaboration will then be used by CAPRI to craft a Request for Proposal for the initiative.

Group One

This group dissected the topics/barriers which served as a catalyst to high rates of Opportunity Youth, defined as individuals ranging from 16-24 who are not employed or in school, in the City of Albany. The conversation began around self-confidence. More specifically, the group agreed that it is foolish to place these high-risk individuals into employee positions without motivating their self-confidence beforehand. Through motivational interviewing, these Opportunity Youth could be reassured that they can complete their tasks to the best of their abilities. An African-American male followed up this portion of the discussion recalling to when he himself identified as an Opportunity Youth. Since then, he made his way from an entry level position to an Executive Director. He believed that his ability to transition could serve as an example to other Opportunity Youth who believe that the only jobs they were qualified for had no room for growth. He maintained the belief that if these youths could have assistance navigating through their levels of employment, they too can surpass entry level positions while building a strong work ethic and commitment to their organizations. In addition to this theory, a woman commented that it is important to show value to their new employees at any level of employment including entry level. Value could be shown by simply incorporating their job duties and involvement into the same activities as those working within mid-level or higher positions while molding employee character and experience. A middle-aged white woman working as an attorney spoke from a legal standpoint explaining that many of her clients struggle landing a job due to a past legal history and being unable to afford an attorney or even a lack of personal identification. A steel mill worker included that the absence of a driver's license or an unclean driving record/criminal history is preventative from obtaining employment within his business. This topic was piggybacked from by an elderly white woman in the group who explained that this issue could be generational. When an individual is raised in a certain way. they may be unaware that there is indeed a wide range of opportunities awaiting them or they may have been raised in an illiterate household. This issue could as be responsible for many Opportunity Youth being uninformed to services because their parents/guardians are ignorant to the systems as well.

The group described what they identified as the barriers to the hiring of Opportunity Youth. These barriers included the instability of income, employee burnout as well as the exhaustion of filling out paperwork in an effective and timely manner, the difficulty of keeping track of these Opportunity Youth, the issue of quality vs. quantity when it comes to work, and the lack of individual-based training. The group also referred to the gaps that are present in current youth employment services. These issues included a lack of understanding when it comes to what services are available, the overgeneralization and lack of personalization of services that are offered within the community, and the lack of adjusting to the lives of these Opportunity Youth. It is important to note that most programs do not adjust for Opportunity Youth in the summer months. As identified by Tyler Bellick's Presentation on best practices to enhance the employability of young adults, out of the 1,000 youth that are served during the summer in the City of Albany, an overwhelming 82% are participating in Summer School.

Group Two

Group two began their discussion around the importance of employment opportunities. One member mentioned the importance of implementing programs that led directly to employment upon the completion of training. Opportunity Youth are more likely to complete the duration of training if they are anticipating employment. It was also stated that these very same programs need to maintain secured relationships with the communities that they serve. In addition to these suggestions concerning support systems, a man in the group stated that it was important for support services to offer sponsored services

that specifically cater to the two biggest barriers to employment: transportation and childcare. A middle-aged woman added that programs need to have a heightened focus on family units and systems vs. individuals while mentioning the Posse Academic Model to support her theory. The key factor in the dialogue was retention. All employers agreed that it is vital for them to support their employees through investing in them and simultaneously mitigating potential risks. Since many employers are eager to bypass the cost of recruitment, they leave many of the soft skills training (i.e. employee etiquette, hygiene, time, attendance) to organizations.

The conversation shifted to the barriers and system issues in Albany. The significant issues included financial issues, training providers, transportation such as effective routes around the city, deficiencies in apprenticeship programs, and documentation issues.

Group Three

The participants in group three approached the discussion by first examining what they noted as the best practices and qualities that programs should uphold. The members decided that the construction of long-lasting relationships with youth were amongst the most vital of qualities that an organization should preserve. These associations allow the youth to feel connected to their providers, social workers, etc. and consequently, they will continue to seek help and become self-sufficient. Another admired quality was demonstrated in programs that granted the intentional access and awareness to the resources available to the community. For example, if an updated directory of resources was obtainable by the community, the unawareness that significantly contributes to the difficulty of providing resources and implementing programs could be combatted. Lastly, being that transportation is a major barrier of employment, services that provide transport to their facilities or that locate themselves in an easily accessible zone via way of public transportation would be more effective. A member of the group cited that this very issue was discussed at the previous mayor summit by a youth in the local community.

The facilitator then referred to the presentation that was shown to them prior to the start of the conversation and asked for suggestions/any ideas, topics, etc. that stood out to them. One member suggested that youth should be more involved, especially within the leadership structure and decision-making positions. The member also included that these youths should be hired at a higher rate in more of a bottom-up process rather than a top-down one. Another member mentioned that the service providers should be able to relate to those who they are serving to maximize effectiveness. The group agreed that everything in the presentation resonated with them as applicable in this community.
Much of the dialogue focused on the barriers to implementing services both within the community and the targeted population. Number one on the list of barriers was finances. This topic was broken down into the cost of food and its connection to productivity and the cost for childcare during traditional as well as non-traditional hours. Another prohibitor of service included the closures or the loss of existing programs. For example, recently, a youth homeless shelter was closed thus eradicating shelter and other basic services for these Opportunity Youth and increasing their vulnerability. Transportation, an ever-reoccurring issue, arose due to the costliness of a bus pass afforded to those who are not in school or not granted one due to their proximity of their school. Some jobs, such as the ones relating to warehouse and manufacturing are not on bus routes, making them completely inaccessible by way of public transportation. While communication and collaboration between different agencies is consistently encouraged and preferred, the lack thereof leaves many ignorant to what is available for them. The contributors agreed that their very own strategies are by word of mouth and at different community events. The complexities in family life could lead to late exposure to career and personal development

skills and, many times, programs do not cater for individual issues. Lastly, the Cliff Effect serves as a major constraint as many are discouraged from seeking employment in order to maintain necessary services. The facilitator noted that these issues are not subject to employment or to the targeted population. The entire community feels the effects of these barriers.

When the question arose as to how successful outcomes could be measured, the group agreed that it could be done by comparing current situations from the starting point and measuring growth, tracking the achievements of smaller and targeted goals, creating self-sufficiency and independence, and maintaining relationships and consistent follow-up with Opportunity Youth.

Group Four

The members of group four were asked to address what they would consider to be the best practices that may have not been mentioned during the presentation. It was emphasized that employers should thoroughly understand the needs of Opportunity Youth. It is vital to understand how ineffective the generalization of services can be when personal issues are not acknowledged. Consequently, employers mitigate risk when a foundation of trust is built and it cannot be done solely through training. Instead, employers should focus on being present within the community so that potential clients may feel comfortable connecting with initiatives. Training, however, could be effective in the vocational field when assisting Opportunity Youth in obtaining a certificate and/or finding entry-level jobs with good pay. The last theme was the need for wrap-around services.   Things such as anger management, child care, and transportation help with mitigating the effects of a criminal record. If we do not aid with these things, the initiative will not be successful.

The facilitator requested that the members describe what they considered to be the best practices of organizations offering services. First on the list was soft-skills. For example, how to fill out an application, effectively communicate, remaining well-composed, and maintaining professionalism including appropriate work attire. This is a major focus for Opportunity Youth because it is common for entry-level jobs to interview on the spot upon their initial request for an application. It is important to note that Opportunity Youth may struggle to obtain appropriate clothing and keep it clean. Much of this discussion was centered around protocol for employment when it came to offenders and youth with criminal records. Although it was noted that employers hire at their own discretion, in many cases offenders are pre-judged. One employer even cited a study that explained the phenomenal work ethic of ex-offenders and the rewarding and positive experience that all parties involved witness. Two additional employers suggested that employers should incorporate a protocol to document successes and provide English language courses for those who have taken on English as a secondary language.

While the beneficial practices were relevant to Albany, there was still a great deal of conceived barriers to implementing these practices. Most of which revolved around a financial burden. One perceived barrier was the disconnect between businesses and target populations. It is vital that businesses understand and connect with their potential employees. The conversation then returned to the topic of criminal histories. Are companies flexible enough when it comes to employing ex-offenders? Youth also need training on how to approach their record. It was noted that follow-up services on both sides are indeed a challenge due to the transient nature of the population. It was suggested that businesses consider connecting with their clients via social media.

Lastly, we should identify what gaps there are in youth employment services in Albany. This could be done by implementing some sort of research hub or directory and would simultaneously avoid confusion

concerning duplication of services. "Cradle to Career" services would allow service involvement earlier within schools, thus preparing our youth to enter the work force.