

The Black Ministerial Alliance of Greater Boston, Inc.



Boston
TenPoint Coalition

BOSTON HIGH-RISK YOUTH NETWORK

PROMISING PRACTICES IN PREPARING, HIRING AND SUSTAINING HIGH-RISK YOUTH IN EMPLOYMENT

SEPTEMBER, 2005

A Report to

THE BOSTON CAPACITY TANK

Prepared by

CLAUDIA GREEN

NAVIN ASSOCIATES

BOSTON HIGH-RISK YOUTH NETWORK

PROMISING PRACTICES IN PREPARING, HIRING AND SUSTAINING HIGH-RISK YOUTH IN EMPLOYMENT

PREPARED BY CLAUDIA GREEN, NAVIN ASSOCIATES, SEPTEMBER 2005

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</u>	3
<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	5
BMA High-Risk Youth Network	5
Who are Youth at High Risk?	5
The Jobs Priority Group	5
Report Overview	6
<u>PROMISING PRACTICES</u>	7
Bird's Eye View of the Employment Network for Youth at High Risk	7
Selection of Programs, Employers and Unions	8
Service Provider Practices: Preparing and Sustaining Youth	8
Employer and Union Practices: Hiring and Sustaining Youth	16
System Challenges and Solutions	21
<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u>	25
<u>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</u>	27
<u>APPENDIX: PROJECT PARTICIPANTS</u>	28

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Boston High-Risk Youth Network is a coalition started by the Black Ministerial Alliance and its partners, United Way, Emmanuel Gospel Center, and Ten Point Coalition, to better meet the needs of youth at high risk, ages 12-21. The Network comprises both private and public agencies; service providers, funders, and policy makers; faith-based and secular programs; and grass roots and business groups. One of three Priority Groups in the Network, the Jobs Group is dedicated to expanding employment and job services for youth at high risk. With this report as a beginning, the group hopes to increase awareness and drive implementation of these practices among providers, employers and unions.

We report here on practices that service providers in Boston and nationwide have found to be effective in preparing youth at high risk to enter, retain and advance in employment. These successful service providers

- Give youth good reason to come to and stay in programs by investing time and resources in fostering strong bonds between staff and young people, and giving youth a sense of belonging. Many programs also provide income in the form of stipends, wages or bonuses.
- Help youth to acquire both “soft” and hard skills by offering challenging, hands-on work and learning experiences.
- Give youth opportunities to practice being employees through internships, job shadowing, and even social venture businesses. In these settings, youth observe and test out how to act, how to dress, what’s acceptable and what’s not, how to deal with a co-worker or supervisor, how to handle instructions or criticism, etc.
- Provide youth with the skills and experience to move into “good jobs” that offer, or have promise of decent wages, benefits, and career advancement. While most young people will enter the labor market in entry-level positions, all should be oriented to career opportunities and how to pursue them when they are ready.
- Provide comprehensive, sustained support during training, and long after initial placement or program completion.
- Engage employers in defining competencies, providing opportunities for practice employment, hiring and articulating career advancement opportunities.

We also report on practices by local employers and labor unions that help young people get a foothold in the labor market and begin to build a career. These employers and unions

- Define business needs, such as attracting new workers in order to serve a new market, bolstering an aging workforce, or stemming turnover. Youth employment organizations can help recruit, screen and prepare youth more effectively when they understand these interests.
- Participate in curriculum design and implementation to ensure potential candidates are well prepared.

Boston High-Risk Youth Network ■ 4 ■ Promising Practices in Employment

- Offer role models and mentorship to help young people see their own future, and to help them adapt to the job and workplace culture.
- Provide youth with practice experience in the workplace so they can observe and practice appropriate work behavior.
- Provide incentives for youth to succeed in school and other academic programs.
- Enable youth to explore and understand career opportunities.

Local examples help demonstrate how a local program, employer or union actually implements these practices, and how they lead to progress and positive outcomes for youth. Taken as a whole, these providers, employers and unions engage young people at different ages and stages of preparedness for the labor force, forming what one provider described as a continuum of services and employment.

For a youth at high risk, real progress toward permanent employment can be slow and marked by setbacks. Every success—from building a young person’s self-esteem, to having them complete an internship or stay on a job for even a month—is hard won by the youth and the provider.

Beyond these individual struggles and approaches to address them, we conclude the report with another layer of challenges that emerged through interviews with employment programs and other youth service provider, such as the lack of good information about existing programs, and the difficulty of placing young people under 18. We note these issues here because they factor into the context in which youth, providers and employers operate. We also provide an example of how a citywide coalition of youth employment providers jointly tackles some of the system articulation problems. In addition to disseminating the valuable lessons shared here by local employers, labor unions and service providers, the High-Risk Youth Network can and should strive to address these system challenges through its ongoing work in Boston.

INTRODUCTION

THE BOSTON HIGH-RISK YOUTH NETWORK

The Network is a coalition started by the Black Ministerial Alliance and its partners: United Way, Emmanuel Gospel Center, and Ten Point Coalition. With a federal Compassion Capital Fund (CCF) grant, now in its third year, BMA convened over 130 people and involved them in a yearlong planning process to better meet the needs of youth at high risk, ages 12-21.

This diverse group, representing both private and public agencies; service providers, funders, and policy makers; faith-based and secular programs; and grass roots and business groups, has met monthly since the start of 2005. It has formed three Priority Groups, one focused on identifying gaps in youth services, one charged with setting common, measurable goals for youth services, and the last (responsible for this report) focused on expanding employment and job services for youth.

Each priority group has identified goals and activities to strengthen the system of services, in two phases. Phase 1, funded by the CCF grant, culminates in September 2005 with the completion of several reports, a conference, and the launch of a website and services directory. Phase 2 activities are projected to start in October 2005 and are in the planning stage. A consultant team led by Navin Associates was contracted in June 2005 to conduct Phase 1 research activities.

WHO ARE YOUTH AT HIGH RISK?

The Network defines youth at high risk as young people who are ages 12-21 and court-involved, truant or out of school, gang-involved, a chronic substance abuser, homeless, pregnant and/or a parent. However defined, there is a broad sense that a significant group of youth are at the brink of very troubling life outcomes, that this group is seriously underserved, and that changes in services, programs, partnerships, and targeting could have a major positive effect.

THE JOBS PRIORITY GROUP

The Jobs Priority Group's long term vision is increased job placement and retention of youth at high risk. During Phase I of its work, the group is focusing on identifying and disseminating promising practices for preparing, hiring and supporting youth at high risk in employment. Specifically, the group's interest is in identifying:

- highly effective practices for preparing, training, placing and sustaining high-risk Boston youth in employment;
- local agencies and programs that serve youth at high risk and exhibit those practices;
- highly effective practices for hiring and retaining youth in employment; and
- local employers and unions that hire youth at high risk and exhibit those practices.

Boston High-Risk Youth Network ■ 6 ■ Promising Practices in Employment

Together, members of the Priority Group compiled a list of practices they felt were most effective. The consultant team then gathered background information on national and local trends in the field of employment for youth at high risk, and helped to identify criteria and actual program, employer and union models that met those criteria. The criteria and models are compiled in this report and form the basis for a “showcase” in September 2005 including a panel presentation, displays and booths of employers and service providers.

In the Phase I, the Jobs Priority Group hopes that the dissemination of promising practices through this report, the conference and the project website will help to:

- increase awareness among providers, employers and unions of promising practices for addressing the employment needs of youth at high risk;
- facilitate the training of more youth;
- demonstrate to more local employers and unions the value and the existing support system for hiring these young people; and
- strengthen the partnerships between programs and employers.

In the Phase II, the group hopes this process will ensure that:

- programs, employers and unions increasingly demonstrate best practices; and
- there is increased funding and in-kind support for the youth jobs network.

REPORT OVERVIEW

The main section of the report begins with a brief description of the types of providers, employers and unions that comprise the employment system, or network, serving youth at high risk in Boston. We then describe the selection criteria and findings on practices that providers in Boston and nationwide have found to be most effective in preparing high risk youth to enter, retain and advance in employment. Program examples demonstrated how the selected local providers actually implement the practices, and how that contributes to their success with young people.

We then turn to employer and union practices, and what makes for positive engagement with youth at high risk. With these practices too, we provide examples of how a local employer or union does it, and how it helps young people get a foothold in labor market and stay on the job.

The final section reports on some of the persistent challenges to serving youth at high risk, specifically those that stem from the service system itself and labor market. These issues, while perhaps not a comprehensive list, were raised during interviews with providers, as was the example we include showing how a collaboration of local service providers is addressing some of them.

PROMISING PRACTICES

BIRDSEYE VIEW OF THE EMPLOYMENT NETWORK FOR HIGH RISK YOUTH IN BOSTON

Given that providers working in any capacity with youth at high risk recognize that most youth need some kind of income, even programs that are not specifically dedicated to employment spend some of their time helping kids get jobs. The range of organizations that focus specifically on employment and career development is broad, including youth development and workforce development agencies, faith- and community-based organizations, human service agencies, schools and alternative education programs, career centers, the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC) and the City of Boston itself. They are funded by both public and private sources, including the federal Workforce Investment Act, the Department of Labor and Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention through the US Department of Justice for youth in the criminal justice system, the Department of Transitional Assistance, and host of private foundations. Services are fairly de-centralized, some targeting particular neighborhoods.

The common denominators among programs providing employment services to these young people is that they aim to keep young people on track toward educational goals, and develop “soft skills” that will help them enter and retain a job. Some of the programs provide GED classes on-site, while others refer their clients to partnering GED programs or to traditional or alternative high schools. Some also offer case management, group work experiences, internships, occupational skills training, subsidized employment, summer employment, school-to-career, job placement assistance, financial literacy, long-term follow-up services, and actual employment in the case of program-based ventures. The programs included in this report run anywhere from four weeks to a year, but nearly all commit to sticking with a young person for up to two years and some have an “open door” policy welcoming alumnae to return anytime after their graduation from the program. Depending on their clientele, many of the programs work closely with the Department of Youth Services (DYS) and staff are in frequent communication with caseworkers and probation officers. Some of the agencies working with older youth also work directly with the Suffolk County House of Corrections.

All of the programs included in this report also have relationships with employers in the region, and some work closely with unions as well. At a minimum, they go to employers to hire their clients. They also seek internships, equipment, advice on curriculum, visits to the programs, practice interviews, etc. from employers and others. The non-profit and for-profit businesses that are involved with youth employment providers are motivated by a range of business, community service and personal interests. The unions also have interest in expanding membership, being able to meet local and federal hiring goals, and being good community partners. While many employers across the city hire young people into their ranks, those that actually collaborate with youth employment providers benefit from the job readiness and practice employment experiences already provided to young people before they start on the job. Youth come in with knowledge of how to dress, how to communicate properly, and they are ready to acquire specific job skills. Providers also stay in touch with their clients and, in some cases their supervisors, offering support as needed. Once employers and unions take on youth, they provide more job-specific training. Those included in this promising practices report also provide significant opportunity for career exploration and advancement in their industries.

THE SELECTION OF PROGRAMS, EMPLOYERS AND UNIONS

The Jobs Priority Group selected programs for this report that represent various approaches to serving the different sub-groups it considers “high risk,” for both male and female, younger and older youth. In that many different sub-populations are included, program approaches, goals and expected outcomes should and do vary. When selecting which service providers to investigate, the Priority Group agreed to use four criteria: That the provider 1) have as part of its central mission to serve youth at high risk; 2) exhibits strengths in serving one or more sub-populations identified by the Network, 3) exhibits strengths in more than one identified promising practice; and 4) can show evidence of success in serving youth entering employment. When selecting which employers and unions to investigate, the Priority Group looked for ones that: 1) employ and retain significant numbers of youth at high risk; 2) exhibit strengths in more than one promising practice, 3) have some experience with the workforce development and/or youth service field. The group also agreed that even if the first employer criteria on “significant numbers” could not be met, an employer or union would be included if it provided applicable lessons for the field.

Using these criteria, the Priority Group conducted a short survey of stakeholders to identify practices, and those providers, employers and unions that demonstrated them. The consultant then interviewed the organizations and institutions ultimately selected by group, and provided context to the data gathered using national literature on employment for youth at high risk. Some of the employers, unions and providers reported on here have partnered with each other, giving us a useful glimpse at why and how these three types of stakeholders work together in the interest of youth at high risk.

Finally, we stress that this report is not intended to be an exclusive or comprehensive listing of agencies, employers and unions that work with youth, nor a final word on program quality in the city. Rather, the providers represent or exemplify a diversity of programs and target populations *and* the best practices identified by the Jobs Priority Group. The employers and unions also represent a variety of sectors, sizes, and interests in engaging with young people. Seen as a whole, they engage young people at different ages and stages of preparedness for the labor force, forming what one provider describes as a continuum of services and employment.

SERVICE PROVIDER PRACTICES: PREPARING AND SUSTAINING YOUTH

- ▶ **Give youth good reason to come to programs and good reason to stay.**

Youth at high risk are motivated to *join* programs because they wanted to change their lives, they were prompted by a trusted adult, and/or because they had a desire for income. They *stay* because they develop strong bonds with staff and a sense of belonging, and because the program meets their needs (Public/Private Ventures, 2002).

Adult-youth relationships

Every program interviewed for this report stressed that the relationships they have with young people are their greatest asset. “*Our best core competency is relationships,*” says Roca Executive Director Molly Baldwin. “*We’re really committed to figuring it out with the kids. We work with kids who can’t get there on their own. We’re hell-bent, passionate and committed to working with them.*” For youth who are

Boston High-Risk Youth Network ■ 9 ■ Promising Practices in Employment

coming out of detention, the relationship must start even before they are released and expected to attend the project site, says Susan Lange, Deputy Director of Youth Opportunity Boston. This gives the young person a familiar face when they actually do start attending on site, and establishes a bond from the start. Programs that are staffed by individuals who can develop a rapport with youth and have “been there,” do well at keeping even the hardest to serve youth engaged (Public/Private Ventures 2002). STRIVE Boston, for example, hires ex-offenders to run its ex-offender program, and Youth Opportunity Boston often pairs up young people with program graduates as mentors. Programs that make youth feel like they belonged and that their needs will be met—someone will take their problems seriously and offer them skills and opportunities that will serve them in the future—also give kids good reason to hang in. Organizations that invest in their staff, and staff that invest in youth do well at giving youth confidence in the program and in themselves (Brown, et al. 2002). This occurs through staff training, peer-to-peer communication, sharing of practices, and encouraging staff to be deliberate in becoming role models for the young people with whom they work.

Financial Incentives

Since most programs include a job readiness and or internship period, they also include a financial incentive, either in the form of wages or a stipend. Income is a more powerful motivator for in-school youth who want or need a chance to earn money. For older youth, the income offered through the program may be relatively small and less powerful than the desire to make a change. (P/PV, 2002). Beyond simply paying youth to show up each day, however, many programs are careful to link wages or weekly stipends to attendance or hours worked *and* actual behavior at the program or worksite. Program staff or internship supervisors may conduct a weekly evaluation or assign points for positive behaviors exhibited.

“Participants are thus motivated by the economic incentive, but they also become invested in their behavior in a way that allows for true and rapid learning,” (Brown, et al, 2002, p. 15).

SERVICE PROVIDER IN ACTION: HULL LIFESAVING MUSEUM

Contact: Lory Newmyer, Executive Director ■ 22 Drydock Avenue, Boston, MA
781-925-5433 ■ www.lifesavingmuseum.org

The Maritime Apprentice Program (MAP) is an intensive skills training program for Boston’s adjudicated youth ages 14-21 that focuses on personal comportment, boat building skills, and basic academic skills. The U.S. Department of Labor called this program the “Best job-training program for high-risk youth in New England” (Hull Lifesaving Museum, 2005). In the summer, the program serves 18 youth, year-round it serves 8; 40 percent are out of school. MAP is located in a maritime setting and are geared toward helping youth acquire job attainment and retention skills. Youth spend the mornings on hard skills—carpentry, wiring, plumbing, blueprint reading, etc.—and the afternoons on soft skills—personal development, writing, business math, English. Youth who do not have a high school diploma or GED must be enrolled in school or a GED program. Mid-year the youth enter a job shadow or internship in recreational boating, transportation, heavy industries, or recreational boatbuilding; later they’ll enter employment or further education.

What keeps young people engaged is the work, the staff and the pay. Staff spends over six hours a day, five days a week with the small group of young people. Some youth return for a second year. *“It’s the relationships between the adults and kids. That’s why the kids come to work in the morning,”* explains Executive Director Lory Newmyer. *“They have a hunger for conversation. We each have different*

personalities, and the kids usually attach to one of us. Our effectiveness is because we can put a lot of time into working with them. We address a lifetime of...nothingness."

The museum maintains a fleet of 14 boats and refurbishes about one-third of them each year. Youth begin by learning to row—a new experience for most urban kids—and then engage in the work of boatbuilding. The hands-on piece is critical says Newmyer. *"The work is hot, dirty and very physical. It has an emotional impact." "It makes me feel like a man,"* she recalls from a participant's journal. Youth take responsibility and are accountable to themselves and the group. *"They make the boat, row the boat, teach someone else to make a boat."* Youth become competent; they plan the project, figure out what materials and tools they need, and then do the work. Many of them also become rowing coaches for the museum's younger clientele. The work is real, says Newmyer. *"What makes it real is that it's real,"* she cites from another journal.

If the relationships and the work are not enough to get a young person to show up each day, a creative stipend policy usually is. *"Attendance is the most important thing in these kids' lives,"* says Newmyer, noting how easily some youth can wind up returning to DYS detention soon after their release. Staff uses a carrot, then a stick approach to get kids to stay committed day in and day out. In the summer, youth begin the seven-week program earning minimum wage. They get a 25 percent raise each week, half based on showing up and half based on behavior. But if, for example, they don't call in to say they won't be that day, they go back to minimum wage again. At the end, most youth earn a bonus. The policy has worked well says Newmyer. During the year, youth earn a stipend of \$125/week, based on attendance. Getting a paycheck with their name on it and knowing they earned it is a positive force.

► **Allow youth to acquire soft and hard job skills through hands-on learning or a simulated work environment.**

New to the labor force and often having had little exposure to positive work role models, what youth at high risk are likely to need most before acquiring even entry level employment is "job readiness" or "world of work" skills. Youth employment agencies work on résumé development, interviewing skills and filling out applications. They also focus on appropriate behavior, punctuality, relationships with supervisor and other employees, conflict resolution, time management, appropriate dress and language, etc. These are the competencies employers say they value most in potential recruits. Depending on the industry, youth also benefit from having basic computer and other technical skills relevant to the job.

All of the programs included in this report know the value of providing these skills in a real or simulated work environment. STRIVE, for example, simulates an office environment at its centers across the city. Sociedad Latina integrates youth into medical departments at area hospitals and research institutions so they can engage in real work. YouthBuild Boston and the Hull Lifesaving Museum offer youth hands-on, tactile work which is particularly effective for those learners who have not done well in a traditional, lecture-style classroom environment in the past (Clymer, 2002). Hands-on learning also provides opportunities for peer-to-peer teaching and role modeling. This, says Hull Lifesaving Museum's Newmyer, is how much learning takes place among the young people in her program.

Boston High-Risk Youth Network ■ 11 ■ Promising Practices in Employment

- ▶ **Give youth opportunities—sometimes more than one—to practice being employees before they actually become employees.**

Most youth development and youth employment programs have found that young people need time and experience in a workplace before they are ready for prime time employment. In an environment that is *real* but more forgiving than a regular job, youth need to spend time observing and testing out how to act, how to dress, what's acceptable and what's not, how to deal with a co-worker or a supervisor, how to handle instructions or criticism, how to ask for time off, etc.

Youth may engage in structured internships, group work experiences, or job shadowing. Community service or service learning allow youth to acquire important life and workplace skills while showing them how to contribute to their communities in positive ways (American Youth Policy Forum, 2002).

SERVICE PROVIDER IN ACTION: YOUTH OPPORTUNITY BOSTON

Contact: Susan Lange, Dep. Director ■ 2201 Washington Street, Suite 200, Boston, MA 02119
617.541.2602 ■ www.cityofboston.gov/bra/yoboston

Transitional Employment Services (TES) is a work readiness and employment program developed and managed by Youth Opportunity Boston (YO). YO has been federally funded demonstration project with along with 36 other sites nationally for five years until recently, and is operated through the Office of Jobs and Community Services in collaboration with the Boston Police Department and the Boston Private Industry Council. TES incorporates work readiness training, community-service based projects and work experience in a multi-tiered, developmental learn and earn model (US Department of Labor, no date). The program has served roughly 1,200 active youth ages 14-21 per year, about half with law enforcement involvement. The four-tiered, graduated level approach to employment is geared toward empowering youth to negotiate their way through the world of work by becoming job ready and by gaining actual experience performing a job. At every level, youth start out in a two-week Job Readiness/Life Skills course. Tiers 1 and 2, described here, provide practice and subsidized employment.

Tier 1 - Community Service Learning/Work Readiness is geared toward those who have little or no work history and need to develop basic employability skills such as punctuality, attendance, teamwork and positive attitude. This component is now offered in the summer only. Once they complete the first full two weeks, youth spend one day per week in computer, communication and life skills workshops and on academic skills. On the other days, each small group plans and implements a project that has the potential for real community impact. Summer 2005 projects focused on youth violence and included production of a newspaper and development of a Geographic Information System. The goal is to get youth to feel connected to their community, to get invested in their own growth and development and to gain skills to use as a building block for their future. Participants earn a weekly stipend based on daily points for attendance and appropriate job behavior.

Tier 2 - Subsidized Placement is individualized and takes place in a non-profit organization. The goal is to provide a challenging set of experiences that offer a taste of what life will be like in the workforce, combined with additional soft and hard-skill preparation and needed supports. Youth have a chance to build workplace etiquette and retention skills, from interviewing, to showing up on time, to having appropriate work conversations. As with Tier 1, youth complete the two-week course, then spend one day per week in job readiness, computer, life skills, and financial literacy workshops. Non-profits and

Boston High-Risk Youth Network ■ 12 ■ Promising Practices in Employment

community-based organizations (CBOs) that host a young person attend an orientation, sign a memorandum of understanding, develop a job description that includes meaningful work, and provide a workplace mentor that guides and regularly evaluates the youth at work. The CBOs and youth are matched through a career fair, at which youth provide a résumé and cover letter, and have a chance to ask and respond to questions by the potential employer.

Doing a subsidized placement provides a safety net for all parties, says YO Deputy Director Susan Lange. It's a lower risk for YO and for the youth. The CBOs are more forgiving while the young people develop their basic work skills. YO pays the stipend, and the CBOs get free labor. During the placement, youth are mentored at their worksite and receive a stipend. The supervisor develops a work-based learning plan, and meets with the youth and YO career specialist throughout the placement to assess progress.

Tier 3 focuses on securing regular, entry-level unsubsidized employment, generally in the secondary labor market,¹ and **Tier 4** focuses on career-oriented employment in the primary labor market or long-term occupational skills training.

Having benefited from healthy funding, YO staff has been able to test their approaches, make changes and add new elements as needed. Early on, for example, YO's model only included Tiers 3 and 4. *"It was easy for us to find the youth jobs,"* explains Lange, *"but they weren't staying in them. The kids were crashing and burning. Many had challenges taking directives from supervisors. Someone at work would say they needed to do a particular task and they'd say, 'forget this,' and then leave or get fired. ... Retention was a big problem. So we added Levels 1 and 2."* The combination of giving youth practice experiences before they enter the real job market together with improved labor market conditions have helped improve retention rates and YO's model for transitioning youth into employment has worked well. The challenge for the future is to adapt the model with a more constrained operating budget with the sunset of a major federal demonstration grant.

SERVICE PROVIDER IN ACTION: SOCIEDAD LATINA

Contact: Alexandra Oliver- Dávila, Executive Director ■ 1530 Tremont St., Roxbury, MA 02120
617.442.4299 ■ www.sociedadlatina.org

Sociedad Latina (SL) launched "Jovenes Latinos Pro-Salud" as a summer program in 1999. In 2001 SL went to offering three cycles per year. The career exploration and employment program serves 30 youth ages 16-21 per cycle, with 40-50% of them out of school youth, the majority Latino. The program places young people in internships in nearby hospitals and a research institution. SL works with the hospitals to recruit supervisors in a diversity of departments. The young people work at eight different work sites (including the Forsyth Institute, which is highlighted later in this report). They work in departments including podiatry, cardiology, nutrition, and X-Ray. In the summer, they work 20 hours/week for 7 weeks; during school year 10 hours a week. Two hours per week are spent at SL in job readiness, financial literacy, and math and literacy training. During the program youth also have to work on a project exploring a career of their choice, and the steps to achieving success in that field. They present their findings at the end of the session.

¹ In the "dual labor market," primary labor market employment is typically permanent, full-time, and includes benefits. Jobs are skilled, and management is likely to invest in training to improve productivity. The secondary labor market is characterized by part-time, temporary, and high-turnover jobs that require relatively few skills. Employers rarely invest in training, and compensation is relatively low with few, if any benefits.

Boston High-Risk Youth Network ■ 13 ■ Promising Practices in Employment

Staff visits the site at the beginning and further into the program. *"We see the kids in action, and meet with the supervisor,"* says Executive Director Alexandra Oliver- Dávila. Staff are in touch with the supervisor, getting feedback as the youth progress. This helps ensure the supervisors feel like they have support from the agency. *"At the end we bring (the supervisors) in for a luncheon. They fill out an evaluation form, and participate in a session on how we can make next year better."* Following the internship, SL staff assists youth to pursue their educational or employment goals. *"Some of the youth that work with us are interested in the medical field but are still in school and want to stay in school,"* says Oliver- Dávila. *"For those that are not in school, our job is to either get them to back to school or to find them employment."* Having found the hospitals somewhat difficult for making permanent placements for young people, SL is currently working on identifying those occupations that have lower skill level or educational level requirements, but that, with some training, will give young people an entry point into the field. Health care continues to be a high-demand industry in Boston.

Some service providers are adopting another means of providing youth with practice employment: Launching their own social ventures. Organizations start up or take over an existing business, form their own ownership and management structure, and hire their own clients to work run the business. While fairly labor-intensive and potentially financially risky, this configuration provides a unique training ground for youth who need more time transitioning into the labor market.

SERVICE PROVIDER IN ACTION: ROCA

Contact: Molly Baldwin, Executive Director ■ 101 Park Street, Chelsea, MA 02150
617.889.5210 ■ www.rocainc.org

Roca is a nationally recognized, values-led youth development organization serving young people in Chelsea, Revere, East Boston and Lynn. The organization has hosted a YouthCorps program and helped youth access jobs for many years. In the last few years, however, Roca has become more pro-active in creating employment pathways for youth that are not being served by other existing programs (including its own). In addition to other innovations with its employment programs, Roca has launched a set of earned income programs that provide transitional work opportunities and placement into full-time work. "Tacos Unidos" is a pushcart business that sells tacos and burritos at outdoor events and workplaces. Seven youth and six adults participated in the business development process and five young people staff it regularly for a wage. Roca also offers a pre-employment program in hospitality and food services, which complements the pushcart initiative. The other business venture is a cleaning and maintenance business. Roca established a retained revenue account with the state, and will eventually be able to get contracts cleaning and maintaining state buildings.

The businesses are not an end, says Founder and Executive Director Molly Baldwin; they provide a vehicle to prepare young people for regular employment. *"The point of the business is to provide a transition. We know they're going to blow out. They're going to fall out of a job, and it's harder to get them back in each time. We have to teach them to work. We're creating a controlled environment."* The businesses offer workers opportunities to develop multiple skills including job-specific skills as well as self-help, teamwork and confidence in their abilities. These unique ventures have captured the imagination of numerous local businesses and entrepreneurs, including caterers, restaurants and a small cleaning business, who have provided assistance and donations. Roca hopes to have these two social enterprises self-sustained within two years of start-up.

► **Make a good match between the youth, the job and the employer.**

Good job developers, career specialists, placement specialists and others responsible for placing youth in employment often have experience both in the private sector *and* with youth at high risk. They are able to translate these different cultures to each other—mainly the work culture to youth—and can help shape expectations (Abt, 2003). Good job developers are also careful to find an appropriate match with an employer. They are honest with employers about what their youth clients can do, and steer away from “charity hires” for their clients. To be sure, the employers and union representative interviewed for this report were similarly not inclined to make them. “*We’re hiring you because we need to get this job done, not because we like you,*” says Al Peciario of the New England Regional Council of Carpenters, referring to contractors in the industry. The union “*will walk you through it, but we’re not going to hold your hand. We’ll tell you what has to be done, we’ll show you, but nobody’s going to come to your house at five of seven in the morning and tell you ‘come on, it’s time to go.’ You’ve got to come to the realization that if I want this to work, I’ve got to do it myself.*” What Peciario appreciates from programs like YouthBuild is that they help identify candidates that have the desire—not simply the ability—to do the work.

Depending on the population they’re serving, job development staff need to pay particular attention to how employers handle Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI). In most health care settings, for example, individuals with CORI will not be considered. In other situations, such as shipping and receiving, construction, etc., employers may be willing to review the applicant’s record with an eye toward actual work responsibilities, such as whether individual will be on customer property, in contact with children, etc. In either case, providers prepare young people by showing them how to access their own CORI, and how to discuss it with potential employers. Job developers also need to be aware of particular scheduling needs for youth. Parenting responsibilities may dictate available work hours, as will enrollment in an academic program, periodic appointments with a parole officer, etc.

For some agencies, having a range of programs and youth at different levels of preparedness helps them to manage their employer relationships. As YouthBuild Boston Executive Director Ken Smith explains, the agency’s recent addition of a higher-level program with strong candidates to send employers works for the greater good of the program and all the young people it serves. “*If we place a young person who’s just starting to think about work with an employer who really needs someone who really understands and is committed to the building trades, sooner or later they’ll say, no, we don’t want your kids because your guy didn’t show up and didn’t really have the skills.*” Having a more sophisticated skills program (while also continuing to serve less prepared youth) helps keep industry employers and unions engaged and allows the agency to constantly forge new construction opportunities.

► **Prepare youth for real opportunities in “good jobs” with career advancement potential.**

Strong programs provide youth with the skills and experience to enter the workforce in jobs that, while they may be entry level, offer the potential for career advancement. They try to target industries or businesses that have occupations with family sustaining wages and room for advancement. Some programs, such as YouthBuild Boston (YBB), are successful at helping young people enter union construction jobs with good wage growth potential. YBB’s Ken Smith is realistic, however, about the fact that some youth are simply not ready for employment in the trades, or even enrollment in some of his

agency's programs. Like other directors interviewed for this report, Smith views his agency as one agency in a city-wide continuum of services for youth, and his own set of programs as offering a series of steps as well. Indeed, being selective about which jobs to target for youth who may have a criminal record or a 7th-grade education may seem like a luxury many programs don't have, say the leaders of agencies like Roca and STRIVE. Yet, they point out, providers *can* help youth adopt a longer view toward career growth. Maybe not right away, says Roca's Baldwin, but once youth spend some time in the workplace they are open to thinking about the future. *"If you can hold them still for six months, they'll start to think about careers. Talking to them about it at the beginning is not effective. It takes a while to have it make sense. It's about self-efficacy. You have to believe you can do it."* From when they enter a program to well after they've found their first job, staff should help youth to identify appropriate pathways and how to pursue the required education, training, and work experience.

► **Provide comprehensive, sustained support before, during and after job placement**

By definition, the youth who are the focus of this report will need access to additional support services, such as substance abuse counseling, housing support, tutoring, etc. Moreover, many in the field contend that programs need to continue services or maintain an "open-door" policy with youth once they have been placed in a first job (PPV, 2002). Youth at high risk are often likely to encounter difficulties either in their home lives or in the workplace once they are on the job, and will need sustained support. Sometimes youth need help withstanding the pressures of being the only one in their family or peer group to go to work. Or, when a problem arises, say with a gap in childcare, substance abuse or an annoyed supervisor, being able to turn to program staff for counseling or even another placement will help keep a youth on track. *"Clients who have multiple barriers to employment are likely to need help addressing immediate challenges for many months after they obtain jobs,"* (Abt., 2003). Further, given the fact that most jobs will be entry-level, youth will benefit from assistance learning about and pursuing further education, skills training or advancement opportunities. The American Youth Policy Forum (2002) has identified as a key principle open-ended services of six months to several years as a means of providing youth with positive relationships with caring, knowledgeable adults as they make a permanent connection to the labor market.

***SERVICE PROVIDER IN ACTION:
STRIVE/BOSTON EMPLOYMENT SERVICE***

Contact: Benjamin Thompson, Executive Director ■ 651 Washington St., Dorchester, MA 02124
617.825.1800 ■ www.bostonstrive.org

STRIVE Boston uses a rapid employment model to help young adults with significant employment barriers gain access to the labor market. While STRIVE serves some clients who are older than the Network's target population, the majority are 18-25 and the organization's recent initiatives for ex-offenders and young mothers make it relevant and instructive. The nationally recognized STRIVE model includes intensive attitudinal training, job readiness, placement assistance and post-placement follow-up. Through a recent collaboration with the Suffolk County House of Corrections and development of a specialized re-entry model, STRIVE Boston now has a set of programs specifically geared toward ex-offenders. Many of them, says Executive Director Ben Thompson, are 18-19 year olds. STRIVE Boston has also launched a "Millennium Moms" program which, in its first cycle this year, served 15 mothers, one-half of them under 21. Both programs are relatively new and unique, and required customization of

Boston High-Risk Youth Network ■ 16 ■ Promising Practices in Employment

services for the target group. In both cases, staff has stretched out the amount of time participants are in the program, and been more attentive to the multitude of social service needs these clients may have.

Also relatively new and less well-known than STRIVE's five-week "Bootcamp" program, is the organization's follow-up, or "graduate" services for individuals who have gone through the program and already attained entry-level employment. STRIVE commits to working with individuals for two years after their initial placement. Participants may enroll, or stay enrolled if they have already started, in a GED program. They are also eligible for free computer classes, and a course through the Financial Services Academy (a STRIVE partner). Placement specialists are in regular contact with participants, and help them to make a job change when needed because the first, second or third job is not working out, or because the participant is ready for a more challenging and better-paying opportunity.

► **Engage employers in defining competencies, providing opportunities for practice employment, hiring and articulating career advancement opportunities.**

Successful youth employment programs often bring employers in to play substantive, ongoing roles in their programs. They get to know what's going on and what skills are required in their industries, and they engage employers in shaping the program and in meeting with youth face to face. Building this type of relationship takes significant time, but is valuable in giving young people real connections to the labor market that they would not otherwise have.

***SERVICE PROVIDER IN ACTION:
YOUTHBUILD BOSTON***

Contact: Ken Smith, Executive Director ■ 504 Dudley Street, Roxbury, MA 02119
617.825.1800 ■ www.ybboston.org

YouthBuild Boston (YBB) serves 16-24 year-old unemployed and unskilled young people in a set of programs that combine academic skills, job readiness and construction skills. In the two main construction skills programs, youth help renovate abandoned buildings into affordable housing in their communities. Those who are in the process of completing a high school diploma or GED rotate on a bi-weekly basis working on academics, vocational skills, and life skills at the YBB school in Roxbury and doing construction work at a jobsite. Youth also receive one-on-one counseling and case management around goal setting and addressing additional service needs. In a new Americorps program for young adults who have already earned an educational credential, youth spend 100 percent of their time on the jobsite. Both groups earn a stipend and pre-apprenticeship hours, increasing their marketability for union apprenticeship programs, construction jobs and higher education. YBB also operates a small program called "Project Advantage" for 16-17 year olds referred by the Boston Public Schools, DYS and the Department of Social Services, in which young people focus on job and career development and completion of a diploma or GED.

In its role as a provider of employment skills for young adults, YBB has also become an important player in the local construction field, both as a contractor or sub-contractor and as a source of new entrants to the workforce in this industry. As such, it has brought key industry representatives to its table to participate in curriculum design and delivery, setting standards, the purchase of materials, and actually helping the organization to become a more competitive player, thereby increasing opportunities for

Boston High-Risk Youth Network ■ 17 ■ Promising Practices in Employment

young people to learn on the job. *"We want to be teaching something that they authorize. ...It has to be start of the art, what they're using"* says Executive Director Ken Smith. The agency employs union tradespeople to teach students both at the school site and on the jobsite, and has close partnerships with trade unions and contractors. *"Managing these relationships is part of our future."*

YBB staff understands well that these partners have clear business interests in their partnerships with YBB. *"Contractors need workers,"* says Smith. They are also motivated by the local Boston Jobs for Boston Residents policy, and have been nudged along by the Mayor. *"Some are still paying fines as a cost of doing business, but others are realizing this makes sense"* not only to meet local and federal hiring guidelines, but also to simply get the job done.

About 35 percent of YBB's graduates end up working in the trades. That number is expected to rise with the launching this year of the new Americorps program.

EMPLOYER AND UNION PRACTICES: HIRING AND SUSTAINING YOUTH

► Define business needs.

Unions and employers should articulate their business and organizational needs when working with youth employment organizations. Fulfilling community benefits commitments is important; working toward a clear business goal will help garner much-needed organizational support. Indeed, having the corporate office behind hiring these young people is critical. Clearly defined needs will also dictate the type of assistance or collaboration the union or company can provide. A company may need to attract new workers in order to serve a new market, to bolster an aging workforce, to meet diversity goals, or to stem turnover. Youth employment organizations can help recruit, screen and prepare youth more effectively when they understand these interests. In the case of UPS, the company has an interest in reaching out to large numbers of youth who may be interested in a career. A school or youth agency can provide a venue for a staffing representative to speak directly to potential candidates, and even interview them on site. Similarly, NSTAR Electric and Gas Corporation needs young, new skilled workers to fill the positions of aging workers. Youth organizations can help prepare their clients to pass entry exams and boost their academic skills in order to prepare for higher level skills training needed for certain positions.

A growing number of employers in Boston participate in youth and adult workforce development initiatives that are focused on particular industries, such as healthcare, automotive repair, and financial services. In addition to regular recruiting work and one-on-one partnerships with service providers, these enable employers to attract new resources and create industry-specific training and other solutions. When employers join and support intermediary, or brokering, organizations it can help simplify and structure the relationships with schools or youth employment programs. This can help small- and medium-sized employers that may not have human resource staff, to engage in meaningful ways (Committee on Economic Development, 1998).

► **Participate in curriculum design and implementation.**

Employers should work with programs in defining expectations and competencies needed for the workplace (American Youth Policy Forum, 2003). While many employers find they can train workers in job-specific skills themselves, they want youth who are “job ready:” who know how to dress, how to ask for time off, how to manage conflict, etc. Employers and unions with experience taking on youth and other entry-level workers can be helpful in defining those competencies, and will be more willing to give youth a chance if the program can guarantee the youth has mastered them.

Beyond collaborating on the curriculum and providing practice work experiences, employers and unions might provide programs with equipment, samples of documents used in the workplace, etc. They can help schools, and programs, introduce more experiential and contextual learning and provide work experience and training to instructors and counselors of youth, so that they are more prepared to teach work skills. Also, utilizing the power of mentoring as discussed earlier, employers and unions can match students with mentors who can serve as role models and can help youth understand workplace culture and what opportunities exist in a particular industry.

UNION IN ACTION:

NEW ENGLAND REGIONAL COUNCIL OF CARPENTERS

Contact: Al Peciaro, District Business Manager ■ 803 Summer St., Boston, MA 02127
617.464.4559 ■ www.necarpenters.org

The New England Regional Council of Carpenters (NERCC) needs young, skilled apprentices to reinforce its aging workforce and to help locals in the region stay competitive. Now, more than ever, the union is reaching out to young people interested in making a career out of carpentry and the building trades, says District Business Manager Al Peciaro. *"For a long time, the building trades were looked at as a country club. Once you got in, close the door behind you, don't let anybody else in,"* says Peciaro. Today, he explains, things are different, and in the attempt to control the market the union is tearing down the gates and trying to bring in new members. In addition, the Carpenters are taking pro-active steps to attracting young men and women of color, which also helps the union fulfill local and federal affirmative action and hiring requirements.

The union also cares deeply about maintaining standards of quality and its ability to command high wages. NERCC has many different strategies to draw qualified young people to its four-year apprenticeship program. Agreements with organizations like YouthBuild Boston help provide city youth with practical experience and knowledge before they apply, giving them a boost. Currently, YBB employs a union carpenter as its construction manager. For the union, this is only good news.

On one project being led by YBB, the agency is the general contractor. It donates materials to the Carpenters' training center, and the apprentices at the training center use them to make pre-fab panels. A union training school instructor creates written plans for assembling the panels, and YBB students install them on the jobsite, working alongside union carpenters. The union and its apprentices benefit, as do the YBB youth. *"They're creating training opportunities for YouthBuild students and making a huge effort to outreach to inner city youth,"* explains union carpenter and YouthBuild Construction Manager Johan DeCola. *"It makes our unskilled, or semi-skilled students competitive in an open job market. We become a competitive contractor. It creates a job site opportunity for my students that they otherwise*

Boston High-Risk Youth Network ■ 19 ■ Promising Practices in Employment

wouldn't have. ... Some students have grown up in subsidized housing. They've never had to use a hammer. "Opportunities and training in the latest practices help these young people not only catch up, says DeCola, it makes them more employable.

While its relationship with YBB is relatively new, the union has done well at increasing the number of apprentices in the Boston metro area who are minorities and female, says Peciaro. A smaller percentage graduate the program, and retention remains an ongoing concern. A mentor program pairs 4th-year apprentices with 1st- and 2nd-year apprentices is designed to help address this.

► **Offer role models and mentorship to help young people see their own future, and to help them adapt to the job and workplace culture.**

Employers are different motivated by different reasons to hire youth that may be considered "high-risk," including business, charitable, and personal interests. In the best of worlds, these interests will be overlapping, such that youth are hired to help the company meet business needs, and someone in the worksite has "been there" or truly wants to see youth succeed.

All of the employer and union representatives interviewed for this report cited the value of mentorship for young people, and described different mechanisms they use to foster these relationships among veteran employees or union members and young people. Mentoring programs help new employees develop work skills and appropriate interpersonal skills, while also helping them to understand the workplace culture, feel a sense of acceptance and learn about career pathways (Prince, 2003).

EMPLOYER IN ACTION: UNITED PARCEL SERVICE

Contact: Jodi Marotta, Workforce Planning Manager, New England
(508) 751-6129 ■ www.ups.com

United Parcel Service (UPS) is the world's largest global transportation company, employing 370,000 people worldwide. The company's commitment to its employees has been widely recognized, among other things for offering good benefits and being a good place for minorities to work. For its permanent jobs, the company's interest is in bringing on new recruits who are young, in good shape and looking for a career. Jodi Marotta, Workforce Planning Manager for UPS New England, also has another interest: Giving young people an opportunity to turn themselves around and get what they want out of life.

"Being a kid from the streets, I was not the greatest myself. Going into the 10th grade, I wasn't sure I was going to make it to 30... Now I have the power to hire these kids."

Marotta attributes his own turnaround to having a positive role model. *"It helps to have a role model that they can see are the same ethnicity and they can put a face on them and say, 'if that guy can do it, so can I.' That's what turned the light bulb on in my head."* Marotta first found a role model at an Upward Bound program during high school, and again later when he started at UPS. *"He looked like me, he talked like me. I said, 'Jeeze, why can't I be in that spot?' And that's what I shot for."* Today, Marotta tries to be that mentor to the young people he hires. He tells them how he worked his way up, and went to college paid for by UPS. Down on the UPS shop floor, he says, youth will find many role models among the *"tremendous melting pot"* that look the same as themselves.

For many of the young people who are the focus of this report, UPS represents an opportunity, says Marotta. At the beginning, *"the majority of the work at the entry level is loading and unloading. You leave sweaty and dirty. The jobs are part-time and the wage is \$8.50."* But after 9-12 months, an employee can go to full-time and start earning \$14.70. If they're over 21 years old, they can become a driver. After two more years, they can be earning \$25/hour; after 25 years then can retire. *"How many 21 year old guys standing on the street corner in Boston are earning \$70,000/year? It's hard work, it keeps you in shape but you can get a nice car, a nice house and plenty of spending money."*

- ▶ **Provide youth with practice experience in the workplace including job shadowing, rotations through different departments, internships and employment.**

As discussed earlier in this report, having opportunities for hands-on learning and to gain experience at being employees is critical to youth as they transition into the labor market. When young people come to the worksite for an internship or job shadow, it is important to expose them to as many aspects of the work as possible, and to give them clear guidance on what is expected of them. It is also extremely valuable to orient staff as to their responsibilities in supervising or mentoring youth.

EMPLOYER IN ACTION: THE FORSYTH INSTITUTE

Contact: Mary-Kathleen Deloge, Coordinator, Educational Outreach Program
140 The Fenway, Boston, MA 02115 ■ 617-262-5200 ■ www.forsyth.org

The Educational Outreach Program at the Forsyth Institute is designed to encourage underrepresented young people to enter the fields of science, math and technology. Through a Visiting Scientist Program, after school workshops and its Summer Internship Program, the Institute exposes Boston Public School (BPS) students to a science laboratory, provides them with hands-on research experience, and introduces them to educational and career opportunities in oral and basic science research. To date, the Institute has only accepted in-school candidates into its internship program, but Coordinator Mary-Kathleen Deloge says they are careful to search for students who demonstrate interest in the field, but are not top-notch kids who are already heads above their peers. By agreement with Sociedad Latina, one slot is reserved for a candidate from that organization who is also a BPS student.

When they come for the eight-week paid internship, students work in a laboratory, learn basic research techniques, go to meetings, and participate in the ongoing work of the lab. They also conduct their own research projects. The research work distinguishes Forsyth's program from other internship programs, says Deloge. *"We allow the high school student to do their project. This is not a hand-holding, 'here let me help you with that' kind of thing. This is, OK, 'here is the background information, you're expected to research that on your own, I'll show you how, but you do this.' Basically the kid is autonomous. It's pretty much throwing them into the water and seeing if they can swim."* With few exceptions, she says, students rise to occasion and surpass it *"which gives them a sense of pride that I don't think they would have gotten elsewhere or otherwise."* When the internship is over, students present their research projects. Their high school science teachers and families are invited to attend.

Forsyth is also clear in its expectations of mentors. Each student is mentored by an Institute researcher. Deloge has prepared a manual for mentors, explaining the goals of the program, mentor responsibilities and what support is available to them. "... *You are this young person's guide through the laboratory, a research project and, quite often, through his/her first job experience,*" reads a page on official mentor duties. Mentors teach their students basic safety procedures, supervise the research projects, and impart work expectations. Depending on resources available, some mentors also invite their students to continue working during the school year, and all are welcome to return for a second or even third summer. Many of them remain in touch with their students after the program, and often provide letters of recommendation for higher education.

► **Provide employed students with incentives to work hard in school**

A high school diploma or GED is key to the long-term earning potential of youth. Therefore, where appropriate, it is important for employers to limit hours for in-school youth or youth in GED or remedial programs, and encourage them to maintain school attendance and a minimum grade point average (Committee on Economic Development 1998).

► **Provide youth with opportunities to explore and understand career opportunities**

Employers and unions benefit when the youth with whom they work understand the opportunities open to them. Knowing what positions may be open to them down the road, as well as what the skill, experience and educational requirements will help young people to be able to visualize their own future. It also helps boost retention.

As noted earlier in this report, service providers and employers alike are quick to note that youth are often unable to absorb "career information" when they are just getting started in the labor market. Training programs often provide financial literacy training that helps youth see what they need to earn to support how they want to live. They may provide career information to youth once they have spent some time in their first job. On the employer side, making career pathways accessible and transparent to youth is one of the most important ways they can support youth employment, retention and advancement.

EMPLOYER IN ACTION: NSTAR ELECTRIC AND GAS CORPORATION

Contact: Alicine François, Staffing Manager ■ One NSTAR Way, Westwood, MA 02090
617.464.4559 ■ www.nstaronline.com

NSTAR transmits and delivers electricity and natural gas to nearly 1.4 million residential and business customers in Eastern Massachusetts and employs more than 3,200 people. NSTAR has identified clear business needs related to its labor force: The company has an aging workforce, potentially losing a significant portion of its line workers to retirement in the coming years. This, together with the company's diversity goals, has motivated the company to look for ways to attract youth to the company's service area. Its recent focus has been on providing young people with information about opportunities in the company, as well as helping to eliminate some of the barriers. In addition, NSTAR

has spent the last two years developing the Power System Technology Program with Bunker Hill Community College to prepare new recruits for overhead line worker positions. The two-year Associates-level program includes academic courses and practical, hands-on training. Students spend school vacations working at NSTAR and are guaranteed a job when they complete the program.

Certain barriers may still exist for the young people who are the focus of this report, such as the requirement for a high school diploma or GED, or the need for a more immediate source of income than a two-year work/study program can provide. Yet jobs at this company are career positions; they pay well, even at the entry level. Temporary, part-time call center reps makes \$16/hour, and permanent call center reps start at \$18/hour. Overhead line workers start at \$26/hour, and can increase their grade over time. Underground line workers start at \$24/hour and can increase their grade and/or become splicers or trouble shooters. By agreement with the union at NSTAR, all workers are informed regularly of open positions.

Moreover, NSTAR is conscious of trying to open its ranks and reach out to the communities it serves. For example, the company has made changes to its application processes. In collaboration with the union, the company developed a 2-week brush-up math course to help applicants pass the entry exam. The union now sponsors the course. The human resources staff is also dedicated to reviewing a person's background carefully, and determining on a case-by-case basis what factors may be barriers to employment. In addition, NSTAR has hosted summer youth interns. *"Once we take an interest in someone, we don't give up,"* says staffing manager Alicine François, citing examples of providing extra tutors, financial assistance and other supports to students in the Power Systems program. *"That's the strength of this company, from the union up to the CEO. A lot of the union members weren't born with a silver spoon in their mouths. They know they're here because someone gave them an opportunity. The union is like that, HR is like that, I'm like that. Once you identify kids who just need an opportunity, they'll give you 110 percent."*

SYSTEM CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

The challenges youth at high risk face in trying to move toward employment and economic stability are monumental. They are forced to draw on a sense of order, self-discipline and self-confidence that may, up to that point, have been completely absent their lives. The service providers that work with these youth on employment are also helping youth to gradually address a complex set of issues including violence or trauma, parenting, substance abuse, prostitution, legal issues, failure in school, etc. Real progress toward permanent employment can be slow and marked by setbacks including reincarceration, childcare problems, firing, or youth simply walking off the job. Every success—from building a young person's self-esteem, to having them complete an internship or stay on a job for even a month—is hard won by the youth and the provider. This report is intended to illuminate how successful programs, employers and unions deal with such challenges.

Through interviews with employment programs and other youth service providers conducted for this report, another layer of challenges also emerged: Those which are external to the youth and the programs themselves and have more to do with the local youth employment system and the labor market. While these issues fall somewhat outside the purview of this report on actual program practices, we note them

Boston High-Risk Youth Network ■ 23 ■ Promising Practices in Employment

here because they factor into the context in which youth, providers and employers operate. These challenges include:

- A lack of programs, be it in job readiness, skills training or placement.
- A lack of information and knowledge about services, programs and agencies serving youth at high risk. Basic program listings and contact information would be helpful.
- A need for infrastructure that enables providers to learn about programs. Staff at all levels needs regular training on what programs exist and how to help clients access them.
- A need for a better and more comprehensive referral system so kids don't fall between the cracks. All service providers, relevant state agencies (DYS, DSS, etc.), and funding sources should be involved.
- A need for more job developers, especially individuals that can develop deeper relationships with employers, and can take youth beyond the first rung on the employment ladder.
- A need to provide young women with a wide range of professions, rather than focusing on traditionally female occupations.
- Age as a significant barrier to employment. Most employers prefer to avoid younger workers.
- Age as a barrier to training programs. With a scarcity of resources, the career centers may be less likely to give vouchers to people under 21 because they are perceived as more likely to change their minds or switch paths down the road.
- Great difficulty in placing younger 16-18 year olds, especially young men. These youth may have already attained a diploma or GED and gotten out of DYS, but they are often too young for skills training and finding employment is extremely difficult. Even if they're interested in higher education, sometimes the wait can be quite long till the next semester begins. Many of them are virtually homeless and there are few options for them.

We highlight here one “promising practice” example of how a group of local youth service providers has tried to create a stronger infrastructure and network for information exchange and referrals.

SERVICE PROVIDERS IN ACTION: YOUTH SERVICE PROVIDERS NETWORK

Contacts: Alexandra Oliver-Davila, 617.442.4299 ■ Roger Oser, 617.782.7600

The Boston Youth Service Providers' Collaboration is a network of youth service providers that have committed to sharing best practices, prioritizing referrals, and working together to increase funding. All receive funding from the City of Boston's Office of Jobs and Community Services. The group was formed in 2000, and today has 13 members including providers of alternative education, career exploration and skill development, and youth employment. Members use different models in their work with youth, but all share a common set of principles such as individualized services to youth, engagement of employers, and use of a school-to-career framework with a priority on contextual learning and exposure to the

Boston High-Risk Youth Network ■ 24 ■ Promising Practices in Employment

workplace (BYSPN Statement of Purpose, 2005). The group meets monthly and is chaired by two members. The network's target population is low-income youth who have dropped out of school or are chronically truant; youth that are deficient in basic skills, and court-involved youth.

Members often make direct referrals among their organizations, helping to make the system more seamless for youth. The group is currently in the process of documenting the referrals members make to each other. *"It's been really great,"* says co-chair Alexandra Oliver-Dávila. *"We can refer young people who want to go back to school because there are alternative education programs sitting at the table. Career Link (One-Stop Career Center) sits at the table, so if there are jobs that come up, or if we need to send somebody, we can do that. It's been very helpful."*

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abt Associates, Inc. 2003. *Promising Practices for Helping Low-Income Youth Obtain and Retain Jobs: A Guide for Practitioners*.
- American Youth Policy Forum. 2003. *WIA Learning Exchange for Youth Systems, August 1, 2002 – September 30, 2003*.
- Boston Youth Service Providers Network. 2005. *Boston's Alternative School-To-Career System* (internal document).
- Brown, David, et al. 2002. *Barriers and Promising Approaches to Workforce and Youth Development for Young Offenders*. Annie E. Casey Foundation.
- Clymer, Carol, et al. 2002. *Supporting Youth Employment: A Guide for Community Groups*. Public/Private Ventures.
- Committee on Economic Development. 1998. *The Employer's Role in Linking School and Work: A Policy Statement by the Research and Policy Committee of the Committee for Economic Development*.
- Commonwealth Corporation. August 2004. *Strategies for Older Youth*. Research and Evaluation Brief, Volume 2, Issue 2.
- General Accounting Office. 2004. *Workforce Investment Act: Labor Actions Can Help States Improve Quality of Performance Outcome and Delivery of Youth Services*.
- Hull Lifesaving Museum. 2005. "Programs and Activities for Young People," accessed at www.lifesavingmuseum.org.
- Ivry, Robert and Doolittle, Fred. 2003. *Improving the Economic and Life Outcomes of At-Risk Youth*. MDRC, 2003.
- Partee, Glenda. 2003. *Preparing Youth for Employment: Principles and Characteristics of Five Leading United States Youth Development Programs*. American Youth Policy Forum.
- Prince, Heath. 2003. *Mentoring*. Jobs for the Future.
- Public/Private Ventures. 2002. *Serving High Risk Youth: Lessons from Research and Programming*.
- U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Youth Services. Date Unknown. *Youth Resource Connection, TIP Sheet for Youth Opportunity Grants: Transitional Employment Services* (Youth Opportunity Boston).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE

PEPNet (Promising and Effective Practices Network at nyec.modernsignal.net/pepnet) is a system for enhancing the quality of programs that link young people (ages 12 to 25) to work and education to promote a successful transition to adulthood. PEPNet Quality Standards for Youth Development provide a framework, or goals, for program excellence in the areas of quality management, programmatic approach, youth development competencies, and a focus on youth results. PEPNet Tools help organizations achieve these goals. **PEPNet Promising Programs** have undergone a rigorous peer review process, and have been certified as demonstrating promising approaches and a commitment to quality programming and continuous improvement.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A very deep appreciation is expressed to the youth employment practitioners and employer and labor representatives who participated in interviews for this report:

Molly Baldwin, Executive Director, Roca

Maria Cheevers, Project Director, The Female Focus Initiative, Roxbury YouthWorks

Jonah DeCola, Construction Manager, YouthBuild Boston

Mary-Kathleen Deloge, Coordinator, Educational Outreach Program, The Forsyth Institute

Alicine François, Staffing Manager, NSTAR Electric and Gas Corporation

Susan Lange, Deputy Director, Youth Opportunity Boston, City of Boston

Jodi Marotta, Workforce Planning Manager, United Parcel Service New England

Lory Newmyer, Executive Director, Hull Lifesaving Museum

Alexandra Oliver-Dávila, Executive Director, Sociedad Latina

Al Peciaro, District Business Manager, New England Regional Council of Carpenters

Ken Smith, Executive Director, YouthBuild Boston

Benjamin Thompson, Executive Director, STRIVE/Boston Employment Service

Mayra Welsh, Program Coordinator, STRIVE/Boston Employment Service

The Boston Capacity Tank and its partner services are funded by a \$2 million Compassion Capital fund grant, from Administration for Children and Families of U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, representing 67% total project costs. The remaining \$1 million, representing 33% of total costs, is funded by non-governmental sources. Seventy-five percent of the funds are reinvested into the community.

APPENDIX: JOBS PRIORITY GROUP MEMBERS

Ellen Bass, Black Ministerial Alliance
Ernst Beaucejour, New York Life
Gary Bracey, Boston Learning Center
Tina Bustion, Project RIGHT
Chris Byner, Boston Center for Youth and Families
Virgenmina Cosme, Council to Felix Arroyo's Office
Crystal Dixon, Emmanuel Gospel Center
Peter Forbes, Department of Youth Services
Terry Grobe, Commonwealth Corps.
Kathy Hamilton, Private Industry Council
Alison Handy, Generation Excel
Eric A. Johnson, Bowdoin Street Health Center
Andrea Kaiser, Bird Street Community Center
Kathy Kihanya, GED Plus at ESAC
Michael Kozu, Project RIGHT
Susan Lange, Youth Opportunity Boston
Michael Long, Men in Black
Lori Nelson, MGLC Offices
Turhan Shepherd, Twenty-first Century Church
Neil Sullivan, Private Industry Council
Chris Sumner, Boston Tenpoint Coalition
Aaron Tanimoto, Action for Boston Community Development
Harvey Towvim, Ideas Grow
Tony Wray, Job Corps
David Wright, Black Ministerial Alliance