

Passaic County WIB/One Stop and Faith-based Community Strategic Planning Report

Background

As part of its overall plan to provide a coordinated set of workforce services to residents and businesses in Passaic County, the Passaic County Workforce Investment Board (WIB) has been working for over a year with representatives of the faith-based community through the WIB's Faith-based Committee.

Led by Pastor Randall Lassiter, with support from Lanisha Makle, the WIB's Executive Director, the Committee has been convening open monthly meetings to share information and ideas and provide faith-based organizations with ongoing support and resources. While this has been successful in educating local organizations and providing a forum for discussion, the WIB and the Faith-based Committee wanted to engage in a more deliberate planning process between the workforce development system and faith-based organizations.

On August 20, 2008, The Widing Group facilitated a strategic planning session attended by representatives from several faith-based organizations throughout the county, as well as staff from the Workforce Investment Board (WIB) and the Passaic County Workforce Development Center.

This report summarizes the planning discussion, including identifying the next steps agreed to by the planning group.

Goals of the Session

In bringing together members of the faith-based community and representatives from the Passaic County WIB and Workforce Development Center, the WIB wanted to:

- Share information about the programs and services being provided by the Workforce Development Center and local faith-based organizations.
- Explore opportunities for the faith-based community, WIB and Workforce Development Center to work together in meeting community needs.

Services Provided by the Passaic County Workforce Development Center

As part of the strategic planning session, Natalie Provenzale, Director of the Passaic County Workforce Development Center, and her staff provided a tour of the main One Stop facility and reviewed all of the services provided by the One Stop, including:

- Orientation to the One-Stop System
- Vocational Assessment, Testing and Evaluation

- Career Counseling and Planning
- Computer-based Job Search
- Self-service and Staff-supported Access to Resources
- Pre-Vocational Services
- Group Workshops on job search and career planning
- Job Search and Placement Services
- Job Training Referrals
- Employment, career planning and educational services for youth
- Multi-Lingual Staff Assistance
- Referrals to Community Resources, such as transportation, daycare and other supportive services.
- Computer Instruction

Services Currently Being Provided by Faith-based Organizations

Faith-based organizations in Passaic County are a rich resource of services and supports for their communities. Some of the services currently being provided by the organizations attending the strategic planning session include:

- Computer literacy training
- Job search/dress for success
- Literacy/reading skills development
- Employment readiness preparation
- Workshops in Spanish
- Small business workshops
- Providing space for meetings

Critical Community Issues/Needs

As part of exploring strategies for working together, the strategic planning group discussed areas of critical need within the Passaic County community. Some of this information came as a result of focus groups recently held in the County by the United Way. These issues will be described in greater detail in a publication due to be published in Fall 2008.

Issues of community need that were identified as being of crucial importance were:

- Lack of affordable housing
- Lack of affordable childcare
- Access to transportation
- Homelessness
- Services for youth, particularly for these high priority groups:

- Ages 13-14
- Youth with disabilities
- Youth aging out of foster care
- High dropout rate
- Juvenile crime and gang recruitment
- Obtaining resources and support to build entrepreneurial opportunities
- Access to education to build basic and occupational skills
- Connection to/accessibility of supportive services

Recognizing that there are numerous problems in the community, as well as a wide variety of people and resources to address these problems, the strategic planning team saw great benefit in further exploring strategies for working together to meet several of these needs.

Challenges

In exploring strategies for addressing critical community concerns, the group also discussed issues related to how the faith-based community and other organizations can work together more effectively. Faith-based representatives indicated that they face a number of challenges in providing services, including:

- Lack of funding, particularly grant funding to support various faith-based initiatives
- Lack of information/education about grant opportunities and the grant application process.
- Lack of infrastructure for meeting the requirements of different funding sources, which often require levels of administrative tracking and support that are not currently available. Participants in the planning session also expressed frustration that many times they are expected to provide community services and resources on a volunteer basis. They indicated that in order to provide high quality services, they need funding to do so.
- Issues with technology, including a lack of some technologies (such as broadband Internet access), outdated technologies and lack of skilled individuals to effectively utilize technology.
- Issues with coordinating and managing activities across organizations. For example, coordinating programs across several churches can raise issues of governance, accountability and setting common expectations that take more support and resources to address.
- Lack of education and information about resources other than grant-funding that can support initiatives. For example, social entrepreneurship allows organizations to become self-supporting, but local faith-based organizations need additional information and support to pursue these strategies.

- Need for better communication mechanisms between the workforce system and faith-based partners.

Potential Strategies

After discussing the issues and challenges described above, the planning group then identified three areas where additional activities could occur that would better position them to meet community needs. These are:

- *Information sharing*
- *Referrals*
- *Using faith-based organizations as satellite centers or “Access Points” for the Workforce Development Center.* This option is based on a model of coordination between faith-based organizations and the workforce development system that’s been developed by the US Department of Labor. While it requires a high level of collaboration and support, this model also provides the most comprehensive strategy for bringing workforce services into local communities.

The group also identified ways that the WIB and its Faith-based Committee could support faith-based organizations.

Information Sharing Strategies:

- Have Workforce Development Center staff visit faith-based organizations and provide an overview of services
- Provide tours of the Workforce Development Center to members of the faith-based community.
- Provide a workshop on the One Stop system specifically for faith-based organizations
- Have faith-based organizations register with the Passaic Employment Network so they can receive regular updates from the Workforce Development Center
- Devise other strategies for ongoing communication, such as using emails, newsletters, etc.
- Develop a video Orientation/Tour of the Workforce Development Center to be sent to all faith-based organizations and broadcast on local cable. The video could also be made available online.
- Encourage organizations to register their programs and services on the United Way’s 211 Help Line.

Referral Strategies

- Provide faith-based organizations with information/referral forms
- Develop a common referral process

Faith-based Organizations as “Access Points”

Members of the planning group expressed interest in further exploring the Access Point model. To do this they will need to:

- Develop a resource plan--how can faith-based organizations, the WIB and the Workforce Development Center work together to create Access points? What services could be provided and how?
- Look at ways to utilize technology, particularly cell phones and Internet

Additional Activities/Strategies

In addition to the three strategic areas described above, participants also identified the following potential activities:

- Explore the potential to coordinate transportation resources so that un-used church vehicles could potentially be pressed into community service during off-times.
- Develop an asset map of the faith-based community to identify all available resources, services, etc. within Passaic County.
- Help faith-based organizations find synergies that help them develop programs and services. The synergies should be based on each organization's mission and the passions of their members and allow organizations to capitalize on their strengths and their resources.

Roles of the WIB

To support the activities described above, as well as to address some of the challenges identified by the faith-based organizations, the Passaic County WIB asked what role it should play. The faith-based participants indicated that they wanted the WIB to:

- Sponsor workshops and provide technical assistance for the faith-based community
- Foster greater connectivity to government resources so that faith-based organizations could know what was available and how to access these resources.
- Work with the faith-based community and other stakeholders to further explore different models for providing services and sharing resources, including supporting exploring social entrepreneurship and the development of “Access Points” in the community.
- Provide access to grant software to research grant opportunities.

The WIB is already providing some of these services, but will work with the faith-based community to identify additional opportunities to make these activities available.

Next Steps

As a result of the strategic planning session, participants indicated high interest in and enthusiasm for continued planning and discussion. The group agreed to the following next steps:

- The WIB's Faith-based Committee will continue to hold monthly meetings designed to educate the faith-based community about the workforce system and to engage them in working together with the Passaic County WIB and Workforce Development Center.
- The Faith-based Committee will also reach out to form a work group to review and discuss the recommendations included in this report and develop a strategy for moving forward in the planning process. This includes setting goals and defining roles and responsibilities.
- The United Way will be publishing the results of their recent focus groups sometime in the Fall. The work group will review this plan and use it to further identify potential services needs that could be addressed through combined faith-based and workforce development system efforts.