



***Joint Newark & Essex County
Welfare to Work Committee Meeting***

The Waterfront, 2 Grafton Avenue Newark, NJ
Tuesday, July 17, 2015 at 10:00 am

Meeting Minutes

Attendees:

Mary Alexander	Joseph Epps
Kelli Bell Taylor	Danny Denice Gonzalez Bosques
Allyson Carvajal	Janine Schaeffer
Adriana Crawford	Safanya Searcy
Sam Okparaeke	David Weiner
Davetta Lane	Curtia Orr
Miriam Rodriguez	

Welcome:

Danny Denice Gonzalez Bosques (Newark Housing Authority)

Ms. Bosques brought greetings to meeting attendees. She asked for everyone to introduce themselves. Meeting attendees reviewed the minutes from the last meeting. Mr. Weiner presented a motion to move the minutes; Ms. Bosques seconded the motion. Minutes were accepted. Ms. Bosques communicated her gratitude to Sam Okparaeke, Essex County WIB Director, for attending the meeting. She expressed her hope for the committee to gain clarity and a better understanding of what the expectation is of the committee. She briefed him of the committee's progress with its mission statement. She told him about the committee's idea to collaborate with the Joint Literacy Committee to launch a project; they want to make an educational video for clients to watch while waiting for services; the video will serve as a marketing tool for training opportunities that are available to them.

Committee Business

Sam Okparaeke, Essex County WIB Director

Mr. Okparaeke apologized for not being able to attend some of the meetings in the past. He stated that it was important for him to be present so that everyone could be on the same page. He expressed that the main purpose of this committee is to look at the systemic issues and to identify our biggest problems which must be tackled by joining forces with the Division of Welfare. Many of the issues are coding issues such as clients not being sanctioned on time or client sanctions not being lifted. Many of these issues are beyond the control of the Division of Training and Employment. The Director of Welfare has committed to give the Division of Training and Employment access and training to do coding. Sam advised that committee members will require help to successfully aid in improving our systems; from the productivity of vendors, service quality, proper referrals,

proper testing, agency functionality and identifying best practices. To reach this goal, the committee will be provided with monthly module reports of contracted vendors to be used to monitoring compliance. He informed the committee that Essex County is in the midst of the RFP process. The review panel consists of members of the Essex County and Newark WIBs. At the end of the RFP review process, the committee will be informed, have the opportunity to ask questions, find out why contracts were granted. Mr. Okparaeke also vowed to make vendors accessible to the committee which will help with oversight and understanding the process. He invited the committee to the Essex County One Stop to sit with the management and front line staff to get a flavor of what is actually going on. Mr. Okparaeke stressed that understanding how the system works puts committee members in the best position to make informed and reasonable suggestions. Upon the committee's request, vendors will be required to give presentations, answer questions about their programs, their performance and/ or placement activities. As a result of poor communication issues between the WIB and the Director of Training and Employment, the committee had not been able to get this far in the past. Mr. Okparaeke stated that he can grant access to any information that the committee might need. He further communicated that he understands that there is some uncertainty about where this committee is going, but the body of this committee should be able to examine and come up with ideas and advice on how we can improve our system. "Because of WIOA, we are going to be required to make sure that the people that come into our buildings and those that we refer are placed in employment because training should result in employment". Mr. Okparaeke admitted that Essex County College will be training all Essex County employees in customer service training and invites Newark and WIB members to join in the initiative. He mentioned that Mary Alexander has been with the agency for a very long time and that she would be a very intricate part of the changes that will be taking place. Moving forward, the committee will have a great responsibility to make suggestions, identify gaps and to help improve participation and placement rates.

Mr. Epps expressed his displeasure with the RFP process. He said that the companies that submit RFP's, seem to be approved despite the unverifiable placement rates of about 42 %. Performance information was from zero to two years and he personally felt that anything less than five years is an inadequate time frame to evaluate a vendor. He used Catholic Charities as an example by advising that, they use the same response for everything and their greatest ability is in vocational training, not education. Mr. Epps said that they are taking on a responsibility because of the opportunity to add income to their organization, while the return on investment is poor. He exclaimed that there weren't any examples of why they felt participation or placement was poor. He admitted that it was nice to see that they offer motivational incentives and holiday turkeys, but was turned off by the fact that the overall RFP response was so limited.

Ms. Gonzalez Bosques agreed that grant writing and responses to proposals are templates there is often little improvement in the narrative to spice it up because it has been funded like this and no criticism has come back. She communicated that there is no incentive to step outside of the box. She advised that she has visited Catholic Charities. During her visit, she witnessed phenomenal staff and great programs. She said the reputation of the facility is what keeps participation rates down. The large DVR population is what keeps many clients from going there. Newark Housing Authority contracts them for case management services and thru a quality control survey, there were high ratings across the board. Clients admitted that they just did not like the facility. She compared the stigma of receiving a service at the welfare office vs. at Essex County College; she said that clients are more inclined to go to the college for services.

Mr. Okparaeke admits that Ms. Gonzalez Bosques was on target and informed the committee that the content of the RFPs were changed this year. During the Vendor Conference, the goal was to think outside the box. Of the 27 vendors that came into the conference, only 16 vendors applied for RFPs. Of the 16 vendors, only 1 vendor was a new. He admits that there is not much that can be done to change that. He said that this year money was put aside for ITAs so that customers can have a choice. In Essex County, the administration encourages giving contracts to businesses, schools and organizations within the county so that transportation won't be an issue for

customers. Mr. Okparaeké admitted that he would prefer to grant three contracts vs. sixteen contracts. He also expressed that the administration makes the final determination from the review committee's recommendation. He projects that once vendors begin to come before a committee like this one, there should be a shift in their performance level because they will be held accountable. He advised that the vendors get their contract money at three different pay points, with the placement part being ignored.

Curtia Orr advised that the measurable outcome that they are being graded by should mirror performance based contract benchmarks and stressed the heavy emphasis on participation. Mr. Okparaeké asked Curtia how could the effectiveness of a training program be tracked. Curtia explained that the way funding is awarded, there is only a twelve month calendar year and we are not set up for a program to be any more intensive than six months. Even when it comes to tracking and reporting the performance is restricted. Curtia suggested that these restrictions will require the committee to look to the Department of Labor and the federal government to communicate the need for longer time periods to be able to provide services within the fiscal year. She also spoke of the need for more short term, intensive programs. Mr. Okparaeké clarified that Welfare to Work doesn't have the same requirement as WIOA; welfare program are not funded to track clients for one year after funding. Once clients get a job, their case is closed.

Mr.

Ms. Alexander expressed that one of the purposes of the Joint WIBs is to collaborate resources so that clients can get the maximum benefit of services. One suggestion was to host orientations for public housing residents so that they become aware of available opportunities. Mr. Weiner suggested that WIBs can best serve elected officials when there is a clear and articulate vision for human capital and economic development that can be supported and championed by its members. He questioned whether the work of the committee is clear and articulate. Ms. Searcy said that it is the job of the committee to be charged with the responsibility of developing that. Mr. Weiner relayed that he was unsure that the committee has that charge. He said that the committees' job is to oversee that vision and its reporting progress and to serve as ambassadors to the community. It was suggested that when the RFP process starts, this committee should be notified so that they can volunteer to be a part of the process.

Ms. Searcy articulated that she enjoys serving on this committee; however she doesn't enjoy feeling like we can't get to the next step. She relayed that her time is valuable and she charged the committee to stay focused and get to the heart of developing goals and strategies to move to the next level. She communicated that she sees this committee as a functioning and working committee; she can't bear coming to meetings and talking when there is a major population of individuals who need to be serviced. She further stated that we can't hold the City of Newark, The County of Essex, nor chief elected officials accountable if we are not coming to the table with a plan. Janine asked what came of the retreat. Ms. Bosques said that the committee as a whole did not come up with anything concrete; they did agree that they need to increase communication and partnerships, develop a social media marketing campaign and increase coordination and collaboration internally and externally.

Mr. Weiner reiterates that the job of the committee is to provide true oversight of the advocacy of the programs as they have existed. He conveyed that since Welfare Reform in 1997, the committee hasn't had a role and stated there isn't enough private sector representation on the WIB. He relayed that he didn't mean to sound critical, but he has noticed that major companies support various community events, yet they don't volunteer to serve on the WIBs. He expressed that he doesn't believe that the administrations have tried and until the structure of the committee is as it should be, the committee can't make progress. Janine Schaeffer addressed this issue by stating that often, it is difficult for business representatives to attend regular committee meetings due to work schedules. She communicated that many of them are honored to be WIB Board/ Committee Members and will attend Board Meetings, but many don't attend the committee meetings, where the real work happens. A suggestion was made to begin having working lunch committee meetings to attract more committee members. Mr. Weiner suggested that Essex County Executive, Joe DiVincenzo could get committee member to the meetings. He advised that the County Executive has a very persuasive way when it comes to contracts and vendors. He used Shauger as an example of a vendor that has made hundreds of millions of dollars from an Essex County Vendor Contract.

Ms. Alexander interjected that although the history is great, the committee must move forward. She agrees that we must do what Ms. Searcy proposed. Mr. Weiner advised that we must know where we came from in order to move forward. Ms. Alexander expressed that we can't continue to dwell on the past. Mr. Weiner advised that what should happen is what didn't happen and what didn't happen, happened now.

Ms. Bosques changed the direction of the meeting. She brought up a point from the WIB Retreat; the committee agreed that communication and customer service was both a strength and weakness. She recommended that Newark and Essex County employees complete Customer Service Training. She stressed that client populations would also benefit from the training since customer service is a universal skill. Ms. Bosques wants to bounce ideas off of Newark and Essex County WIB Directors, Sam Okparaeke and Amina Bey, so she plans to invite them to the next committee meeting. She is requesting that the committee be included on the list of volunteers to review RFP's; requesting a list of vendors/ contractors that have been approved for services; requesting evaluations of past RFP's. Ms. Bosques also indicated that she wants to talk to Julius about marketing a list services and/or training that are available to the community.

Mr. Weiner made a suggestion that we should educate clients while they are waiting for services in the waiting room areas. In response, the committee talked about exploring the possibility of recording a video pointing out available services, training and programs. They discussed a collaborative project with the Literacy Committee which involved revamping the pamphlet. The committee expressed excitement about the idea of incorporating some young people (interns) to participate in this initiative.

Date to Remember:

NHA and the City of Newark Father's Day Event

4 | Page

JOINT WIB (Welfare to Work)

Committee Meeting

Submitted by Kelli Bell Taylor

June 19th from 3 pm to 7 pm at The Clubhouse in Newark

Closing

Ms. Bosques reiterated that the committee shouldn't spin wheels for the sake of spinning wheels. Lets' move forward and implement the actions to make a difference in the population that we service. She advised the committee that the next meeting is scheduled for **Tuesday, July 14, 2015 at 10 am at The Waterfront, 2 Grafton Avenue in Newark, NJ**. Ms. Bosques presented a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Weiner moved the motion. Meeting was adjourned.