

Youth: Finding Ways to Put Them to Work

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As families across Berkshire County know well, we continue to face severe economic challenges with more than 6,000 residents officially unemployed and an unemployment rate of 8.8%. This is a conservative number as we know many more have given up looking or are underemployed working two or three jobs to make ends meet. At the same time the state budget continues to face extreme pressures with many needs and drastically reduced resources. So in addition to seeking to maximize the use of existing resources, we need to make strategic investments that will leverage contributions from both the private sector and philanthropic communities; and at the same time look at how we can more effectively and efficiently organize the delivery of services and opportunities for youth and families in Massachusetts.

I offer two suggestions:

To help our youth - Ask your legislators to support **The Youth Solutions Act - H3696 and 1852** which is a bill is to

understand the growing crisis faced by many thousands of young people (dropping out, not working, etc.) and to be advocates for the value of successful program strategies (outlined below). There is something not quite right when a program like Connecting Activities which over the past decade has leveraged more than \$438 million in private sector wages serving 200,000 in-school youth is cut by more than 70% between FY2007 and FY2010. We need to support these programs that are able to combine positive work experiences and increased dedication to school leading to higher graduation rates and beyond. We need to support what is working, even in these tough financial times.

To help workers and companies - Ask your legislators to extend the **Workforce Training Fund - H22 and H1813** - beyond the current sunset date of 12/31/10. These bills would extend and improve an employer contributions fund which has trained more than 5,000 workers in 82 Berkshire County companies. These resources are critical to support company training in key industry sectors to keep our workers trained and our economy moving in the right direction. ■

BCREB Summer and Year-round Employment Programming Providing life changing opportunities for our region's youth

While others took the time to rest during their summer vacations, over 100 income eligible youth ages 14-24 participated in employment experiences this past July and August throughout Berkshire County. These opportunities were made available through the state of Massachusetts' funded *Youth Works Summer Program* and federal *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)* stimulus dollars. The impact these programs have on the youth participants is truly invaluable, greatly influencing the pursuit of their future educational and occupational goals and helping to build their self confidence as being integral and vital members of the Berkshire County workforce.

State and Federal Youth Employment Dollars at Work

Youth Works

\$87,000 in state funds to Pittsfield;
45 eligible youth served ages 14-21;
18 host employers;

Work experience, mentoring, foundation and life skill building, workplace readiness, educational guidance, case management;
Over 150 youth have participated since 2005



Southern Berkshire Educational Collaborative Group Environmental Projects/Training (ARRA)

The BCREB extends its sincere gratitude to Berkshire Training and Employment Program, Berkshire Works Career Center and all participating employers, school districts, community agencies and youth for your work in making these programs a huge success! Now we are gearing up for the summer of 2010!

ARRA Programming

\$192,000 in federal funds to Berkshire County;
65 eligible youth served ages 14-24;
5 program vendors, 21 host employers;
Work experience, mentoring, foundation and industry specific group skills training, workplace readiness, tutoring, leadership development, support services, guidance and counseling



Youth Works Summer Program

Connecting Activities Internship Program Impacting Young Lives for Over a Decade

Trying economic times have led the BCREB to receive its lowest amount of grant funds in fiscal year 2010 serving to uphold the region's internship programs. Despite this, all twelve participating high schools in Berkshire County have demonstrated true commitment to their internship models by budgeting accordingly to maintain their work-based-learning opportunities offered to all high school youth ages 14-21. In the midst of increasing lay-offs and a shrinking workforce within many industry sectors, the Berkshire business community has shown its dedication to the program by continuing to offer internship opportunities and/or dedi-

cating the time to providing job shadowing, mentor-protégé, guest speaking and career fair activities in striving to assist with the training of our region's future workforce.

In 2009, 550 high school students participated in paid and unpaid internship opportunities throughout nearly 300 regional employers. Over 1500 youth and 500 employers participate in additional work-based-learning activities annually. Currently 177 students are participating in internship experiences throughout 82 Berkshire companies. All participating high schools welcome the opportunity to be able to partner with new employers each year.

Why Participate In Connecting Activities? A Community Partnership

Benefits for students and educators: Connecting Activities and additional work-based-learning programs provide an efficient system where teachers and students can learn first-hand from employers what specific *workplace skills* are currently required in order to achieve occupational success.

Benefits for employers: Connecting Activities allow employers to become partners in education playing the most vital role as mentors for our region's youth. Employers are given the opportunity to

shape the future workforce of our region and establish a sizeable pool of determined, confident and skilled workers to meet 21st Century high demands.

Getting involved is easy! If you/your business are interested in participating in the Connecting Activities Internship Program and/or the BCREB's specialized summer initiatives including the Youth Works Summer Program, please contact Heather Shogry, Youth Director at 413-442-7177 x103 / youth@berkshirereb.org.