



YOUTH JOB SKILLS INITIATIVE & SUPPORT SERVICES



Creating Opportunities for Out-of-School Youth

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Funded by all or in part of, the Department of Labor/ETA WIOA Formula Grants and Wagner-Peyser; the Department of Health and Human Services TANF and Child Care Development Fund; and the Food and Nutrition Service SNAP Employment & Training.

Impetus

In Spring 2019, the seven large boards in Texas were alerted by TWC to an initiative that would allow us to focus on addressing high concentrations of school dropouts and UI claimants under 24. The additional WIOA youth and Out-of-School Youth (OSY) money helped WSB develop strategies to provide enhanced service delivery to these eligible youth, specifically out-of-school youth without a secondary school diploma or recognized equivalent. To qualify for this program, clients must meet the definition of a WIOA OSY Youth.

TWC urged workforce boards to work directly with the local Adult Education & Literacy providers, in El Paso being Far West Adult Education Consortium (SISD, YISD). Although collaboration between boards and AEL providers had been required, it had never been directly mandated and funded aside from this specific grant. Prior to this grant, WSB had already established a strong collaborative relationship with FWAEC and this grant provided the opportunity to demonstrate the benefits of the well-established partnership.

About the Youth Job Skills Initiative

The Youth Job Skills Initiative focuses on assisting youth that are classified as Out-of-School WIOA youth eligible (ages 16-24), who need assistance with GED, enrolling into post-secondary, post-secondary credential or employment. Once we established the recruitment process and the youth were enrolled, it was critical to address youth needs immediately to retain them in the program. Through strong communication with teachers at AEL, career navigators, and WSB program staff, we have provided valuable connections to our youth. Building that connection with them has given us the opportunity to retain them in the program and take a family centered approach to keeping them engaged. Whether they are at school, work, or at home they are given the confidence and assurance that as a team we were here help them.

Program Goals

This program aims to prepare workers -- particularly disadvantaged, low-skilled, and underemployed young adults -- for employment by providing job search assistance and training. The Youth Jobs Skills Initiative is essentially a dedicated WIOA OSY program with the same robust programming that an OSY would get with the regular program. While these are all objectives of the WIOA program in general, this grant differs in that it funds clients directly referred to WSB by AEL.

The dedicated grant also requires WSB and AEL to develop strategies for each youth by identifying career pathways that include education and employment goals, achievement objectives, and the services that come with achieving those goals. Services are meant to be designed to prepare the youth for employment into in-demand occupations.

WSB provides participating youth clients with the following:

- Services leading to the attainment of a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, or a recognized postsecondary credential;
- Preparation for postsecondary educational and training opportunities;
- Academic or career and technical training that leads to the attainment of recognized postsecondary credentials; an
- Services that lead to meaningful sustained employment.

Successful performance is measured by entry into unsubsidized employment, retention in unsubsidized employment, and earnings.

Funding Sources

In July of 2019, WSB was awarded a \$139,000 which is meant to last through August 31, 2021. The funds are specifically tied to costs for services the client receives such as the wages for temporary employment, support services, and testing. The funds do not pay for any WSB administrative costs, which means those costs are leveraged and absorbed by the traditional WIOA OSY funds.

Program Challenges

Some of the challenges encountered throughout this program include the intensive case management necessary for some clients. Some clients are teen parents and some individuals come from households with drug abuse and domestic violence. The challenges related to reaching these populations were further exasperated by COVID-19 and its impact on in-person educational opportunities. Not all clients maintain a consistent mental focus, determination, motivation and support to follow the pathway for this program.

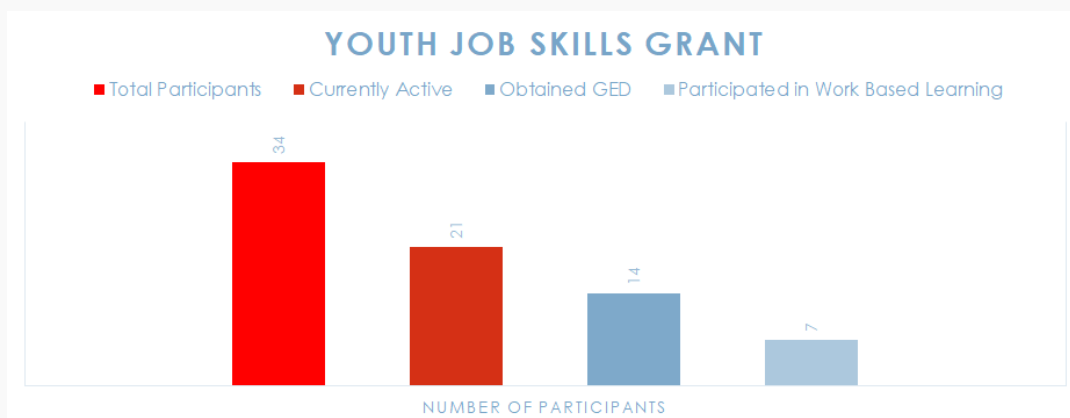
Prior to COVID-19, participants often had an in-person teacher who could identify their needs and reach out to a Career Navigator. For example, if a participant needed help with transportation, then they could support youth with support services and connect them at different access points. Fortunately, WSB has developed the relationships needed to identify these barriers. It is important to keep participants in contact with another to build community and encourage each other to complete the program.

Increasing access points and relaying the information in a way that is directly relevant to the participants has been an important way to ensure success and lift barriers. Emphasizing the benefits of a long-term education and discussing various career pathways with participants can also increase positive outcomes. This program can help participants identify a goal to further their education (college or technical schools) and furthermore, assist them with the various steps that will help them

earn higher wages. It is especially important to break down any barriers to achieving training, certification, or other means of achieving higher wages. This program ultimately aims to help people see that they can support their family and stay in school or figure out how to improve your career as they help their family.

Outcomes and Successes

This initiative has provided tremendous opportunities for our underserved opportunity youth. At the onset, WSB thought to do mass outreach and enroll as many participants as possible. However, after meeting with our AEL partner we quickly realized we needed to take a different approach. We submitted a plan to TWC to target a small group of youth that needed the most help; a Cohort model. The first group started with 15 participants. There is an overflow pool of 40 additional potential participants that can be brought in after attrition. We intend to increase the size of the cohorts or run simultaneous small cohorts, depending on the needs of each group.



By working with our AEL partner, we quickly exceeded our initial enrollment target. In comparison, the target for GED completion was low. Rather than focusing strictly on the candidates that could achieve the GED target the fastest, we chose to slow down our process and focus on serving this group with empathy and patience. The youth population faces numerous challenges and we understand the importance of assisting these individuals with taking first small steps towards their long-term goals. We intensified our offerings for support services since they are very helpful in addressing immediate needs and providing stabilization while the students embarked on their GED quest. When the time was right, we transitioned participants into work-based learning assignments.

The employment target is the same as the enrollment target. Employment continued to fluctuate as participants learned to balance work, life, and school. Our youth were met with challenges in retaining employment and meeting the expectations of keeping up with their GED. COVID-19 quickly changed that reality for our youth. Interestingly, we have seen a stronger commitment in them completing their GED.

Overall, this program has taught us the importance of assisting the youth in overcoming their first educational barrier of obtaining a high school diploma or equivalency. We are now focusing on the transition process between GED to post-secondary education, along with supporting them while they work towards a recognized post-secondary credential.

About the Support Services

Support Services are a component of the overall WIOA Youth program designed to eliminate the barriers youth have in order to assist them with successfully completing the program. These services enable an individual to participate in WIOA activities (such as, but not limited to, assistance with transportation, childcare, housing, health care, educational testing, and work-related tools). Upon eligibility confirmation and enrollment into the WIOA Youth program all youth are eligible to receive support services. The most prevalent support services provided to these participants included transportation and work attire.

Program Challenges

One of the many challenges with serving our youth is assisting them in raising awareness of the skills needed for job readiness. We spend a lot of time working with our youth to prepare them for the real world of work and still find that their circumstances can prevent them from successfully completing the program. The 14 elements have assisted us in the triage of systemic poverty and issues they face. We often find ourselves mitigating several barriers at once in order to give them the holistic services they need to be successful.

Outcomes and Successes

WIOA Youth Program was able to serve 249 youth during 2020.



About Workforce Solutions Borderplex

Workforce Solutions Borderplex (WSB) is the public workforce system in the six-county Borderplex region that assists employers in finding quality employees, and training individuals with the skills necessary to thrive in the workplace. We administer a broad range of programs and services to effectively address local workforce issues. Workforce Solutions also establishes partnerships with various stakeholders within the region to improve education, employment, and economic development. Our organization aims to provide skilled workers for employers by advancing education, employment, entrepreneurship, and economic development opportunities in support of global competitiveness and regional prosperity. Ultimately, we are interested in empowering the most dynamic workforce to achieve global competitiveness and regional prosperity.