



Supporting the Development and Retention of a World Class Workforce

Jeffrey S. Swartz, Executive Director

Robert Weil, Chair

LITERACY COMMITTEE
 MEETING MINUTES
 TUESDAY, APRIL 6, 2021
 ZOOM MEETING AT THE WDB OFFICE, 1111 MARLKRESS ROAD, CHERRY HILL, NJ

ATTENDANCE – LITERACY COMMITTEE

MEMBERS		10-Nov-20	1-Dec-20	5-Jan-21	2-Feb-21	2-Mar-21	4-Apr-21
Brahl, Ken CHAIR	Ravitz Family Shoprites	X	X	X	X	X	X
Patti Beach	Learning Link, Camden County One-Stop Career Center	X		X		X	X
Cirii, Frank	Local Area Operations Director, Camden County One Stop	X	X			X	X
Dann, Carol	Hopeworks Camden						
Daunoras, Heidi	Pine Hill School District	X	X	X	X	x	X
De, Shyamoli	Literacy Volunteers of America			X		X	
Druce, Jennifer	Camden County Library		X			X	
Fugee, Antoinette	Center for Family Services, Inc.					X	
Hill, Lauren Dr.	Camden County College	X		X		X	X
Kalitan, Marlyn Vice Chair	Kalitan Consulting	X	X	X	X	X	X
Knopf, Dick	Marketing Professional Services		X	X	X		X
Mitchell, Danielle	RobinsNest Inc	X		X			
Strobl, Holly	Council Women, Clementon Borough						
Walker, Eric	RobinsNest Inc						X
Young, Jennifer	Verizon	X	X				
Swartz, Jeffrey S.	WDB	X	X	X	X	X	X
Varallo, Kathleen	WDB	X		X	X	X	X

WELCOME

Ken Brahl, Literacy Chair, called the meeting to order at 8:41am. He welcomed attendees and thanked them for calling in to the Zoom meeting. He welcomed Eric Walker, Volunteer and Community Partnership Coordinator, Orchard’s Family Success Center, filling in for Danielle Mitchell. Ken asked the committee to review the minutes from Tuesday, March 2nd and asked if there were any corrections or additions. Patty Beach noted her title is Learning Link Counselor. Hearing no further comments, he asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Heidi D Daunoras made the first motion; Dr. Lauren Hill made the second motion. By a unanimous vote to the affirmative, the motion was carried and the meeting minutes March 2nd, 2021, were approved.

ONE-STOP & LEARNING LINK UPDATES

Frank Cirri, Local Area Operations Director, reported all county staff are working full time at the One-Stop. He said the application to make the Learning Link a testing site for the HighSet, GED, High School Equivalency has been completed, signed, submitted, and awaiting approval. Frank thanked Dr. Hill and Patty Beach for their hard work on the application process. Frank said it will be a great advantage for the One-Stop to be a resource for testing and being able to bring customers to full completion of the process. He reported that referrals are still slow. He encouraged the committee to forward any possible customers for Learning Link and

Training Grants. Customers can engage with the Learning Link services online outside of testing which can be done by appointment.

Frank reported that all safety protocols are being followed at the One-Stop and proper entry and screening is in place. He said a log is being kept for anyone entering or leaving the building in case contact tracing is needed.

Frank said One-Stop staff are still attending the food distribution events. They help with food giveaway and make sure that the Virtual Services Directory is inserted into the bag or box giveaways. He said everyone who gets food gets information about One-Stop and partner services.

Counselors are available to meet with customers by appointment on a case-by-case basis.

Follow this link to the Camden County One-Stop Career Center -Virtual Services Directory:

<https://www.camdencounty.com/service/employment/job-training-placement/>

Dick Knopf, Marketing and Professional Services, asked what type of customers are requesting Learning Link Services. Patty Beach, Counselor, Learning Link, said customers that are in need of increasing their reading or math adult basic skills or they are looking to get their HighSet which is their high school diploma. Frank said many customers are coming in for training which is funded by the One-Stop Resource Center. There is a minimum required 9th grade skill level to qualify for funded training, so customers use the learning link to increase their skills. Customers get tested first and if their skill levels are low then Patty and other counselors assist the customers in raising those levels. Frank noted that customers vary in age range. Some customers have been with the Learning Link for years and are considered regulars and some are younger customers who may have dropped off learning and want to catch up and get their skills back up to par. Some customers have graduated from high school but when tested, they find their skill levels are lower in math or reading or both. The Committee discussed other possible barriers to employment that might bring customers into the Learning Link such as language or health challenges that would cause them to want to change career paths. Patty said outside of testing and orientation to the program, most of the work is online based so counselors do not have enough interaction with the customers to get into their more personal challenges. Kathleen noted that the WDB provided a letter of support for a NJ grant funded program called “ReWork” run by the Center for Family Services. The program specifically addresses individuals or family members who might have been affected in any way by addiction. These individuals are provided supportive services to prepared them for re-entry in the workforce. Some are referred to the Resource Center and Learning Link.

METRIX NJ UPSKILL LAUNCH

Jeffrey S. Swartz, Executive Director, reported that the Metrix Online Learning Program was successfully launched in some counties around the state during the pandemic. The program allows a customer to study free courses online. The licensing for the program is very expensive so through the efforts and lobbying of WDB Directors, the State Department of Labor agreed to purchase the licensing for the entire state for an eight-month pilot period. Training has begun in the local areas to familiarize staff with the program. WDB and One-Stop staff attended the training. Jeff said the program is available to any state resident. They do not have to be unemployed. The program can be used for incumbent workers who want to increase their skill sets. Kathleen said the program is an online based learning platform. Residents can register and are then sent a username and password. They are registered for a period of six months. The courses include anything from Quick Books to

Microsoft Office and some courses that result in a certificate of completion for further credential testing. Once a participant completes that full module type course, they print a voucher that can be submitted to the One-Stop for supportive services and testing fees. Frank noted the trainings are self-paced and online. Ken asked if an employer could put employees through the training. Jeff confirmed the program is available to anyone living in the state and encouraged Ken to look at the programs to see how they could apply to his staff. Marlyn Kalitan, Career Consultant, Vice Chair, Literacy, said she will look at the program for personal use and knowledge for the library and committee.

LITERACY SHARING & BOOK DRIVE UPDATES

Heidi Daunoras, Director, Curriculum, Pine Hill Schools, reported the Book Smiles Organization partnered with the Food Bank of South Jersey and donated 10,000 books for distribution along with food needs. She said book collections have been so successful that Larry Abrams, Founder/Executive Director, is currently running a fundraiser to purchase another transport vehicle. The Booksmiles organization continues to garner the attention of county residents and even book publishers are donating to the organization. Booksmiles looks for every way they can distribute the books to families in need. Dick asked if other schools are involved besides Pine Hill. Heidi said the program is open to all schools especially title one schools. Title one schools are those that receive federal funding for free or reduced lunch programs. There is an easy application process. Any teacher can sign up to pick up classroom learning books for their students on Wednesdays or Sundays. They can also pick up books they can give to their students to take home. The intention, especially due to hybrid or remote learning, is to get books to the students where they are, at home, and to families who do not have home libraries. Heidi said she formed a team early in the pandemic in a pilot effort to get books to families during the lock down. That program was so well received that it continued to grow and now many teams in other schools are forming the same types of efforts to collect and distribute books. She said Larry Abrams started the book smiles initiative just two years ago when a student of his shared, they did not have a home library or any books at home. Larry was surprised and wanted to do something to help and so that is how it all started. Heidi said the greatest thing through all efforts is to see youth and teens getting involved. Her son is one of them and it has been an opportunity to participate in something positive amid everything going on. The Adults may be supporting Youth, but it is the kids who are accomplishing the really great efforts. Its great to see the commitment and the reasons why these young men and woman are getting involved. Jeff asked Heidi to invite her son to join the committee and share his story. Heidi said he is a senior and would probably be more than happy to attend. He has been asked to speak at another company about his community service. She said it might be a challenge to attend a meeting until the summer months after graduation. Ken thanked Heidi for her and her son's contributions to literacy outreach.

LITERACY LIBRARY RESOURCE GUIDE

Kathleen Varallo, Administrative Assistant, reported she received additional library listings from Jennifer Druce, Associate Director, Camden County Library System, and is in the process of editing the guide with additions requested by the committee at the last meeting such as Literacy Volunteers of Camden County contacts. The additions are causing a revised document and she will complete it to fit to a two-sided, trifold, 11 by 17 page. For those attending the meeting for the first time, Kathleen explained that the committee set a goal of creating a listing of all the libraries in the county with the idea, that libraries can offer a safe space for help and with literacy and career search. She said there is no one listing of all the libraries in Camden County. The

Committee hopes to complete the document for outreach and for future efforts to partner with the libraries. The guide will be posted to the WDB website along with the Literacy Needs Assessment. She said the library guide will be ready for final approval at the next meeting.

Kathleen reminded the committee that the Camden County Library System is offering digital service library cards to all residents in the county until COVID-19 restrictions are lifted. Marlyn asked if the card was only useable for digital services. Kathleen confirmed it would probably be valid for digital services. She said anyone can enter any library but would not be able to check out any materials without showing ID and a library card.

Ken thanked Kathleen for her efforts and noted the committee may be the first to have compiled this type of complete listing of libraries in the County. He will look forward to the final draft for approval at the next meeting. He said this has been the perfect quarantine project for the committee. He thanked all committee members for their review and contributions to completing the Library Resource Guide.

Jeff announced the State will be offering funding for another Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) and the WDB did submit a proposal to serve up to 45 youth. Staff has contacted some employers who participating in the program in the past. Most were very happy with the program and would be willing to host youth again this year. Jeff said most of the parameters remain the same, it is an eight-week program, 20-25 hours per week, with an additional 4-5 hours of work skills training component added. This year the only criteria, is that participants ages 16-24 must live in Camden County. There are no income eligibility requirements this year. Participants will be paid a stipend of \$12.00 per hour. Jeff encouraged committee members to spread the word to obtain more employers and let youth know about the program as well. Jeff said Kathleen will be overseeing the skills development workshops this year. He thanked those on the committee that volunteered themselves to these workshops including Marlyn Kalitan and Ravitz Family Market Staff. He hoped they will participate again this year. Kathleen said the WDB will be introducing the participants to the Metrix Upskill as part of their skills development. She said we are also hoping to engage the youth a bit more during the zoom-based workshops. An example to more engagement will be that participants might pick out their most feared interview questions and practice answering them in breakout rooms with fellow peers.

Jeff also discussed some other possible funding opportunities for additional summer programs. He will report more if those programs get further developed. Dr. Lauren Hill, Director, Adult Basic Skills, Camden County College, said it sounds like the SYEP has evolved and will allow for more youth reach. She said the first year was very restrictive. Jeff agreed and said some participants in the southern part of the county had some barriers to getting to worksites. This year's criteria may make it easier to find worksites in their local area. Heidi said matching youth more closely to their career interests will be more beneficial to the youth. She said one of the greatest prevention efforts is to give youth a positive work experience at an early age with mentors and positive role models. Jeff said Camden County may serve less youth than some other counties but its more about the quality of the experience. He said the interview and screening process practiced in our local area seems to work out better for both the youth and the employers. Ken spoke about his challenges to hiring committed employees. He said he would be happy to accept youth who have experienced the SYEP program and completed the work skills training. He said Ravitz Family Markets has started a Futures Team to give youth a controlled program that meets minor's employment restrictions but gives youth a positive in-store experience.

The futures program is now employing up to 18 youth who work 4pm – 8pm in certain areas of cashier and stocking the store and they have every other weekend off. The program is working out well for the youth and the store.

Ken asked if there were any other questions, comments, or updates. Dick asked if the WDB will be considering in-person meetings anytime soon. Jeff said the WDB will keep its virtual meeting policy at least through the summer months. Attendance has been very good, and members seem to be happy with meeting virtually. He shared his thoughts with the Executive Committee, and they agree. The Committee discussed concerns about meeting in-person because COVID – 19 cases have been on the rise again, in the past month and the vaccine process is not completed for most residents in the County. Ken thanked everyone for their active participation and looks forward to a time when in-person meetings can resume. He wished them a safe month.

NEXT MEETING: The next Literacy Committee Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, May 4, 2021 at 8:30am. The WDB will send out meeting materials and Zoom conferencing information prior to the meeting.

Submitted by

Kathleen Varallo,

Administrative Assistant