

## LGFCU Excellence in Innovation Award Project Evaluation

<b>Project ID</b>	GG-14
<b>Title of Program</b>	Investment in Youth Job Skills Development Pays Real Dividends
<b>Program Category</b>	General Government
<b>Submission Date</b>	6/24/2016 1:01:22 PM
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<b>Implementation Date</b>	3/10/2015
<b>FLSA Designation</b>	Both (if applicable to a team)
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### Description of Productivity Improvement

New Hanover County's Community Justice Services Department's Community Service and Restitution (CSR) Program facilitates successful completion of community service sanctions assigned to youth who are court ordered or court diverted and referred to the department. CSR staff, utilizing existing county resources, began developing an innovative Job Skills Development (JSD) component to enhance the services provided to our youth with the goal of preparing them to successfully enter the local job market. CSR staff collaborated with our county library to secure a meeting space and access to educational and technological resources for the facilitation of the first successful cohort in Spring 2015.

JSD seeks to further the county goals of reducing juvenile recidivism rates while promoting increased school participation and high school graduation rates. This is accomplished through collaborative efforts with community partners and local stakeholders to empower youth seeking employment in the local job market. Of the ten youth that have graduated from the first two groups of the JSD component, four are now employed. All the youth are attending school full time and the program has experienced a zero-percent recidivism rate among its graduates.

**Description of why this project was initiated**

Youth unemployment is a growing national epidemic and according to a 2013 study, North Carolina falls 6% below the national average with only four states reporting higher unemployment rates. North Carolina is also one of only two states in the nation that currently prosecutes individuals 16 and older as adults, which results in a proportionately higher percentage of job seekers with adult criminal records. In North Carolina, youth are not permitted to be employed until they reach the age of 16 without first obtaining a youth employment certificate, creating additional barriers to employment. The adverse impact of these factors on youth prompted action by the CJS staff to confront the challenges with a new and innovative programming approach. The objective is to prepare youth with the necessary skills to enter the local job market and help alleviate the structural barriers to employment confronted by our youth. From a multitude of areas, including the department's customer service surveys, community conversations, and feedback from youth and families served, a gap in services was identified. From this, CJS began to focus on addressing the deficits in soft skills for youth to enter and compete successfully in the local employment market. Parents also expressed a desire for their children to benefit from the non-monetary benefits, the values, and the soft skills that come from employment such as teamwork, respect, time management and experience in a positive, structured work environment.

**Quantifiable results (sustainability, cost savings, cost avoidance and/or a higher level of service).**

**Indication of what resources were used and what was done with any accrued time savings**

The improvement was a higher level of service was delivered at the same cost. Existing Staff, Existing Collaborative Partners, and Existing Facilities within context of existing core Community Service & Restitution (CSR) Service. Added Value to current CSR service obligations under Juvenile Crime Prevention Grant (JCPC) provisions.

Implementation of the Community Service and Restitution Job Skills Development component required no additional funding from New Hanover County. CSR realigned its resources and strategies to target the necessary skill deficits of the youth who are being served rather than continuing to conduct business as usual. One of the greatest strengths of the program was effectively identifying and utilizing existing resources available to the public. The New Hanover County Library is a tremendous resource and partner for the program and has provided meeting space and educational tools on a weekly basis. Additionally, the library has a computer lab with internet access that patrons may use at no cost, which has also allowed CSR staff to assist youth with navigating online job searches, applications and other basic activities, such as setting up an email account. The JSD component takes full advantage of other community events offered free of charge to the public including job fairs, community college and university resources, as well as non-profit community events.

Results / Measures are Youth Outcomes: Successful Employment Gained, Successful Maintenance of Enrollment in School. Cost Avoidance in youth's positive recidivism data and early successful termination of court ordered services via successful completion of all. During defined criteria timeframe: 10 Youth Successfully Completed, 4/10 became employed and 0/10 recidivated during the timeframe.

### **Other descriptive information**

New Hanover County's Community Service and Restitution (CSR) Program operates in partnership with over forty community stakeholders to facilitate successful completion of court-ordered and court-diverted community service hours for youth ages 6-17. The CSR program is the only one in North Carolina that provides its services to Level II youth as a dispositional alternative to secure custody.

Youth serve at various locations throughout the county ranging from local churches, retirement homes, and food banks to an array of governmental and non-profit organizations who strive to provide a diverse and enriching service-learning experience. In addition, for appropriate youth who are referred to the CSR program, a recently-formed Job Skills Development (JSD) component provides an understanding of the local job market, as well as strategies for seeking and obtaining employment. It also helps to empower the youth to independently secure and maintain employment through interpersonal and soft skills development.

The JSD component came to fruition in 2015 as a result of numerous conversations between program and court staff, community partners, and the youth and families served. Evidence-based research was also conducted on the long-term, positive outcomes correlated with youth employment. CSR staff worked on developing a programming strategy to fill the unmet needs of youth seeking employment. The county staff recognized a significant knowledge and skills gap in our youth, which presented real barriers to employment. While service-learning projects foster the development and growth of hard skills "such as constructing and disassembling simple projects, light gardening and cleaning" many soft skills like work ethic, time management and teamwork were relatively foreign to the youth being served.

The new JSD component integrates service-learning experiences with soft skills development, framing the CSR program experience in a vocational and educational context. The JSD component aims to better prepare youth for today's economy, while placing emphasis on the unique vocational opportunities associated with New Hanover County's vibrant service, health and manufacturing industries. According to a 2013 U.S. Census Bureau report, North Carolina falls 6% below the national average for youth employment rates, with only four states higher than the North Carolina youth unemployment rate. Positive outcomes generated from youth employment include increased labor force participation rates with a correlated decrease in high school dropout rates and perhaps even more importantly, a decrease in juvenile recidivism.

The JSD component is specifically designed for youth seeking their first employment opportunity and is an eight-week course designed to provide the skills necessary to be successful in the local job market. The highly structured program is facilitated in partnership with the New Hanover County Library and held weekly in library facilities. Each week, youth are introduced to a new module which builds upon the materials and knowledge presented in previous weeks. As an initial part of the JSD component, youth are required to attend a tour of the library where they are informed of a number of employment resources offered by the library's Job Lab. The lab provides career counseling, resume coaching, job listings in the county, as well as access to computers and the internet.

Upon completion of the eight week program, youth are provided with individualized resource packets, including sample job applications, resumes, and a "skill bank" that is comprised of specific, personalized skill-building sets. Families also receive an aftercare plan that offers relevant resources for those who wish to pursue further community involvement and exploration of vocational opportunities. Additionally, youth and their guardians are provided an anonymous customer service survey upon completion of the program, which allows for immediate feedback regarding service quality and accessibility. CSR staff review each survey and strategically work to continually improve the impact and effectiveness of its programming.

The eight week breakdown of the JSD component consists of the following:

Week 1 - Why Work? Youth and staff participate in discussions revolving around community dynamics, cyclical poverty, crime, individual experiences and the non-monetary benefits of employment. Desired Outcome: A heightened understanding of one's community, self and the implications of employment.

Week 2 - Personal Values: Open conversation and exercise regarding individual and community values and their relation to vocational choices. Desired Outcome: Increased self-awareness and focus on values unique to each individual as well as collective value clusters.

Week 3 - Skill Inventory: Each youth develops an inventory of skills through review of current articles, discussion and group activity. Desired Outcome: Growth in self-confidence and identification of skills each youth possesses, as well as avenues to develop additional positive attributes.

Week 4 - Resume Development: Staff applies information obtained in previous weeks to introduce youth to the concept of a resume and assist them in developing a resume document. Desired Outcome: Production of a hard copy resume for each individual participant.

Week 5 - Job Applications: Youth complete job applications to businesses of their choice and are provided real-time feedback from CSR staff. Desired Outcome: Understanding the basic job-seeking techniques while building knowledge related to initiating employment opportunities via job applications.

Week 6 - Job Applications: Youth utilize application forms developed in the previous week to complete additional job applications with minimal assistance from staff. Desired Outcome: Youth will display the ability to independently complete a job application with zero errors or mistakes which would hinder employment prospects.

Week 7 - Interviews: Staff conducts individual and group mock job interviews with youth. Handshakes, basic etiquette, posture, tone, presentation and reviews of high frequency job interview questions are covered. Desired Outcome: Youth will become familiar with the job interview process, basic etiquette and demonstrate increased self-confidence in interview settings.

Week 8 - Employment: Group discussion and instruction regarding application follow up, the first day of work and how work experience relates to educational and career opportunities. Desired Outcome: Youth will be prepared for the first day of work and have functional knowledge of skills obtained during employment, with an emphasis on leveraging those learned skills to further personal and professional growth and development.

The first two groups of youth to successfully graduate from the JSD component included ten individuals, four of whom have since obtained employment locally. This includes one fifteen-year-old young man who was court-ordered 100 hours of community service. His community service was completed at a local food bank, an arts education center, and through an auto detailing activity in the CSR program. The JSD component helped to frame the experience and knowledge he gained through service-learning projects in an employment context. He was able to obtain employment and used his wages to independently pay his court-ordered restitution along with purchasing new school clothes for his siblings. An agreement was reached between the young man, his employer and the court

counselor to guarantee a part-time work schedule once the school year began. Of significance, he attended the second round of the JSD component as an assistant and facilitator, leading the other youth in his example of success.