



Vermont State Workforce Development Board

Youth Committee - Meeting Minutes

March 18th, 2022

1:00 pm – 2:00 pm

Committee Members in Attendance: Rose Lucenti, Loretta Stalnaker, Kym Anderson, David Rubin, Holly Morehouse, Caelan Keenan, Tracy Verge, Laurel Butler, Jess DeCarolis, Kreig Pinkham, Elizabeth Frascoia

Guests in Attendance: Victoria Biondolillo, Abby Rhim

Executive Director Victoria Biondolillo began the meeting at 1:03 pm. She told participants that we will begin with introductions, followed by sharing challenges that everyone is seeing regarding youth in the workforce. She then wants to determine big buckets to focus on so we can create a roadmap for our goals and objectives for future meetings.

David Rubin, Dean of Administration of Vermont Technical College

Holly Morehouse, Executive Director of Vermont Afterschool

Rose Lucenti, Vermont Department of Labor

Kym Anderson, Director of Orange County Restorative Justice Center

Caelan Keenan, Youth Program Manager of Vermont Works for Women

Jess DeCarolis, Division Director of Student Pathways at the Vermont Agency of Education

Loretta Stalnaker, Chief of Police of Royalton Police Department

Laurel Butler, Specialty Advisory of the Vermont Small Business Development Center/Vermont State Colleges System

Tracy Verge, VYEP Program Administrator of Vermont Department of Labor

Elizabeth Frascoia, Executive Director of the Governor's Institutes of Vermont

Kreig Pinkham, Executive Director for the Washington County Youth Service Bureau

Executive Director Victoria Biondolillo stressed the importance of engaging with our youth, whether that is making sure they are getting the assistance that they need or showing them a diverse array of opportunities that they can explore. She then opened the floor for folks to answer where they think the state is with engagement, tracking, etc. regarding bringing youth into the workforce system.

Kreig Pinkham started by highlighted the demographic reality of Vermont. He shared that we are at a place where population is one of the most important issues that we should be focusing on. We need to be talking about our aging population and how to attract, recruit and retain young people.

Executive Director Victoria Biondolillo shared Jess DiCarolis' contribution to the chat stating that we are the third oldest state. She then asked Jess or Tracy Verge to speak on the work already being done currently.

Jess DeCarolis agreed with Kreig Pinkham regarding our demographic crisis. She then stated that the pandemic has forced us to utilize technology to better connect with kids and expose them to opportunities. That being said, she agreed that there are, of course, persistent issues that need to be addressed. Finally, she urged us to think about encouraging kids to become global citizens. It is just as important to encourage them to explore opportunities and leave Vermont as it is to ensure we have affordable homes, dynamic careers and other elements that attract them to return.

Tracy Verge agreed with Jess DeCarolis. She went on to say that currently, there is a heavy emphasis on re-educating folks on different pathways. Whether it is the possibility of an apprenticeship or a four-year college, she added that we need to make sure kids are getting the information they need to see all the opportunities available to them.

Executive Director Victoria Biondolillo then asked the group where everyone feels we need to go, as a state, to engage youth in our state? Additionally, if they leave, how do we maintain contact to support and assist them so they potentially come back?

Laurel Butler said she believes there is a significant missed opportunity that we don't teach personal finance intelligence in our schools. She stressed that if someone doesn't understand finance, then how would they know what kind of career or pay-back there is in any opportunity. If we don't look at financial basics, young people can't identify what their benefits are and why they would want to stay in Vermont. They need to understand cost-benefits to see opportunity.

Holly Morehouse shared that she hopes we look at not only creating the opportunities but all the things that surround individuals which determine if they can take advantage of said opportunities (technology, transportation, food, clothing, etc.). The broader understanding of what they will need to gain access to opportunities must be acknowledged.

Kreig Pinkham stated that we need to shift beyond just the focus of youth. He agrees that we are doing lots of good work, however, we aren't shifting the frame to include how we are preparing communities to engage in community-based planning that creates environments where young people feel they could belong.

Elizabeth Frascoia shared that she grew up caring about music and art. Without those interests, she feels she wouldn't have been very engaged. She has seen that many Vermonters seem disengaged, partially due to the pandemic, and that we must widen the frame of variables when thinking about engaging youth. For a young person to want to be near where they grew up, the community needs to show them support. She then suggested potentially adding youth to this conversation.

Jess DeCarolis shared that with so many requirements in school, whether that is comprehensive health, education or financial literacy, some things, for example band, get pushed to the side. She then urged

the group to examine how we utilize out of school time, so that all spaces are contributing to welcoming youth into their communities. She then added that infrastructure is very valuable. We need to look at broadband, construction, etc. as a combination of contributors which equate to how youth feel about belonging in their communities.

Caelan Keenan then added the importance of mentorship. She noted that whether it is a mentor or boss, kids need someone to look up to in order to make connections and promote their successes.

Executive Director Victoria Biondolillo summarized that there is both the student and their unique path, and both must be considered. She then raised the point of how we are creating best practices that support young people and the next generation of workers. We have some kids that have a support system already, and we just need to engage them with the community. Other kids, those that have less support, may need some sort of template or wraparound of services in order to promote collaboration to best create success.

Kym Anderson noted the level of trauma she is seeing. Due to the pandemic, but also the opioid crisis, the mental health crisis is severe. She then added that youth is a group that ends up falling through the cracks.

Tracy Verge noted that although we all work with the same group, we have many different agencies and programs. She stressed the need for collaboration and communication to get the most success with individuals.

Executive Director Victoria Biondolillo agreed. She added that we need to identify key players in individual areas and take a more holistic approach so we can better help one another.

Tracy Verge shared that her department is having difficulty finding the kids who are currently falling through the cracks. She noted that they are doing a lot of outreach but struggling to find kids.

Executive Director Victoria Biondolillo provided background of Tracy, saying that she works for WIOA youth programming. She then added that for enrollment purposes, it can be tricky if the system is not able to identify the kids that need assistance. She then added that if we can work collectively, we would better be suited to funnel kids towards services.

Kreig Pinkham stated that looking at examples such as foster care, the entire system has done a good job connecting resources. He suggested that we could use that model as an example for districts.

Executive Director Victoria Biondolillo then asked the group if there were any other thoughts or ideas.

Holly Morehouse added that during these times, the stress and anxiety kids are experiencing is generational. She noted that we might not quite understand the long-term impacts just yet.

Executive Director Victoria Biondolillo agreed that mental health needs to be a significant part of the conversation.

Chief Loretta Stalnaker noted her finding of a lack of engagement with kids. She stated that it is hard to get them to break out of the status quo.

Executive Director Victoria Biondolillo added that including kids in these conversations would likely be of value.

Jess DeCarolis liked the idea of engaging youth. She suggested programs she has seen implemented where you engage both older and younger youths, collectively, and how many positive results can come of this exposure. She also noted a “crosswalk of essential services” mapping project and how it can be resourceful if put in the hands of adults.

Krieg Pinkham noted the importance of incentives. He mentioned how young people tend to identify barriers to employment, sometimes ones that can be easily navigated. If we can get business owners and employers to utilize incentives, it will break down barriers for youth gaining employment.

Executive Director Victoria Biondolillo agreed with Krieg Pinkham, adding that with the State Workforce Development Board’s makeup consisting of so many business owners, it might be helpful to include them in some conversations regarding what could be provided to incentivize youths.

Elizabeth Frascoia noted that if we aim to serve all youths, we need to acknowledge the many different identities that a young person might have. She then stressed that we need to think about how we can move towards a more universal design. She ended saying that whatever ideas we think of, they need to be inclusive.

Executive Director Victoria Biondolillo shared that for next steps, she will work on outlining some “major buckets” the committee should address. She will then send these ideas out to the group to get feedback prior to the next meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 1:54 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Abby Rhim.

Abby Rhim, Executive Assistant

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