

# SECOND CHANCES, SAFER COUNTIES

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & REENTRY



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## REGION VI WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD

### THE OPPORTUNITY FOR CHANGE

The Region VI Workforce Development Board (WDB) was created under the federal Workforce Investment Act of 1998, and has always had a focus on reentry of individuals returning to the community from the justice system, in particular on youth reentry. This is due in part to the fact that the WDB has a youth committee made up of experts that advise on youth-related issues. A youth committee member who is employed at the Kenneth “Honey” Rubenstein Juvenile Center (Rubenstein Center), which houses approximately 50 youth in rural West Virginia, was able to clearly articulate a need for education and workforce training for the youth being housed there. The Region VI WDB decided it wanted to concentrate on working with youth returning home from the Rubenstein Center and several years ago applied for a number of grants to provide funding for such programming.

### REGION VI'S MODEL

The Region VI Workforce Development Board is one of seven regional workforce boards in West Virginia, and serves 13 counties in the northern part of the state (Barbour, Braxton, Doddridge, Gilmer, Harrison, Lewis, Marion, Monongalia, Preston, Randolph, Taylor, Tucker and Upshur). It is funded through a combination of sources, including the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and state grants. For example, as the WDB worked with the Rubenstein Center, staff discovered that nearly 80 percent of the youth there had some type of learning disability or behavioral issue, so the WDB was able to obtain a grant focused on serving youth with those needs in 2011 from the West Virginia Department of Rehabilitation Services.

The Region VI WDB works with all West Virginia youth returning from the Rubenstein Center but prioritizes those youth coming back to the area, and enrolls them not only in justice-focused programming but also in the WDB's general youth programs. “Under our youth programs we work with kids to get their high school diploma or equivalency if they don't already have it,” explains Barbara DeMary, executive director of the Region VI WDB. “We also set them up with a case manager and work with juvenile justice staff if necessary. The goal is to come up with a plan to help that individual achieve what he or she wants.” An individual's plan can include anything from help with transportation

### REGION VI WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD

Serves 13 counties in West Virginia

TOTAL POPULATION: **405,623<sup>1</sup>**



<sup>1</sup> Population total derived from U.S. Census Bureau State & County QuickFacts, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/>.



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(which can be a major issue in rural West Virginia, DeMary says) to determining if the youth wants to go back to school or would rather start working.

One program DeMary is especially excited about is a wage reimbursement program that encourages employers to hire youth who have been involved in the justice system. This program is a win-win for youth and for employers, DeMary says. Youth get on-the-job training, while the employers get an employee whose pay is reimbursed up to 75 percent by the WDB, thanks to a grant through WIOA. DeMary says it has been somewhat challenging to find employers willing to participate, but she attributes that to the newness of the program. "A lot of the employers we're hoping to work with are smaller employers, and the program seems almost too good to be true," she says. "They think there must be strings attached, but I'm going to county commission meetings across the region to really explain the program to everyone."

## SUCCESSES AND OUTCOMES

While the Region VI WDB is almost wholly federally funded, its successful programs have also resulted in financial support from the counties it serves. In particular, DeMary noted that during a project that allowed at-risk youth to build and then keep a computer, every county that was able to provide funding did so. "We really do have excellent groups of county commissioners, and they've always been supportive whenever they can," she says.

The Region VI WDB has also found success in thinking creatively about funding opportunities. The grant from the Department of Rehabilitation Services is one example of this, and the WDB also has grants that serve long-term unemployed individuals. "Any time I go to a meeting, I remind everyone that we can count incarcerated adults as long-term unemployed, so long as they've been attached to the workforce at some point," DeMary explains.

## LESSONS LEARNED

**ELECTED OFFICIALS SHOULD BE EDUCATED AND INVOLVED:** The Region VI WDB consists of 13 county commissioners and three mayors, from every county served, which DeMary says is extremely helpful in getting the word out about workforce development opportunities. In a similar vein, DeMary recommends that county boards or commissions invite local workforce development agencies to their meetings so local leaders are aware of all that's being offered in their community.

**IT'S IMPORTANT TO MOVE QUICKLY WITH REENTRY SERVICES:** The transition from incarceration back to the community can be extremely difficult, so having a plan in place and work or schooling ready upon release can make a big difference in an individual's success. "You never really know what's going on in a person's home, especially with youth," DeMary says. "Early intervention is really imperative; once someone hits the door at home you have to be there and ready to help."

### FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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