

Meeting Minutes

COPC Economic Dev. & Employment Meeting

September 27, 2007

COPC Office 1816 Main Street

In Attendance: David Taylor, Stephanie Cattarin, Craig Seal, Debbie Curtis, Michael Jeswald, Jill Shuey, Melissa Brierley, John Drake, and Carl Slenk.

Updates:

1. Employment and Training Referrals:

- From 1/1/07-6/30/07, more than 900 poster inserts have been distributed to the community. The COPC office also distributed applications for the Niagara County WorkForce Investment Board's summer youth program as well as a spring job fair.
- During the last six month HUD reporting period (1/1/07-6/30/07), a one page employment referral tracking sheet was developed with an empty chart for individuals' first and last names and zip codes. The COPC office used the sheets to track individuals who were given employment and training information in packets distributed at the COPC office during free income tax assistance in February, March and April. Jill Shuey forwarded the names and zip codes over to COPC partners at the Niagara County WorkForce Investment Board One-Stop office and the Niagara Falls Housing Authority Doris W. Jones Family Resource Building. Unfortunately, this process of cross checking names and zip codes with partner new customer databases was only able to match one individual and give COPC one referral.
- Jill Shuey in April contacted seven community partners and asked if when their agency case workers or staff distributed a COPC poster insert to a customer if they could write down the individual's name and zip code on a COPC employment referral tracking sheet. The seven agencies agreed and in May the COPC office began distributing the sheets to the agencies monthly. To date, the COPC office has received zero completed employment referral tracking sheets back from partner agencies.
- Niagara University's Hospitality Training and Research Center was awarded a youth grant from the Niagara County Youth Bureau to assist economically disadvantaged out-of-school youth ages 17-21 find employment in the hospitality industry. The Hotel/Restaurant/Retail Industry Certification Program for Youth will consist of ninety hours of classroom training, a three week paid internship at a hotel, restaurant or retail store, and a Niagara University certificate upon successful completion of the program. The program also provides assistance with transportation and GED training if needed. Mike Jeswald mentioned that the Hospitality Training and Research Center has already successfully completed the first class. Recruitment is still ongoing in preparation for future classes. Melissa Brierley a NU social work student with the COPC office is assisting to take calls for the program and with the pre-screening of applicants. The COPC conference room will also be used for the programs two week training classes.

- Deborah Curtis also mentioned that the Hospitality Training and Research Center has received a grant to design and implement a high school arts and cultural internship program for minority students in Buffalo and Niagara Falls. The program will provide workforce skills for jobs in the arts and cultural industry.
- **Next Steps:**
 - The COPC office will continue to distribute the tracking sheets to agencies as well as follow up with agencies regarding any concerns with using the sheets.
 - An important next step for the Economic Development and Employment sub-committee is to review referral strategies implemented thus far as well as COPC expected outcomes. One proposal would be to re-concentrate efforts on getting individuals to walk into the COPC office where it might be easier for COPC staff and student assistants to distribute information and track referrals.

2. Small Business Assistance:

- During the 2006-2007 academic year, a graduate MBA student, William Warren, under the direction of MBA program leadership, including Stephanie Cattarin and Wick Hannan, worked with COPC to recruit MBA students to work one-on-one with businesses.
- William Warren and Stephanie Cattarin were able to recruit nine current MBA students who were interested in providing targeted technical assistance to small and family-owned businesses. The students met and reviewed the needs assessment forms submitted by the individuals who attended a workshop in January 2007. The students selected to work with two organizations.
- The students were divided into two groups and met one-on-one with their respective businesses to determine the timeline and goals for their specific projects. From February 2007 to April 2007, the nine MBA students combined volunteered over 145 hours of their time towards the project. The students compiled a company awareness and networking plan for one business and put together and assisted in starting to implement a four point marketing strategy for the other business.
- Stephanie Cattarin mentioned that there was difficulty in recruiting businesses as well as the students wished they could have done more to assist the businesses.
- Jill Shuey and Craig Seal met with Zack Casale of Main Street Business and Professional Association over the summer to discuss a proposed business assistance center on Main Street. The Main Street Business and Professional Association is interested in putting together a one-stop-shop on Main Street in Niagara Falls where prospective entrepreneurs looking to open a business can go for resources as well as current business owners looking to grow their business. John Drake mentioned that the one stop office would be housed at Center City and they are looking to see how they can partner with NU as well as NCCC's Small Business Development Center.
- Stephanie Cattarin and Craig Seal discussed with other committee members possible ways in which more NU Business students could get involved with the one-stop.

- **Next Steps:**
 - Set up a separate meeting to continue to discuss the proposed one-stop. Invite all the partners to the meeting who might be part of the one-stop. Jill will follow up with Zach Casale.

3. Tax Assistance and Financial Literacy:

- In 2007, thirty-five NU accounting students volunteered 470 hours and prepared 391 tax returns, which resulted in tax funds of \$314, 561, including \$106,223 of earned income credits to low-income taxpayers.
- In June 2007, Jill Shuey met with professors Alfonso Oddo and Dan Tompkins from Niagara University's College of Business Administration to discuss the training of students to provide financial literacy services beyond the current tax assistance program.
- It was discussed to use Professor Oddo's tax program as a model and to train students to either provide workshops or one-on-one services. Alfonso Oddo and Dan Tompkins will be looking to train students through existing classes in finance and well as utilizing students from finance clubs.
- Professor Oddo put together a list of financial literacy topics that students could be trained to provide as services to the community. Jill forwarded the list of topics to COPC partners for feedback, and community partners identified working with the elderly, individuals who do not want the responsibility of home ownership, and individuals who are financially several years away from the goal of home ownership as possible target customers.
- Several new community partners have also been identified including St. Johns AME Church Federal Credit Union and the WNY Self-Sufficiency Coalition.
- Stephanie Cattarin mentioned that the NU switch board received many calls regarding the tax program last year and did not know where to refer people. Stephanie suggested that we contact the NU switch board this year and give them a schedule and locations of the tax assistance sites.
- John Drake recommended as a possible tax assistance site for 2008 Neighborhood Housing Services on 16th. John also asked Jill to follow up with Claudia Miller of the Home Ownership Center regarding referring individuals to the center for financial literacy services.
- John Drake also discussed that Consumer Credit Counseling Services of Buffalo who uses Center City's office one day a week may be interested in relocating to the COPC office.
- **Next Steps:**
 - Jill is meeting with Professor Oddo and Professor Tompkins on October 1st to continue to financial literacy program that can start in January 2008.
 - Jill will follow up with John Drake regarding setting up a time to meet with the staff from Consumer Credit Counseling Services of Buffalo.

Submitted by: Melissa Brierley and Jill Shuey