

Niagara WDB Youth Committee Meeting

Meeting Held: 1/18/24 via Zoom

Attendees: Lindsay Collins of Collins Accounting (Chair), Brian Rotella of Niagara Falls School District, Dennis Martinez of ACCES-VR, Dawn Cody of Niagara County Employment & Training, Michele Taylor of NYS Department of Labor, Ron Piaseczny of Niagara Pride Inc., Bonnie Rice of Niagara County Workforce Development Board.

Bonnie welcomed the new Youth Committee Chair, Lindsay Collins.

Members provided introductions to one another, including their role within their agency.

Dennis said he works to help individuals with disabilities attain, achieve, and advance in employment. There is a greater focus on youth with disabilities from high schools and preparing youth with disabilities to transition into integrated employment.

Brian said he is the Assistant Principal at Niagara Falls High School and manages several programs, including PS2 (Post-Secondary Success Program). He is a member of a team that develops job shadowing and internship opportunities for students and conducts market research on existing career fields. They are building pathways for students for available jobs, such as law enforcement or health care. NFHS has 45 college credit courses and partnerships with 5 local trade unions for training students.

Dawn said she is the Senior Employment and Training Coordinator at Niagara County Employment & Training Department (NCET) and supervises several youth programs. The WIOA grant serves both in-school and out-of-school youth ages 16-24, year-round. The SYEP grant serves youth ages 14-20 who are from low income families by providing summer work experiences. The YEP grant serves the SYEP population but operates during the non-summer months. The GVP grant (which will end 3/31/24) serves youth ages 14-20 in areas of high gun violence, which is Niagara Falls and Lockport for our county. Dawn is always looking for employers that are interested in youth workers; the youth are paid through the various grant sources. Dawn also supervises a Disability Resource Coordinator, Marilyn Patterson, who advocates for people with disabilities in the community.

Michele said she works for the NYS Department of Labor (DOL) and manages several offices in Erie and Niagara Counties. DOL partners with NCET and the Buffalo Employment & Training Center which operate the youth programs in their areas. DOL hosted their first-ever Teacher Ambassador Program this past summer and it has been expanded to a permanent program. The Teacher Ambassadors were hired to work at DOL for one month and gain exposure to different careers so they can bring that knowledge back to their students and roll it into the curriculum.

Ron said he is the President of Niagara Pride, Inc. which provides scholarships to graduating seniors to pursue academics in a field that will benefit the LGBTQ community. Niagara Pride also has grants for Gay Student Alliances/Gender Sexuality Alliances in Niagara and six rural counties. They also partner with GLYS on programs and meet-ups, and host monthly meet-ups and Pride events which are open and welcoming to youth.

Bonnie Rice said she is the Executive Director of the Niagara County Workforce Development Board, which steers the funding and policies for federal WIOA dollars locally.

Lindsay Collins said she is the Vice President of Collins Accounting and also works in construction in the off-season. Collins Accounting offers a scholarship program as well.

There is an opportunity to partner with the WDB Inclusion Committee on their first-ever Career Xploration Fair to allow high school students with disabilities to talk with various employers about different occupations and to experience some demonstrations (possibly hands-on) of jobs in various career fields. The goal is for youth with disabilities to gain exposure to career fields by engaging the youth in demonstrations. It is anticipated this will expand their horizons as they consider future employment opportunities. This will be offered as a field trip to Niagara County high school youth. The WDB Youth Committee could actively participate by promoting this event, providing assistance the day of the event, and offering to assist where needed. The Youth Committee members indicated they are definitely interested in being a part of the Career Xploration Fair.

Ron mentioned the need for a go-to person at DOL to assist the local LGBTQ community with their employment related needs. Bonnie has already emailed Chris White (DOL-Albany) to see if this exists already or can be accommodated. Michele said the DOL Employment Counselors may be able to assist with this. Ron said it could be a dedicated contact person for them to refer LGBTQ individuals to, with the ability to set up a meeting if needed. Some of the issues that may be encountered include looking for resume prep assistance, how to address undergoing a name change, how to handle having your ID with a different name than the name you use, etc. Bonnie will let Ron know once she hears from Chris White.

Action Items

Youth Committee Member	Action	Due By	Completed
Dennis	Notify Inclusion Committee that Youth Committee wants to be actively involved in Career Xploration Fair		
Bonnie	Notify Ron once response is received from Chris White re: LGBTQ Liaison for employment related issues		

Next Youth Committee Meeting
April 4, 2024 at 10 a.m. via Zoom.