

A Comparison of Findings and Recommendations of Two Reports:

“Preparing Our Youth for Work: A Community Assessment”, August 2010
UNC Charlotte Urban Institute

and

“Workforce Development Sector Analysis: Focusing on Workforce Development for Adults with
Barriers to Employment in Charlotte-Mecklenburg”, August 2011
Carol Morris Consulting and The Lee Institute



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Introduction

Workforce development incorporates processes which involve a wide range of policies and programs. It consists of the training and education of job-seeking individuals with the purpose of eventually engaging the individuals with productive employment. This preparation usually occurs in two environments: organization-based development through institution-related education and community-based development through the purview of social services. Workforce development in the United States commonly focuses on two categories of individuals: adults who are 25 years of age and older who have barriers to employment; and a group often referred to as disconnected youth, typically ages 14-24 with similar barriers to employment.

Adults who have barriers to employment are usually described in terms of the variety of circumstances that contribute to their being unemployed. These include but are not limited to a lack of marketable skills, mental illness, low education levels, cultural inadequacies, homelessness, language barriers, lack of transportation, budget cuts, and stereotyping. During the current period of economic uncertainty and financial cutbacks the percentage of unemployed adults in Mecklenburg County went from 4.6 in 2007 to a high of 11.9 in 2010. The percentage of adults with barriers to employment constitutes both a large portion of this number and of the number of adults with barriers who are no longer looking for employment.

Disconnected youth are described as individuals who are not enrolled in school, not employed, not in the military, or who are not pursuing meaningful education beyond a high-school diploma. A report from Columbia University's National Center for Children in Poverty titled "A Profile of Disconnected Young Adults in 2010" indicated an increase in the national percentage of disconnected youth from 11.4 in 2000 to 14.8 in 2010. Indicators show an increasing number of disconnected youth in Mecklenburg County as well. Additional contributing factors stated in the report are that disconnection varies by age, race/ethnicity, and place of birth, but there is very little difference by gender. In The Annie E. Casey Foundation's "2009 KIDS COUNT Indicator Brief," it was concluded that disconnected youth often reflect the problems of disconnected communities.

Two reports on workforce development in Charlotte have been released in the past year, each focusing on one of these two categories of workforce development. In August 2010, the UNC Charlotte Urban Institute (the Institute) released a report on workforce development for disconnected youth, "Preparing Our Youth for Work: A Community Assessment". This report was done at the request of and with funding from Goodwill Industries of the Southern Piedmont Inc. In August 2011, Carol Morris Consulting and The Lee Institute released a report on workforce development for adults who have barriers to employment, "Workforce Development Sector Analysis: Focusing on Workforce Development for Adults with Barriers to Employment in Charlotte-Mecklenburg". This report was the result of a Foundation For The Carolinas' Community Catalyst Program grant to Goodwill Industries of the Southern Piedmont Inc., Jacob's Ladder Job Center Inc., and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Workforce Development Board.

The following pages present general information about the reports, the individual findings and recommendations of each report, and a discussion of the findings and recommendations which are common to both reports.

General Information

As seen in Table 1, the two reports had a common focus on workforce development for individuals who have disadvantages and challenges in achieving gainful employment. The primary differences between the two reports stem from the differing target age ranges of the individuals who were being assisted by the various programs. These age differences led to different criteria being used to identify the individuals who were the recipients of workforce development program services. This in turn created different report expectations and outcomes, even though they shared a similar goal- assessing the state of workforce development services in Charlotte-Mecklenburg.

Table 1. Comparison of General Information

		UNC Charlotte Urban Institute	Carol Morris Consulting/The Lee Institute
Report		Preparing our Youth for Work: A Community Assessment	Workforce Development Sector Analysis: Focusing on Workforce Development for Adults with Barriers to Employment in Charlotte-Mecklenburg
Date of Report Delivery		August 2010	August 2011
Initiator		Goodwill Industries of the Southern Piedmont, Inc.	Goodwill Industries of the Southern Piedmont Inc., Jacobs Ladder Job Center Inc., and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Workforce Development Board.
Commission		Assess the needs of youth in Mecklenburg County in terms of workforce development and recommend changes to put it on track. Assess Goodwill's youth employment services to determine Goodwill's role.	Analyze the existing workforce development sector and identify opportunities for strengthening community services for adult job seekers, particularly those with traditional barriers to employment.
Components of Report		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion of disconnected youth in society • Identification of disconnected youth characteristics • Examples of nationwide best practices • Catalog of youth job services in Mecklenburg County • Responses from youth, parents, civic leaders, employers, service providers, and school professionals, and recommendations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive analysis of public and non-profit workforce development sector • Identification of opportunities for strengthening coordination, integration, and leveraging of resources • Responses from workforce development service providers and funders, program participants, and employers, and recommendations
Target Population	Age	Youth (14-24)	Adults 25+
	Criteria	Disconnected or at risk of failing to transition successfully to adulthood or meaningful careers due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not in school or employed • Lacking a high school diploma • Pregnant/ Parenting teen • Adjudicated • In or aging out of foster care • In alternative school • Homeless • Living in poverty • Substance abuse 	Facing employment barriers within the four categories of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational/basic skill deficiencies • Emotional and physical barriers • Situational barriers • Institutional barriers

Shared Findings

Even though these assessments applied different approaches to the gathering and presentation of findings, many similarities can be witnessed. Some of these shared attributes are obvious, while others become apparent after looking at this comparison with greater scrutiny and reading the text of the full reports. Presented here are the more apparent similarities between the findings of the two reports.

Issues regarding the workforce development system in Charlotte include:

- no coordinated leadership or structure holding the many programs and entities together
- little communication, collaboration, or coordination between the various programs
- lack of knowledge about available programs and services among the community, those who would benefit from workforce development services, and the service providers themselves
- service duplication in some areas, while gaps in services persist in others
- no mechanism to look across programs to determine the number of people being served by these programs and if individuals attend multiple programs
- lack of needed business community /employer involvement in these programs

Issues regarding workforce development programs in Charlotte include:

- lack of tracking individuals during and after programs, making meaningful program evaluation difficult
- not enough access for job seekers to career exploration and planning
- lack of individualized services like in-depth assessments of job seekers, one-on-one support, and wraparound services
- need for greater flexibility in time and locations of workforce development classes and activities
- too few opportunities for participants to get actual work experience
- lack of attention to job retention/advancement and support for participants after program completion

Shared Recommendations and Guiding Principles

Despite the different phrasing of the report commissions, commonality does exist in many of the recommendation statements made by the two groups. A detailed list of recommendations from each report can be found in the appendices of this report. The more compelling similarities among the two reports are recommendations to:

- bring the members of the workforce development sector together to build a unified, system for workforce development
- develop a system-wide tracking system
- enhance community-based partnerships and opportunities
- create better and more employer relationships and partnerships

- increase real work experience opportunities for program participants
- improve work/career exploration, planning, and development opportunities for participants
- develop a case management (one-on-one tailored counseling and support) approach to services and support
- improve soft skills curriculum and training
- provide more motivational and energizing program experiences

In addition to the shared recommendations, a common set of guiding principles for the sector going forward emerged from the two reports and are as follows:

- Work as a unified workforce development system, not just a collection of programs, with a strong presence in the community.
- Directly involve business and industry as key stakeholders and partners in the system.
- Focus on career and personal development for workers, not just jobs, with long-term support.
- Coordinate and consolidate programs to share staff, case management, data, and locations in accessible sites.
- Track the progress and success of participants to measure impact of individual programs and the system at large.
- Implement evidence-based best practices throughout the entire sector.

Final Thoughts

With the commonalities between these two reports and the contiguous nature of the two age groups (14-24 years of age and 25 + years of age) which are involved, the conclusion of this analysis is to focus on improving existing services and support with an awareness of possible linkages between the two efforts, thus streamlining processes and leveraging the limited resources that are available to each.

Within and between the two groups represented, it is suggested that there be:

- a shared and synchronized approach among stakeholders
- continuing stakeholder and community involvement
- a comprehensive and coordinated set of programs, specialized services, and support
- data collection, tracking, aggregation, and analysis
- purposeful reporting
- seamless transitions for the recipients of services

For ongoing maintenance and sustainability, it is suggested that there be:

- short term and long term planning
- reoccurring needs assessments
- formative and summative evaluations
- subsequent program and service enhancements

Bibliography

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Appendix 1

Comparison of Detailed Findings

Table 2 presents the findings of each report in greater detail. In addition to available programs and services, the Institute was also tasked with reviewing Goodwill’s Youth Job Connection (YJC) program. The Institute report has a greater focus on school institutions and secondary education-related matters as well as the evaluation of Goodwill and its Youth Job Connection. The Carol Morris Consulting and The Lee Institute report has a greater bearing on social services and government-funded programs.

Table 2. *Comparison of Detailed Findings*

Detailed Findings	
<p style="text-align: center;">UNC Charlotte Urban Institute</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too many high school dropouts • Too few employment opportunities from which to gain useful employment experience • Goodwill plays lead role to develop soft skills and tracking of youth • Service duplication and service gaps • Little collaboration among agencies • Lack of tracking of youth • Lack of sufficient program evaluation • Failure to provide work experience • Low retention in programs • Barriers to employment include lack of motivation, lack of family support, low grades, transportation • Public schools failing at preparing for workforce and getting into additional education and training • Youth need help with life skills, homework/tutoring, work readiness, career awareness and exploration • Primary areas to address are life skills and work readiness • Little input and response is received from employers • Finding jobs is more difficult due to the economy and employers are seeking available and more skilled workers • Employers are seeking employees who are prepared to work • Positive comments on Goodwill’s Youth Job Connection • Only a small percentage of youth in the Youth Job Connection were disconnected or at risk of being such • Employment services are needed • Barriers to employment are lack of experience, transportation, age, and motivation • Youth Job Connection classes need improved with more locations, shorter and more frequent sessions, interactivity, job search engines, diversity • Age and lack of experience are drawbacks • Transportation is a significant barrier • Youth Job Connection need more locations, more opportunities for work experience, better advertising of services, separate image from Goodwill • Services quality is low • Curriculum needs to expand in both depth and breadth. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Carol Morris Consulting/The Lee Institute</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No coordinating leadership structure or network in place to focus on sector-wide outcomes/impact • Government funded workforce development programs not coordinated or aligned across agencies • The myriad of programs and services are confusing and difficult for job seekers and service providers to navigate • Clients may access services from multiple organizations without such information shared or service delivery coordinated • Data (quantitative and qualitative) not available to determine the full utilization of services and collective impact of the sector • Lack of business community involvement • Limited knowledge of local labor market needs • Few incentives for job seekers to focus on more ambitious goals • Limited career exploration and planning available to job seekers • Not enough focus by sector on career pathways approach • Time and other limitations of job seekers • Lack of comprehensive assessment of needs • One-on-one attention to job seekers often lacking • Limited resources for job seekers with barriers • Limited sector-wide agreement on soft skill competencies • Need for more industry-specific hard-skills training • Fragmented approach to job development • Scarce work experience opportunity for low-skilled workers • Limited attention to job retention and advancement after a person is hired

Appendix 2

Comparison of Detailed Recommendations

In an analysis of the detailed recommendations (see Table 3), the differences between the parameters of the report commissions led to a different presentation of the recommendations. Whereas the Institute suggested changes Goodwill should consider (in terms of its youth program and involvement in the wider youth workforce development sector), Carol Morris Consulting/The Lee Institute focused on identifying possible opportunities to strengthen the workforce development sector as a whole.

Table 3. *Comparison of Detailed Recommendations*

Detailed Recommendations	
<p style="text-align: center;">UNC Charlotte Urban Institute</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish two programs for youth – partnership with Goodwill, CIS, and CMS and tailor adult services for young adults (18-24) • Develop a tracking system to evaluate programs and services • Increase work experience opportunities • Improve work experience opportunities by creating a work experience clearinghouse, dividing work experience staff into job development and youth placement specialties, and subsidize employment • Develop a curriculum that focuses on soft skills and life skills by incorporating appealing classes, flexible schedules, career exploration, job readiness training, volunteers, parents, and community • Develop a support services catalog • Use case management approach to identifying needs and providing referrals • Establish more relationships between caring adults and youth • Decentralization of Youth Job Connection service locations • Nurture neighborhood community partnerships • Orient awareness publicity to youth • Enhance Goodwill’s image 	<p style="text-align: center;">Carol Morris Consulting/The Lee Institute</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form a coalition, leadership group or other form of collaborative entity • Identify/pursue opportunities to align and leverage government funds for workforce • Develop common definitions and evidence-based standards of practice or curricula • Capitalize on/leverage individual organization strengths through specialization • Develop a common client database • Develop a real-time, query-based referral web portal • Establish a formal sector-wide forum and/or training “academy” to teach best practice approaches to local workforce development professionals • Build, promote and participate in industry partnerships with individual employers, employer/industry associations and local and regional economic development entities • Develop/offer more sector-specific training • Involve employers in program design and delivery • Expand workforce development professionals’ knowledge and understanding about the labor market and current and future workforce needs of employers, particularly in high-demand sectors • Promote sector-wide use of a career/work readiness certificate • Develop a dual-customer database and/or other software tools • Greater focus on career pathways that lead to living wage employment • More individualized, holistic guidance and wraparound support for job seekers with barriers • Focus on providing a full continuum of workforce services and support • Build shared ownership of plans