Tips for Successful Student Placement in High Growth Industries

The following will represent suggestions for a successful career development program in any DOL YouthBuild site. The second half of this document will refer specifically to work that Portland YouthBuilders has done over the last several years.

General Principles That Apply To All DOL YouthBuild Programs

- Student should be exposed to career exploration starting with day 1 (mental toughness)
- Students should be assessed for their career interests and exposed to career opportunities throughout the program
- A schedule for Career and postsecondary activities should continue throughout the program
- Career and postsecondary development should be integrated into all program components, i.e. career knowledge on the construction site, case manager familiarity with career options
- Placement should be made a high priority, i.e. ongoing discussion at community meeting about placement
- Students should be given assistance in creating a career portfolio, e.g. resumés, cover letters, job applications, and reference letters. (Could be done as part of the education program or specifically by career coach)
- A Career mentoring component should be created (someone specifically assigned to help student navigate career options)
- A training should be developed that helps students improve their soft skills, i.e. mock interviews, formal and informal presentations
- Students should be given the following in order to effectively navigate career choices:
  1. Introduction to career and postsecondary opportunities (takes place at recruitment)
  2. Career and postsecondary comprehension (can take place during orientation and at the beginning of the program)
  3. Career and postsecondary exploration (should take place throughout the program with either case manager or career coach)
  4. Career and postsecondary preparation (is informed by internships, certifications, and support of entire staff)
- Programs should do the following in order to have an effective career development strategy:
  1. Understand industry and labor market trends unique to their community
  2. Develop and maintain relationships with employers, chambers of commerce, unions, workforce investment boards, career one-stops and individual employers that offer meaningful paths for advancement
  3. Develop a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with postsecondary institutions that can offer credentials in high-demand occupation
  4. See that all staff is conscious of growth industries in their communities
  5. Target occupations that require skill sets and education that can be attained in a relatively short period of time (within 2 years of graduation)
- Students and staff should become familiar with the following concepts:
  1. The difference between a job and a career (This would require an understanding of career pathways, already available in some areas developed by YouthBuild Career Development Department)
  2. Vocational assessments (There are a number of online instruments that can be utilized.
  3. This does not preclude further discussion with students about the level of effort needed)
  4. Understanding of career pathways (Already available for some health care employment as well as for the construction industry)
  5. Job shadowing opportunities (Board members frequently help to provide these opportunities)
  6. Internships opportunities (Labor intensive but often worth it since students get a real exposure to workforce requirements. This is best done before the end of the program so that there is a chance to reflect)
  7. Barriers to individual students’ achievement of their career goals, (Best utilized by either career coach or counselor/case manager so that student has a realistic understanding of what their barriers might be)
  8. Understanding of requirements necessary to successfully enter into postsecondary education (Visits to community colleges, assistance in the application process, support for students during their first year of postsecondary enrollment)
  9. Understanding of successful application for financial aid. (A difficult process but a number of YouthBuild DOL sites have transitioned staff and successfully mastered this process)
Tips for Successful Student Placement in High Growth Industries:
Portland YouthBuilders’ Approach

The following represents Portland YouthBuilders’ approach to effective career development. Some of their activities can be found in the earlier section on general principles. Portland YouthBuilders has been a forerunner for many best practices.

First Phase

- Students begin to engage career exploration and identify a primary area of interest
- Career coach is assigned in one of four areas: construction, technology, college and general (the career coach is expected to have significant knowledge in the content area to which he/she is assigned
- Career coach joins a case management team which is comprised of case managers, educators and construction staff
- The entire team is tasked with working to help define an appropriate pathway for the student
- Students are invited to these team meetings so that work is being done with them rather than for them
- Meetings are held at least twice a month to assess the student’s plan and progress being made

Second Phase

Students who have shown through good attendance and good work habits that they are committed to post-program placement are supported in the following ways:

- Internship in relevant industry for six weeks
- Period of reflection after internship during which feedback from employers and student’s experience are discussed
- Opportunity for students to complete financial aid materials
- Opportunity for students to apply to appropriate postsecondary institution
- Focused inquiry into appropriate employment and/or postsecondary enrollment in college or apprenticeship program

Post-Placement Support

Portland YouthBuilders has the unique distinction of devoting resources to a structured post-placement support program. Students are provided services for a minimum of one year. Students in college and apprenticeships receive multi-year support until postsecondary or career goals are stable and successful. The amount of support varies, depending upon the students’ needs, but in all cases contact is maintained for a minimum of one year. To help students and graduates persist and succeed in their completion of credentials and advance in high-demand careers, programs need to offer transition support, counseling, and guidance. Local YouthBuild programs need to work with their postsecondary and employer partners to determine the most efficacious balance for collaboratively meeting the transition and support needs of students and graduates. YouthBuild staff members
need to provide the support that allows graduates to successfully navigate intimidating postsecondary and career systems, providing clear pathways for dealing with challenges as they arise, including providing effective support to address issues such as financial aid, child care, transportation, court issues, substance abuse, and other issues.

Final Thoughts

What is particularly impressive about the Portland YouthBuilders program is that job placement and career development is not seen solely as the function of the person responsible for placement. All elements of the program are involved and communication is assured by frequent case conferences that are designed to track students’ progress toward achieving their goals.