



TANF Support for Youth Workforce Development: The Philadelphia Experience

Overview. The Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (DPW) and the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board (PWIB) Youth Council have joined forces to expand summer education and work experience opportunities for thousands of young people in the City of Philadelphia. DPW has used the flexibility inherent in the Transitional Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program to augment and expand youth workforce development funds and activities supported by the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). With the availability of these TANF funds, the PWIB Youth Council has allocated \$5 million to provide enhanced summer opportunities for more than 5,000 young people, enabling them to gain work readiness skills, engage in service learning and build academic skills leading to promotion and/or high school graduation. Thus, the partnership between DPW and the PWIB Youth Council has created new learning and earning opportunities for thousands of young people, substantially increasing their prospects for self-sufficiency, and reducing the likelihood that they will become dependent on public assistance.

Background. The *Workforce Investment Act of 1998* included important new provisions that allowed states and local workforce areas to fund the kinds of workforce development activities and services that research suggests are effective in promoting academic achievement, postsecondary readiness and career success for low-income, disadvantaged youth. The PWIB Youth Council enthusiastically endorsed these research-based principles, but the comprehensive nature of WIA's youth required activities meant that they were much more expensive to deliver, and, with level-funded federal appropriations, many fewer young people could be served. The Council was successful in identifying and leveraging additional resources for youth, but the slots available remained well below the number of youth served in previous years, particularly for work and education opportunities in the summer.

TANF: Opportunities to Promote Self-Sufficiency through Youth Workforce Development. After several years of success in reducing welfare caseloads and realizing corresponding savings, DPW began to consider investing TANF funds in youth workforce development efforts. In this way, TANF funding would serve as a means not only to provide cash assistance to welfare clients, but also as a way to prevent future welfare dependency. In fact, these efforts were promoted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, which argued in

its 1999 report *Helping Families Achieve Self-Sufficiency*, that TANF “presents new opportunities for funding a greater variety of activities, services, and benefits ...” that would support self-sufficiency. Thus encouraged to think creatively about the use of TANF funds, DPW sought opportunities to invest in approaches designed to boost education attainment and employment prospects as means of promoting long-term self-sufficiency for disadvantaged youth.

The low education levels of most welfare clients testify to the importance of promoting academic achievement, school completion and postsecondary readiness as means of reducing reliance on public assistance. A national study by the Public Policy Institute of California found that 60 percent of welfare recipients and 81 percent of persons heavily dependent on welfare (those not having worked in the past year) have low basic skills, compared to 30 percent of full-time workers. An Urban Institute study pointed out that nearly two-thirds of welfare recipients scored in the bottom quartile of all women their age on the Armed Forces Qualifying Test. Furthermore, one-half of those parents — one-third of all welfare recipients — had basic skills lower than 90 percent of other women their age.

Connecting WIA Youth Programs with TANF Funding. DPW understood that a very effective way to advance the purposes of TANF was to promote education attainment and career success for youth from low-income families by building on and enhancing the programs and services provided through the Workforce Investment Act. Because of WIA’s emphasis on academic skills, postsecondary readiness and career success were entirely consistent with TANF’s goals of reducing welfare dependency. Therefore, DPW believed that dedicating TANF funds to expand WIA youth opportunities to be a sound investment. Results to-date clearly validates this expectation.

Outcomes for Youth from Low-Income Families Served Through TANF-Funded Programs. During the summers of 2000 and 2001, the PWIB Youth Council allocated \$5 million in DPW-provided TANF funds to support and expand summer opportunities for almost 5,300 youth from low income families in the City of Philadelphia.

Youth served through WIA and TANF funds received the same high-quality programming. Particularly important to these efforts is a tight focus on basic skills improvements, tied to academic success at school. To this end, academics are embedded into the experiences of all participating youth, primarily through project-based instruction in which each young person is engaged in the development of a project that demonstrates mastery of local and state academic standards. As a result of this emphasis, ***almost 80% of participating youth earned school credit for the projects they complete.***

The following are several examples of innovative programming that has been supported with TANF funds:

- Philadelphia Futures, a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting higher education opportunities for City youth, provides extensive college exposure and exploration programs in partnership with area colleges and universities to instill in

participating youth the importance of postsecondary education, as a realistic and attainable goal.

- The Philadelphia Commercial Development Corporation hosted a summer program where students developed, studied and completed an entrepreneur-training curriculum.
- Communities in Schools, a nonprofit organization focusing on promoting the success of at-risk young people, provided youth with a variety of work experience in different service corporation settings.
- LULAC, a City non-profit focusing on the needs of Latino community, provided young people with summer service corps opportunities in a wide range of projects, including neighborhood beautification, blight removal, tutoring younger children, park restoration, intergenerational history projects, and community safety.

Even Brighter Prospects for the Future. In addition to enhancing WIA youth development activities, in the upcoming program year the PWIB Youth Council will recommend the use of TANF funds to support the *Children's Investment Strategy*, a citywide systemic initiative designed to expand the availability of high-quality after-school programs and to develop community-based centers that provide programs and services for youth during non-school hours. These funds will also support the City's *Safe Streets* initiative, which seeks to attack issues of drug use and abuse.

Conclusion. TANF's flexibility and the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare's willingness to use it have had profound positive implications for the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board Youth Council's ability to develop and extend the availability of high-quality youth workforce development activities and services. Through TANF funds, thousands of low-income Philadelphia youth have acquired work readiness skills, earned academic credit and gained valuable exposure to work places and postsecondary education institutions.

Thus, TANF support for youth programming has helped thousands of Philadelphia youth to begin the journey toward productive citizenship, and has reduced the likelihood that they will need to turn to public assistance as a means of support when they reach adulthood.