

## **Dispatch from CCRY: Successes and Challenges in Reconnecting By Don Spangler**

It's hard to believe that CCRY (Communities Collaborating to Reconnect Youth), which met last month in DC, is ten years old. Established by Linda Harris, then Director of Youth Services for the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) and former head of Baltimore City's Mayor's Office of Employment Development, CCRY's original purpose was to elevate and sustain the youth reconnection and re-engagement successes achieved through USDOL's Youth Opportunity (YO) grants, funded from 2000-2005. Today, the network is led by CLASP's Kisha Bird, and boasts two-dozen communities, including many NYEC members. In addition to original YO sites, other communities have joined over the years to work and learn together about how to improve outcomes for disconnected young people.

Bob Rath, CCRY chair and former NYEC board member, opened the meeting, which was packed with presentations from a range of federal policymakers, local practitioners, and advocates, and also included lots of opportunities for information-sharing between and among the sites represented.

As usual, there were plenty of key takeaways. Here are a few of them.

- **Exciting Local Activity:**

- **Los Angeles** has been awarded a set of waivers under the federal [Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth \(P3\) initiative](#), and is deeply engaged in developing strategies to remove barriers to efficient and effective youth service delivery. For example, waivers will allow students who are in foster care, juvenile justice, or who are homeless to be eligible for WIOA activities as out-of-school youth.
- **Seattle**, another P3 site, is exploring waivers and blended funding to build on the state-funded Open Doors re-engagement strategy. Among other priorities, Seattle hopes to utilize federal Reintegration of Ex-Offender funding to focus on young people who were tried as adults, and who are returning to their communities.
- In partnership with Northeastern University, **Boston** is conducting a multi-year evaluation study of its summer youth employment program, focusing on long-term outcomes and impacts on subsequent labor

market participation, academics, and involvement with the juvenile justice system. The city is considering using the positive impacts and their potential savings as the basis for a [Pay for Success](#) strategy. (Subsequently, the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development was awarded federally-funded support from Third Sector Capital Partners, Inc. to advance its Pay for Success work).

- In **Denver**, with support from Mayor Hancock, WIOA funds will continue to support in-school youth programming by strengthening the partnership with the public school system and by requiring significant quantifiable leverage by workforce system providers. And in **Bakersfield** (CA), the school district is providing funding to maintain alternative programming for career development instruction and paid work experience that would otherwise have been lost based on WIOA's shift away from in-school programming.
- **St. Louis** is utilizing the WIOA mandate to focus on strengthening and expanding entrepreneurship, particularly for formally incarcerated youth, and is also looking for a certification option.
- Several sites discussed the growing use in their states of the HiSET exam as an alternative to the GED, based on its lower cost and flexibility for test-takers.
- **WIOA Implementation.** Most attendees were cautiously optimistic about first-year implementation so far. Many were reasonably positive about their **state plans**, although there were some exceptions. Several early implementation wins include the opportunity to impart new knowledge and skills based on the **entrepreneurship** and **financial literacy** required elements, and emerging **connections between the youth and adult systems**. On the other hand, as we heard repeatedly in our NYEC surveys last year, there is **continuing concern** over how **co-enrollment and career pathways** can be structured to work effectively for out-of-school youth, and the implications of the new OSY service requirements for **performance levels**.
- **Administration Leaders' Insights.** Several senior Obama Administration officials presented and interacted with attendees. **Jen Kemp**, who heads USDOL's Youth Office, wanted to clarify a couple of specific WIOA youth-related points where she believed there might be some confusion. First,

she stressed that the **75% OSY requirement relates to funding** percentages, and not to percentages of **youth served**. Further, Kemp underscored that **WIOA Title I youth activities require work experience** (e.g. summer and year-round employment, pre-apprenticeships, internships and job shadowing, and OJT), **not work-based learning**, which is referenced only in the Job Corps portion of the statute. Therefore, states and local boards will be expected to define what they mean by work-based learning if they propose such strategies in their WIOA plans for Title I youth activities.

Also relating to WIOA, **Felippe Lulli** of the Rehabilitation Services Administration reported that he and his colleagues are working closely with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education on career pathways and related activities. In particular, Lulli highlighted the importance of the new WIOA requirement that **State vocational rehabilitation agencies set aside at least 15% of their funding to provide pre-employment transition services for youth with disabilities**. These services, which may include career exploration and forms of work experience such as internships and self-advocacy training, must be designed to help in-school youth transition to postsecondary education or employment.

During a discussion facilitated by NYEC board member Lisa Johnson of FHI 360, Administration leaders stressed the **importance of communicating effectively about state and local WIOA-related successes and challenges, to both executive and legislative branches of government**. This aligns with what Scott Cheney of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee told the attendees at NYEC's fall convening. NYEC is exploring strategies to collect, document, and share this information with federal officials.

In addition, several CCRY members stressed the importance of **ensuring that WIOA monitors in regional offices who review and audit implementation understand all elements of the new law**, including emphases on collaboration and alignment, and that they be trained in ways that enable them to support, not hinder, state and local innovation.

- **A Focus on Youth with Disabilities.** To help CCRY members develop a deeper understanding of the new ties between WIA Youth programming under WIOA Title I and Vocational Rehabilitation services under WIOA Title IV, we heard from Curtis Richards, Director of the Institute for Educational Leadership's Center for Workforce Development, who is a self-described

“advocater” with an extensive history in fighting for the rights of individuals with disabilities.

To be sure that everyone had a basic sense of the **continuum of rehabilitation employment-related programming**, Richards provided a brief overview of several options, including **sheltered workshops**, which are closed environments where groups of people with significant disabilities perform low-skill work at sub-minimum wage; **supported employment**, in which individuals with significant disabilities are employed in workplaces with support from a job coach; and **competitive, integrated employment**, settings in which people with disabilities work alongside other workers, doing the same work and being paid the same wage.

Richards explained that the rehabilitation community has not always been eager to participate in the broader public workforce system, preferring to advocate for its own legislation and separate approaches which focus specifically on the needs of individuals with disabilities. However, Richards argued that **WIOA incorporates all of the relevant provisions and elements of earlier disability statutes**, and therefore becomes “a great piece of disability legislation.” Further, in the long run he believes WIOA’s requirements for **unified planning and common measures will help to integrate vocational rehabilitation services more fully into the mainstream workforce system**.

- **Reauthorization of Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act.** NYEC Director Thomas Showalter helped to lead a discussion on issues and priorities in Perkins reauthorization. As reported in an earlier NYEC policy brief, Senate staff are reportedly working to finalize a reauthorization discussion draft, but nothing has been released as of this writing. **CCRY members and other youth advocates hope that new Perkins legislation might provide for closer alignment with WIOA programs**, and open the door to bridge-building between the two statutes, at least at the postsecondary level. Even so, Thomas pointed out that organized constituencies are likely to oppose and attempt to block innovative approaches that threaten current approaches to programming and funding.

Career Pathways is another area for potential collaboration between Perkins and WIOA, particularly if definitions and performance measures are consistent. However, because CTE pathways are traditionally school-based with few, if any, on-ramps accessible to youth who have dropped out or

are not CTE concentrators, finding ways to align programming and/or blend funding is likely to prove challenging.

- **Looking Ahead to Priorities in the Next Administration.** We concluded the meeting with a brief discussion of youth-focused priorities for the administration, which Kisha and I led. This was a challenging topic since it's anyone's bet who the party nominees will be, let alone the eventual winner in November. But despite so many unknowns, attendees discussed several priorities, including:
  - budgetary issues, in particular the need to raise the budget caps for FY17 in order to avoid sequestration cuts, and then to secure appropriations for WIOA at least at authorized levels;
  - youth programming and funding, including the consideration of a reboot of the Youth Opportunity Initiative;
  - additional support for summer jobs; and
  - maintaining support for several important Obama Administration initiatives, including My Brothers' Keeper, Performance Partnership Pilots, and related strategies to expand services for high-need young people.

We also discussed the importance of getting involved in **state and local planning for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)**, the new reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. ESSA provides new flexibility for states to expand and reframe standards, assessments, and overall accountability systems to better reflect the range of skills young people will need for success. Further, states and local districts will also have more flexibility in developing and implementing evidence-based approaches to meet the needs of students in low-performing schools.

Finally, CCRY members looked back fondly at the Obama Administration's youth-related achievements, including the American Recovery and Reinvest Act's \$1.2 billion investment in summer and year-round opportunities, along with access to the TANF Emergency Contingency Fund to support summer jobs; the creation of the White House Council for Community Solutions, which launched a variety of initiatives aimed at re-engaging disconnected youth; the Interagency Forum on Disconnected Youth, which spawned P3; and other initiatives, such as My Brother's Keeper.