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The Youth Bureau Run Down
Erie County Youth Bureau Newsletter
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Buffalo, NY 14211

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A Letter From The Director

Greetings from the Erie County Youth Bureau!

On behalf of the Youth Board and Youth Bureau staff members, I am pleased to release our first newsletter to the community. Now we all know these are certainly challenging times in Erie County and New York State, but this newsletter will not focus on the fiscal challenges we are all facing, or any financial numbers or data at all for that matter. It is simply intended to spread the news about all of the good work going on in our community. Inside you will find stories highlighting our partnering agencies, and the youth success stories our agencies help create. It will include helpful resources and tips for our agencies, families, and youth in our community. It will also occasionally highlight our youth board members, who quietly volunteer their time to serve the youth of Erie County, and offer them a brighter future.

I hope you enjoy the stories, the great work our agencies are doing, and how they are they are impacting the lives of our youth everyday. Our next issue will be released in April of 2011. If you have any success stories you would like to share, or feedback on our newsletter, please do not hesitate to contact us. We are certainly open to suggestions on how we can better serve you through this new initiative.

Thank you to all of the agencies who took the time to help share their stories through this newsletter. Thank you to our tremendous Youth Bureau staff and Board Members for their support of this newsletter. Finally, thank you to our AmeriCorps Vista, Kacey Weafer, for all of the hard work she put in designing the newsletter, developing the layout, and writing the stories.

On behalf of the Erie County Youth Bureau, we hope you have a wonderful holiday season. We sincerely appreciate all you do for our community, and look forward to more success stories to share in 2011!

Sincerely,

David Rust

Director, Erie County Youth Bureau



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What Did 'You' Do This Summer?

Kacey Weafer, AmeriCorps VISTA, Erie County Youth Bureau

Well, we found ourselves asking the same question and we'd like to share some of it with you. In short, the Erie County Youth Bureau funded 24 Summer Primetime Programs! The ECYB funds Summer Primetime Programs for youth across Erie County. These services provide at-risk youth, structure, recreation, and educational components that they may be missing during the summer months when school is not in session.

Many remarkable programs were run during the 2010 Summer Primetime funding cycle. The cycle ran from June 28th through September 3rd. During that time the Youth Bureau partnered with 24 agencies, amounting to \$200,000 in contracts for the youth of Erie County. Through this funding 2,546 youth from Erie County were served and we hope learned, laughed, and had fun!

Applying agencies had five categories to choose from when designing their summer Primetime program; Academic Enrichment, Career Enrichment, Cultural Enrichment, Gang and Violence Prevention, and Youth Leadership. The requirement was for each program to target at least one of the five categories, but most programs that ran during the summer of 2010 targeted two or more. *Elim Community Corporation* for example ran a "Safe Summer Enrichment Program." In this program, academic and career enrichment were the main focus'. Youth participated in daily required reading, science activities, college tours, job readiness skills training, and observation of different industry positions.

A 16-year old girl who participated in the *Elim* summer program this year said to Nadia Moore, (Erie County Youth Bureau Program Coordinator), "I have lived in Buffalo for my entire life and have seen more of Buffalo this summer than I have in my 16 years living here." These programs offer youth tremendous opportunities that they otherwise may not have growing up in Buffalo.

It wasn't all work for youth in Erie County this summer; many recreational activities were also offered to participants in Primetime programs. There were field trips to Bills' Training Camp, midnight bowling excursions, trips to Darien Lake, visits to local libraries, drama classes, nature hikes, and even day trips to Niagara Falls. Also, many of these summer programs had youth involved in the Mayor's Summer Reading Challenge.

There were programs like *Access of Western New York*, which was a newly funded program for Primetime this year. *Access* offered youth opportunities to take field trips to places like Darien Lake, the Museum of Science and participants even had an opportunity to have lessons in Arabic twice a week (many of the participants of the program are from an Arabic speaking background). Nadia Moore and Kacey Weafer, AmeriCorps VISTA, had the chance to visit with and speak to some of the participants in the program while monitoring *Access* in mid-August and were astonished by the sense of commitment and enthusiasm the youth displayed. When speaking to a 9 year old the monitor asked "What do you want to be when you grow up?" The child said, with a great enthusiasm, he would like to be "a scientist or a

would rather be a scientist because by the time I am an adult if the cure for Cancer hasn't been invented, I would like to find the cure for Cancer." Not only was the young boy confident he would certainly find the cure for Cancer, but Nadia and Kacey were elated to hear this was the type of aspiration the participants in Primetime summer programs in Erie County have for themselves.

"By the time I am an adult if the cure for Cancer hasn't been invented, I would like to find the cure for Cancer."

-Access Youth Participant

First Hand Learning also had an amazing program running this summer. With participants from all over Buffalo, more than seventy youth got to partake in hands on science activities. The program took place in a number of different areas including Cazenovia Park, Tiff Nature Preserve, the Buffalo River, and other locations throughout the city. Some of the hands-on, "minds on" explorations the youth participated in were experiments with plants, animals, soils, rocks and architecture. In August the ECYB had the opportunity to do a site visit with *First Hand Learning*. When we caught up with them, they were on the banks of the Buffalo River, taking samples of the water for the Rivermaster, and fishing.

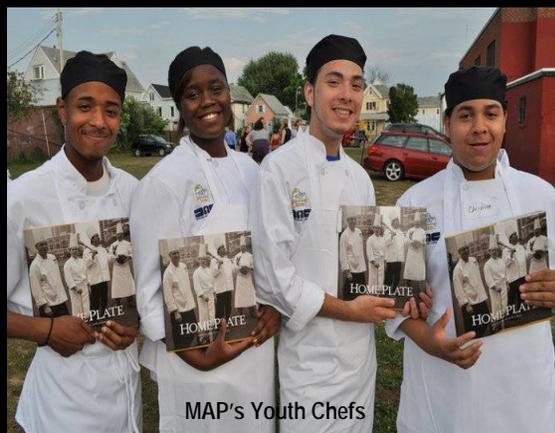
Nadia and Kacey had the privilege to meet a young lady, Nicole, who when they first got there squirmed at the thought of putting bait on the hook. To their great surprise, ten minutes later, they turned around to see her putting the bait on the hook all on her own, and better yet, about five minutes after that she had caught her first fish! Not only are our youth learning valuable information from the experiments they do while participating in this hands-on program, but they are also learning life skills (and fearlessness) that they will carry with them as they get older.

The 2010 Summer Primetime programs were enormous successes this year and we want to thank all of our partnering agencies for their service and dedication to the youth living in Erie County! As the summer winds down and signs of fall begin to pop up in Western New York the ECYB will continue to strive to provide excellent services and programs to the youth of our county.



Nicole with *First Hand Learning*, her first catch of the day

“WE
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BUT
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THE
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Massachusetts Avenue Project, An Aquaponics Adventure

Kacey Weafer, AmeriCorps VISTA, Erie County Youth Bureau

Aquaponics, microenterprise development, community education, organic products, gardening and horticulture. These are not words you generally associate with a youth serving non-profit, but this is changing thanks to one Buffalo area organization, The Massachusetts Avenue Project, or MAP. MAP was started only seven years ago. Since then it has deeply impacted more than 4,500 youth in Buffalo, with 375 of them being employed by this progressive agency. It's the leading urban farm in the Buffalo area and is also nationally recognized as one of the best practices in the country. MAP has transformed vacant lots across the city into urban growing farms that not only serve the youth of the community, but give back to the community on a number of levels.

MAP is a one of a kind organization that encompasses all areas of urban growing, with one huge component, or should I say 50? Not only does MAP work to strengthen the local Buffalo food system, but one of the ways they do it is through the *Growing Green Program*. The *Growing Green Program* is a group of 50 local teens that are employed during the school year to help MAP address the lack of access to healthy food within the city.

The *Growing Green Program* allows teenagers from the Buffalo area to work on a half acre farm on Massachusetts Avenue where fruit, vegetables, herbs, and flowers are cultivated with hard work and care. The garden is open from 3:30pm-6:30pm, Monday through Friday and youth participate after school. These 14-20 year olds not only get their hands dirty working on the gardens, but they also get to work on Buffalo's first Aquaponics system. Aquaponics is an innovative system where hydroponics and aquaculture are combined to create a system where fish and plants are grown using a closed circuit system. The water from the fish tank (including the waste) is pumped into beds where plants are growing which in turn fertilizes the growing plants, then the water left over from watering is filtered back to the fish tank. This has shown to be an incredibly efficient way of growing and has had tremendous results for the amount of produce created.

Teenagers who participate in the *Growing Green Program* have helped MAP reach new heights by creating a "Mobile Market." The Mobile Market is a restored RV that takes produce grown on the farm to multiple locations across the city where people from the community can purchase it. This gives people in local low-income communities access to healthy food and offers a valuable resource when it comes to purchasing produce at affordable prices. In addition to giving community members access to healthy food at affordable prices, the Mobile Market also accepts food stamps and WIC vouchers so that it can more effectively serve the city. This kind of service is essential to Buffalo, which is the 3rd poorest city in the nation, with more than 29% of its residents living in poverty. The Mobile Market served 700 families last year and hopes to serve more in the upcoming year.

Working with the Mobile Market also gives teens the opportunity to learn entrepreneurial skills like sales and preparing food for sale. And speaking of entrepreneurial skills, the *Growing Green Program* has been so successful in entrepreneurial aspects that MAP has two products sold at 25 locations across WNY, including Wegmans! In addition to the *Growing Green Program*, two other programs that are run by MAP are the *Peer Education Team* and *Be Vocal, Eat Local Week*. The *Peer Education Team* is a group of youth who go into local schools offering after school workshops about a variety of topics ranging from sustainable urban agriculture to healthy cooking. *Be Vocal, Eat Local Week* is a local campaign run to encourage the consumption of locally grown food.

While talking to Diane Picard, the Executive Director of MAP, I asked her what her favorite part of MAP was and without hesitation she said that the kids are the best part. And it's true, MAP isn't only concerned about the organization, they care about their young people. The Directors of MAP work to build bridges between MAP and academics for their members. They keep track of their young people as they pass through each grade and become particularly involved during their junior and senior year in high school. They understand that not everyone is destined for college and try to guide these young adults to what would be in their best interest.

MAP is one of the premier non profits in the Buffalo Area and it offers much needed services to the city. At MAP, there is a great balance of enthusiastic youth and Directors that helps to make this program excel. Urban growing is an up and coming sustainable food source and residents of Buffalo are lucky to have such an impactful non profit in this city.

What's going on in Buffalo?

- The Belle Center, located at 104 Maryland Street, offers a non-perishable food items for those in need. Contact Priscilla Grant 845-0485 ext. 18 for more information.
- AIDS Testing Services: For more information about how you can find out your status and get a free AIDS test contact the front desk at The Belle Center located at 104 Maryland Street 845-0485 ext. 10.
- Free admission to the Albright-Knox Art Gallery on the first Friday of every month from 10 AM-10 PM. Located 1285 Elmwood Avenue
- Boxes of Love Food & Toy Distribution Saturday, December 11, 2pm, The Belle Center, 104 Maryland Street.
- Adult Flu Shot Clinic and Health Screening, Monday, December 6, 3pm-7pm, The Belle Center, 104 Maryland Street.



Be-A-Friend Program Youth Spotlight

Submitted by LaGuan Rodgers, Mentor Advocate at Be-A-Friend

Late June signifies the end of school for many young people, which also means the opening of the gateway to fun activities and the leisure mindset associated with summer. On the other hand, June also represents a time when some students are faced with the reality of summer classes and the consequences of missed opportunities from the school year. Nonetheless, it's great to witness a success story up close, particularly when the road that was traveled had its share of bumps and thorns.

When Corey asked me to come to his graduation weeks before it happened, I wasn't sure whether I would be able to attend. If anything, I could see the excitement in his eyes as his special day approached. I listened to a proud yet humble Corey speak about what he was going to wear and who he had invited to come. As I listened to him from week to week, I began to think about all he had been through over the past year, and how it would've been easy for him to adopt a "woe is me" attitude and give up.

In the summer of 2009 Corey and his family were forced to move from their residence when an apartment above them caught on fire, resulting in damage to the family's quarters and most of their personal possessions. Corey, his mother and his two younger brothers were displaced for months as they bounced around, living with different relatives. However, Corey maintained his love for school and kept his attendance record at a quality level. Half way through his senior campaign, Corey had been suspended for a transgression from school rules. Such an experience was an error in judgment, yet he recognized his errors and pressed onward. All the while, Corey actively pursued leadership roles within his school and community, as he became a part of the Youth Empowerment and Leadership Board and remained an active member of his church.

Some may say such setbacks are minor, yet Corey's past year circled in my head as I watched him cross the stage to receive his high school diploma from the Buffalo Academy of Visual & Performing Arts this past June. Corey, who will begin studying stage and set design at Buffalo State College in January 2011, was proud of himself and I was most certainly proud for him. As the graduation aftermath settled, Corey thanked me for attending. I thanked Corey in return, for he reaffirmed the lesson that life will land heavy blows to you, yet fighters get up off the canvas and look forward to another round.

As Corey anticipates his first semester as a college student, he remains both a positive and productive member of the community. When he isn't helping with Vacation Bible School, Corey can be found singing in the choir at Mt. Olive Baptist Church. He also spends time working at a variety of establishments where he has gained useful job skills, not to mention numerous volunteer commitments. In addition, Corey is an active member of Big Brothers Big Sisters Partnership For Youth program, which has afforded me the opportunity to "travel the road," however bumpy or smooth, alongside him as he continues to grow into a fine young man.

A Few Tips On Billing

Submitted by Donna Mertel, Senior Account Clerk at the Erie County Youth Bureau

All grants awarded by the Erie County Youth Bureau must have expenditures listed and submitted on OCFS forms for reimbursement. These forms may be obtained at: www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/youth/youth_development_forms.asp. Also at this website is a list of non-reimbursable costs, which should be utilized. This list is under Fiscal Policies and Procedures.

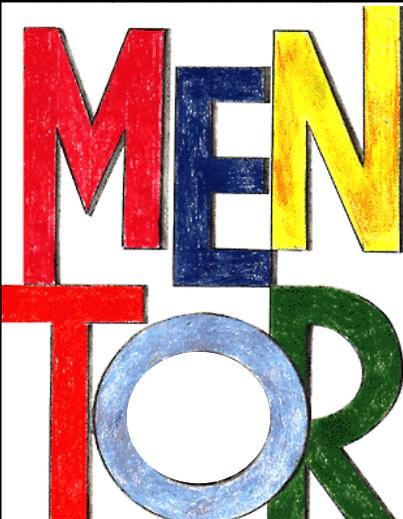
When completing the expenditure report forms make sure all columns are complete. The first column is for check number. If the payment was made through direct deposit or electronic funds transfer they should be listed as "DD" or "EFT", respectively.

All columns on the expenditure report forms are relatively self explanatory, with the exception of last column which is the most misunderstood. The amount chargeable to OCFS column is for listing amounts that are chargeable to the program being funded by Erie County.

If your agency is funded through the YDDP grant, be aware this grant requires a 50/50 match. Therefore, if the total amount chargeable to OCFS is \$10,000 your reimbursement will be \$5,000. Also, this is a reimbursable grant.

The SDPP grant is an advance payment grant. Keep in mind that payments cannot be made unless an invoice is provided. Expenditure reports are to be submitted on a quarterly basis. Receipt of the expenditure report prompts the next advance payment.

If there are ever any questions regarding budget, billing, or payment Donna Mertel can be reached at 716-923-4008 or Donna.Mertel@erie.gov



For more information about any of agencies in this newsletter you can go to their website

- Massachusetts Avenue Project—www.mass-ave.org
- On The Job Ministries—www.otjministries.org
- Be-A-Friend, Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Erie County—www.beafriend.org
- Compeer—www.compeerbuffalo.org
- The Valley—www.thevalleycenter.org
- WNY United—www.wnyunited.org



On The Job Ministries Puts Youth to Work Across Buffalo

Kacey Weafer, AmeriCorps VISTA, Erie County Youth Bureau

Walking into the New to You Thrift Store I felt like I was walking into any old store to look for a cute shirt to wear. It was only after I got a tour and got to sit down with Kim DeFlyer, the Executive Director that I learned On the Job (OTJ) is so much more than a place just to buy things.

OTJ is a part of Westside Ministries that works to create businesses on the West Side that employ at-risk youth and provide them job training and life skills. Every year, OTJ employs 25-30 youth ages 14-24, that live on the West Side of Buffalo. Not only are these young people provided a job, but they are also taught valuable skills that they will use for the rest of their lives. By working for OTJ, they get the opportunity to make themselves economically secure; this is a huge incentive to many of the young people who participate in the program. This is also a great way to keep youth off the streets and to keep them on a positive track. All of the youth who come to OTJ leave with new skills, attitudes, and competencies they will be able to use in the workplace or college. This makes them more employable in the future and helps them to contribute during their time with OTJ.

OTJ runs three different businesses, New to You Thrift Shop, SoapWorks, and Westside Wheels. New to You is OTJ's newest business. It is a thrift store that offers a wide variety of goods including clothing, furniture, household goods (plates, toasters, cups, anything you may need for your home), and even decorations for the holidays. New to You offers low cost goods and is a great alternative to purchasing at a retail store for many of the residents of the West Side. Also, purchasing goods at New to You benefits a wonderful growing nonprofit, that gives back to the community in more ways than one. What makes New to You so exciting is that the business is almost entirely run by young people from Buffalo. Every day they come in and learn about the entrepreneurial side of the business, what makes a successful business, and what it takes to run one. New to You Thrift Store has come quite a ways since its humble beginnings starting as just a collection of donations.

The second business that OTJ runs is SoapWorks. SoapWorks is also run by youth from the city of Buffalo. Every bar of soap created by SoapWorks is handcrafted and packaged by these youth who are empowered by the skills that they learn. Almost all of the youth employed by OTJ graduate high school. This statistic can be directly correlated to the guidance that OTJ's staff gives their youth while they work at one of the three shops. SoapWorks makes a few different kinds of soap from pomegranate to gardener's hand soap, there are options for everyone!

What makes New to You so exciting is that the business is almost entirely run by youth from Buffalo.

The third business that OTJ runs is Westside Wheels. Many people living in Buffalo rely on a bicycle to get from place to place. Westside Wheels understands that and has catered their business to the needs of the people on the West Side where public transportation is limited. Westside Wheels salvages, repairs, and resells bikes to people. They also have bike mechanics on site to help with fixing any type of bike. This type of business is crucial to a city like Buffalo and is offering a service that is much needed. Also, youth who work at Westside Wheels learn a valuable skill that they can use for the rest of their life while getting paid for it!

One of the things that makes OTJ so unique is that they work with their youth to help them get an education. Each youth that works for OTJ is enrolled in some type of schooling. Whether it is high school, working towards their GED, or going to college, the importance of academia is stressed at OTJ. Some of the youth who come to work at OTJ do not have a high school diploma yet and OTJ works individually with these youth counseling them as they work towards their degree. They understand the importance of having a high school diploma and work towards having these youth understand it as well. Attendance to high school or classes for a GED are regularly checked by staff at OTJ in order to ensure youth are getting the best available education for youth.



I asked Ms. DeFlyer if she could share a story with me about a youth that stands out to her. She told me about a youth in high school who worked at OTJ for a few months and then he decided he didn't want to participate in OTJ anymore. After about a year and a half the youth came to Mrs. DeFlyer asking if he could work in one of the stores. Ms. DeFlyer agreed to help the youth only after the youth agreed that he would work to get his GED. He is now in the process of doing so, with her guidance.

What makes OTJ stand out is that they build businesses to create jobs for youth, while providing valuable services to people living in the local community. What a combo! If you are interested in visiting or supporting OTJ, their main shop (New To Youth Thrift Store) is located at 289 Grant Street in Buffalo, or visit their website www.otjministries.org/

10 Helpful Grant Writing Tips

Submitted by Nadia Moore, Program Coordinator at the Erie County Youth Bureau

In a difficult economy, it can be challenging for not-for-profit organizations to secure funding through competitive grant writing. We, at the ECYB understand that grant writing can be difficult, and therefore offer this list of simple tips that may help you and your agency along the way.

- 1. Give yourself enough time** – It will take a substantial amount of time to coordinate, plan, research, organize and write your proposal. Allocate enough time to acquire an original signature, as required by most grant applications, of the personnel within your agency that is responsible for such.
- 2. Plan to submit early** – You should try to submit your finished program proposal approximately one week before it is due. In this day of electronic submissions, be certain that the submission process does not have a pre-registration process that is required to be completed before the proposal is due.
- 3. Be prepared ahead of time** – You should make a packet of documents that are usually required to submit with a proposal ahead of time and keep copies stored in a file that is easily accessible. These types of forms can include such documents as your agency's 501 (c) 3 tax exemption letter, by laws, articles of incorporation, list of Board members with their contact information, financial statements, audit reports and any relevant letters of support.
- 4. Follow the guidelines set forth in the Request For Proposals (RFP)** – This may seem like a no brainer, but many times proposals do not follow the format in the RFP and/or submit forms that are different from those requested. If you add additional items, such as charts or photos, make sure they add depth and purpose to the proposal and not just add filler pages.
- 5. Is it a good match?** – Clearly understand the potential funder's goals and objectives and make sure they match your program's goals or your organization's mission. Don't look to develop a program to fit a grant opportunity, do it in the reverse. Target funding sources that have the same goals and objectives of your program. Then respond with a quality proposal for a program that fits the mission of your organization and meets the requirements of the RFP.
- 6. Simply write** – When preparing your proposal, be clear and concise. There is no need to write more than is needed just to have more pages. Give factual and supportive information. Do your research and never make up statistics. Your reader may have the accurate information, which discredits your entire proposal. Be professional in your writing. Do not use slang, abbreviations or too much industry specific jargon. Review panel members may not know all the latest buzz words in a specific industry and may not clearly understand your points.
- 7. Show experience** – Deliver a proposal that demonstrates an acceptable answer to the problem/need statement. Give examples of how your agency has been successful at meeting the need and the experience working with the target population. Discuss key partnerships and other collaborating partners and the success you have had with them in the proposed program or past related programs.
- 8. Highlight your niche** – Others will submit proposals for the same RFP. Highlight how your program is a better/different solution than others. Funders do not want to fund the 'same ole program'. Present unique and creative methods in your program proposal.
- 9. Review** – Have someone who did not assist with writing the proposal proof read it. They should not only look for spelling or grammatical errors, but should pay attention to whether the proposal's content is easily understood and meets the requirements set forth in the RFP.
- 10. Meet the deadline** – Your proposal is a first impression, do not ruin it by requesting an extension or submitting your proposal after the deadline. Many funding sources have their review procedures set on a timeline based on the submission deadline. Make every attempt to turn your information in early, but you must turn it in by the deadline time and day. Don't have all of your hard work stick out like a sore thumb by submitting it late.

Additional tips will be available in upcoming newsletters, so stay tuned for more!

Valley Community Association: Striving For Excellence In More Ways Than One

Kacey Weafer, AmeriCorps VISTA, Erie County Youth Bureau

The Valley Community Association, The Valley for short, is an unparalleled agency in South Buffalo serving residents of the city from 6 weeks old to 99 years old. Their specialty, however, is their afterschool program, *Striving For Excellence*, which serves more than 200 youth per year.

The *Striving For Excellence* program serves youth from kindergarten through eighth grade afterschool, five days a week. When these young people get to the Valley in the afternoon they are given a snack and starting at 3:00pm they are broken down into age based groups to partake in daily activities. Every day there are three "activity blocks"; one is a homework session, and the two other sessions can be anything from photography to book club. The sessions are on a specific rotating schedule. The Valley takes a very hands on approach to these sessions. Employees at The Valley understand that after a full day at school most kids don't want to sit down in a classroom and learn. With this in mind, they try to make these academic sessions as hands on as possible so that youth enjoy themselves while learning. When 5:30pm rolls around, the academic portion of the daily schedule is finished and they are able to participate in recreational activities. Some of the recreational activities that are offered are Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and recreational basketball; these recreational activities are also open to teenagers up to age 18.

The Valley is one of the elite youth agencies in Buffalo because of their commitment to the success of their youth. The academic portions of the program utilize Buffalo Public School curriculum materials and homework help is provided by New York State Certified Teachers, college graduates, and college education majors who are committed to helping youth. Even their physical education classes are taught by a New York State Certified Physical Education teacher. Also, there is an Academic Coordinator that maintains communication with school teachers on a weekly basis, if not more often, in order to make sure that youth in the program stay on top of their grades. When report cards come out, the Academic Coordinator sorts through grades in order to find members that need extra help. For example, if a young person's report card shows poor marks in math and it is clear they need help with multiplication, the academic coordinator will find appropriate worksheets dealing with multiplication for the members to work on after they finish their homework for the day.

Another impressive program offered through the Valley is their "First in Family" program. This program is two fold and has been around for about eight years. The first part starts when they are in 7th and 8th grade. Youth can get guidance from Dr. Julia Hall, who works to help them figure out whether they want to go to a public or private high school. She will help guide students and their families into making the choice that is best for each student. This is a big help in the city of Buffalo where young people have the opportunity to choose where they would like to attend high school. The second part of this program occurs when students are in 11th or 12th grade. Dr. Hall helps them apply to various colleges. Applying to colleges can be especially stressful and with the help of Dr. Hall these students can become the first in their family to go to college. Dr. Hall helps these high school students with everything from filling out their FAFSA to filling out their college applications. The Valley has secured more than \$1.5 million in scholarship money for high school students going to college since 2004. For those students who don't see college in their future, the Valley works to give them options as well. The Valley is working towards a partnership with the Buffalo Skilled Trade Union in order to give those youth an outlet where they may be able to find jobs after high school. For the Valley, the support doesn't stop when they get into college, the Valley follows up with college advisors in order to make sure that they are attending classes and making good grades. If these young people aren't, the Valley helps to make arrangements like getting them in touch with a tutor, so that these young adults have every chance to excel that they can.

The success of the Valley can't go noticed without mentioning the support of parents who have youth attending the afterschool programs. There are monthly events for youth and their families to attend, and all of the activities emphasize togetherness. Some of the activities that are happening this year are a bingo night with prizes, a holiday party, or even the infamous St. Patrick's Day Parade. These events get parents involved with their child and allow families to spend time together.

One can't say enough good things about The Valley and the services they provide youth and their families. Thanks to a dedicated staff and parent involvement, The Valley will surely be one of the outstanding agencies in Buffalo for years to come!

Erie County Youth Bureau

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Best Practice Mentoring: A Spotlight On Two Premier Agencies

Kacey Weafer, AmeriCorps VISTA, Erie County Youth Bureau

To those not familiar with mentoring it may seem like a grey area with many different approaches. But after looking at a few different mentoring programs in Buffalo that have had excellent results, it is easy to pinpoint where these agencies are similar, and it is those similarities that make them so successful in what they do.

Mentoring is defined as “a developmental partnership through which one person shares knowledge, skills, information, and perspective to foster the personal and professional growth of someone else,” and for many of the youth of Erie County, it is just what they need to reach their full potential. Anyone can be a mentor as long as they are willing to provide a young adult with support, friendship, in the form of a positive constructive relationship. Mentoring relationships have been shown to improve the lives for hard-to-serve, at-risk youth living in Erie County. In studies done about mentoring, it has been noted that a number of changes are observed in youth with mentors as the relationship continues. Some of these changes have been higher self esteem, reduction of being violent or using drugs, better relationships with parents and peers, and better academic performance. These changes are all extremely important to the well being and development of these youth into model citizens.

The two mentoring agencies that have stood out year after year in the Buffalo area are Compeer of Greater Buffalo and Be-A-Friend, Big Brothers and Sisters of Erie County. Together, both agencies work with 600 youth a year from the Buffalo area. Mentoring programs like Compeer and Be-A-Friend focus on increasing developmental assets in social competency, education, and positive identity. Allowing these relationships to grow and strengthen will help to guide these youth away from negative behaviors and outcomes.

Compeer of Greater Buffalo is celebrating their 25th anniversary since being founded in Buffalo. One of the most unique things about Compeer is that the youth they match with mentors are at-risk, most of them are suffering from emotional problems ranging from being victims of abuse or neglect, to suffering from a mental illness. Mentoring is an especially important service to provide youth living in Buffalo because many of these youth do not have access to resources that can help them to deal with these illnesses. Compeer makes 1-1 or 2-1 community based matches that last on average 18-24 months. Youths get referred to Compeer from more than seventy-five different sources referring youth; some of these sources include pediatricians, teachers, and mental health professionals.

Be-A-Friend also provides youth from Buffalo 1-1 or 2-1 mentoring. This mentoring program serves most of its clients from the city of Buffalo because there is such a high percentage of Buffalo youth who are Persons In Need of Supervision (PINS), high school dropouts, and the high number of single parent homes in the city. Youth are referred to Be-A-Friend from a number of different agencies including Buffalo Public Schools and Family Court. Be-A-Friend gets more than 25 referrals a week! The average mentoring relationship for youth and their mentor for Be-A-Friend are 22-24 months with many relationships lasting much longer.

Buffalo is considered to be the third poorest big city in the nation according to recent studies, and with poverty comes poor conditions for youth and family. Many of these youth live in single parent households and the single parent is working multiple jobs just to make ends meet. Many of these parents simply don't have the enough time to give to their children because they are trying to balance everything while providing for their family. Setting a child up with a mentor is a great idea for many of these parents because not only can it help to fill the void of growing up in a single parent household, but a mentor can add extra guidance if a parent is really busy. This is one of the reasons why waiting lists are so long. There is a waiting list of over 250 youth at Compeer, and around 600 youth on the waiting list at Be-A-Friend; both agencies are always accepting new youth.

One of the things that these two agencies have in common is both Compeer and Be-A-Friend incorporate “best practices” into their programs. Best practices are a series of suggestions put together to assist agencies in making their mentoring programs as successful and positive as possible. Some of these best practices include setting guidelines for evaluation and results, screening both mentors and mentees, and extensive training in addition for mentors in addition to the mentoring relationship.

While talking to Will Murphy, Director of Programs and Operations at Be-A-Friend, he told me about how they incorporate best practices in Be-A-Friend. One of the best practices that he emphasized was training. Be-A-Friend works relentlessly to train employees and mentors. It is important to train employees because when employees are trained they are able to help everyone else and give trainings based on the needs of the mentors. Will gave me an example of this, many of the youth who are served through Be-A-Friend have an incarcerated parent, and many of the mentors have no experience with incarceration. Be-A-Friend offers all types of training which allows mentors to get all of the answers they are looking for. All they need to do is ask for help and they are trained in whatever area they would like help with. Much of this training is outsourced in order to give the mentors the best information available.

Another best practice that Be-A-Friend follows is evaluation of the mentoring relationship. In addition to monthly reports on activities and time spent together, there is a six month report, as well as a yearlong report for mentors to fill out. These reports help to analyze the positive impact of the program and the mentoring relationship. This includes any changes to the mentee that can be documented, including increased academic performance. It will also help to make sure that the relationship is on par with the agencies statement of purpose. The evaluation is similar to a report card for an agency, and is used to help develop the mentoring relationship.

A Spotlight from page 9

One of the best practices that Compeer follows is carefully recruiting and screening the possible mentors. Once an application is filled out, including four references and a police record search, mentors go through a comprehensive interview by Compeer staff that not only allow Compeer to get to know the mentor, but allow the mentor to understand what Compeer is about. This interview normally lasts between 60-90 minutes. Some of the topics that are discussed are work history, personality profile, friendships, prejudices, mental illness, health and many other things. After potential mentors go through the interview, they continue with a multi-step screening process that includes clearance from child abuse or maltreatment, and fingerprinting through the FBI. Once they are approved they are required to go through a general group training session that covers a number of topics ranging from philosophy to the practice of mentoring to the keys of developing a successful relationship. Following this three hour training mentors are matched with a mentee. The Be-A-Friend screening process is very similar to the screening process with Compeer. As you can see, the screening and recruiting process is taken very seriously by both agencies, and part of the reason why they are so successful.

One "best practice" that both agencies incorporate into their mentoring relationships is the procedures for managing match closure. Match closure is when a mentoring relationship comes to an "official" end. Match closure is one of the most vital parts of the mentoring relationship, and although it normally very short and simple, it is very important. The reason why it is so important is because if the closure is done improperly it can lead to hard feelings and feelings of abandonment which reverse the effects of the last year of the relationship. Closure also gives mentors the opportunity to discuss their involvement in the program with the staff.

In examining and speaking with these two programs and their Directors it became clear that beyond the commonality of best practices that both programs maintain it is abundantly clear that both have these core cultural elements as well, listening, caring, full engagement, respect throughout the organization and above all are committed to making a difference for every single youth they have the privilege to work with.

Youth Detention Center Launches New Reading Program

Submitted by Sharif Shahied, Youth Detention Clubhouse Director

The Boys and Girls Clubs of Buffalo (BGCB) and the Erie County Youth Bureau have teamed up to assist the youth at the youth detention center with their reading and writing skills. The newly created 'Book Club Program' has been implemented along with the five core programs that the BGCB are required to implement within the Life Skills portion of the youths' day. The BGCB programs help youth with Character and Leadership, Health and Lifeskills, Arts, Sports and Recreation and Education. The Book Club Program is incorporated with our Character and Leadership program already offered at the youth detention center. The Erie County Youth Bureau was very instrumental in helping us get the necessary books that deal with triumph and sparked the interest of the youth housed at the facility.

We are implementing a new program to go along with Kids Litz, each person will be responsible for being able to accurately record what happens in the stories they read. They should be able to tell whether it is fiction or non fiction, who the main characters are, where the story takes place, and what the actual story is about. Also, they will have to present their reports to other members of the group.

For the month of November, we have selected "The Freedom Writers Diary". In this book a teacher, along with 150 teens, used writing to change themselves and the world around them. These students were considered "at risk", and the teacher took a few books like: The Diary of Anne Frank, The Diary of a Young Girl, and Zlata's Diary as their guides, and recorded their feelings in diaries of their own. At the Youth Detention Center, we are doing something very similar with our teens. Using rhymes, lyrics, poems, and raps to describe what's going thru the teens' heads. The goal of this month's meetings are to have youth express themselves without using profanity, be able to articulate words properly, and practice their public speaking skills. The ultimate goal for the fall session of The Book Club is for the youth to have journals of their own that can be of some help to other "at risk" teens.

The Positive Place For Kids



BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS
of Buffalo

The Book Club meets daily within the youths' positive youth development program day. It is our expectation, that youth will not only enjoy reading books on their own, but also have an increased reading ability as they transition back into their regular schools.

Western New York United Against Drugs & Alcohol Abuse, Inc. Empowering Youth One School At a Time

Kacey Weafer, AmeriCorps VISTA, Erie County Youth Bureau

Don't let the name deceive you, Western New York United Against Drugs and Alcohol Abuse, Inc. doesn't do what your average school based alcohol and drug program does, they go much further. Not only do they teach about the dangers of drugs and alcohol, which have the ability to destroy entire communities, but they empower youth within the City of Buffalo and teach them how to become leaders. Thanks to WNY United thousands of youth every year learn about the importance of being a leader and making the right decisions. Yearly, WNY United is changing the entire atmosphere of schools in Buffalo from Kindergarten through 6th grade.

WNY United partners with Buffalo Public Schools and a select number of different suburban and rural school districts. Altogether, there are twenty-six different partner schools, sixteen within the City of Buffalo, four in Lakeshore, four in Frontier and two in Cleveland Hill. There isn't a set curriculum that is used for each school. Instead, the curriculum is tailored in order to deal with the most prominent issues in that school. No two schools are alike and WNY United understands that the issues that are affecting students in a suburban school are not the same issues that are affecting students living in the city.

At the beginning of the year, the director of WNY United, Beth Anzalone, meets with the principal of each school and other leaders to create the prevention plan. After the prevention plan is set, an assessment is made of the school and a team is put together. The team is called The School Community Action Team or SCAT. They help to select strategies for the school that will be used for the upcoming year. The teachers and administration in the school are then trained in the latest prevention technologies in order to reduce student risk factors and build assets of youth once the program starts. Although each plan is tailored, the in school trainings are based off of social skill development for K-6th grade, and are listed as follows:

- Grade Conflict Resolution K-3rd
- Too Good for Violence Grade 4
- Keep a Clear Mind Grade 4
- Building Skills Grade 5
- Too Good for Drugs Grade 6

WNY United works to address issues and behaviors that students in that grade experience, and these aren't the one time meetings that you would expect. These lessons span over a 10 week period in order to give youth the best chance at making positive changes. Not only do they get these lessons throughout the year, but they get a new, age appropriate, 10 week lesson every year until they reach seventh grade.

This program is all about empowerment. Youth who become empowered gain the ability to make positive decisions for themselves, and that is exactly what this program does. It allows youth to learn ways to deal with conflict, violence and drugs so that down the line when they are put in a situation where they feel pressured, they have the tools to do the right thing.

To make sure that this program is effective, WNY United distributes a survey to youth at the beginning, the middle, and the end of the program. This survey allows WNY United to see assets (that reverse destructive behaviors) that youth develop throughout the sessions. The results have shown that almost all youth have shown some type of improvement as a result of the lessons. These lessons are evidence based and are always being evaluated in order to keep them as efficient and relevant as possible.

Besides the programs during the school year, there is also a summer program run by WNY United called Leaders in Training (LIT). The LIT Program works on many different skill sets, but its focus is on social skills, academic enhancement and of course leadership skills for youth. Every year, a handful of seventh graders are selected to take part in the LIT program. This camp runs from 9am-3pm Monday through Friday for five weeks during the summer. When youth attend they participate in activities ranging from a personality assessment that helps them learn traits about themselves, to a "Build A Business" curriculum, where youth create their own business concept and create everything from the name through the marketing for it. Youth involved in this program are given the skills to become role models to their peers and help to enforce positive change within their schools. After learning these skills during the summer before eighth grade when these youth go back to school in the fall they meet every two weeks to continue their service learning from the summer.

The WNY United LIT program is unbelievably empowering. The closing ceremony this year wasn't only a closing ceremony, but it was an actual performance put on by the youth of the skills they learned during the summer. This year it included moving poetry, skits, a movie created by and featuring youth in the summer program, there even was African drumming. With a Program Director as dedicated and committed as Ms. Anzalone and the help of the great employees, WNY United will continue to have great success.



2010 Red Ribbon Rally at School #91 BUILD

*The Youth Bureau Run Down
Erie County Youth Bureau Newsletter
810 East Ferry Street
Buffalo, NY 14211*

The Youth Bureau Is On The World Wide Web!

1. Go to <http://www2.erie.gov/socialservices/>
2. Click Services for Children, Family and Adults
3. Click Youth Services
4. On the Welcome to Erie County Youth Services, click Youth Bureau.
5. On the Youth Bureau page, if you scroll to the right, you will see the More Information Section.

“Serving youth and families through asset development and advocacy, prevention, and intervention programs that strengthen families and communities.”



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Youth Bureau

Mission: To serve youth and families through asset development and advocacy, prevention, and intervention programs that strengthen families and communities.

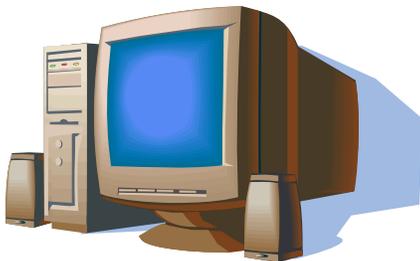
810 East Ferry Street
Buffalo, NY 14211
(P) 716-923-4000
(F) 716-893-7929

Welcome to the website of the Erie County Youth Bureau! The ECVB annually grants funding to over 75 community based organizations providing positive youth development programs throughout Erie County. Funded agencies are selected through a competitive "Request for Proposal" process. Agency's past performance, monitoring, and performance measures are also taken into consideration. In addition, the ECVB enables 11 Municipal Youth Bureaus and 32 local towns and villages to be eligible for New York State aid to run youth service and recreation programs. Youth services are offered in the following funding categories:

Youth Development/Delinquency Prevention Programs
Special Delinquency Prevention Programs
Runaway & Homeless Youth Programs

More information:

- [Youth Board](#)
- [Program Descriptions](#)
- [Year Round Programming - Application Process](#)
- [Summer Primetime Programming - Application Process](#)
- [A Partnership for Youth Program Descriptions](#)
- [Youth Detention Center Partnerships](#)
- [Results Based Accountability](#)
- [Maps](#)
- [Calendar](#)
- [Municipal Youth Bureau's Towns & Villages](#)
- [Forms](#)
- [Darcel Hunter Scholarship](#)



The Erie County Youth Bureau thanks Diane Picard of Massachusetts Avenue Project, Kim DeFlyer from On The Job Ministries, Will Murphy from Be-A-Friend, Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Erie County, Michele Brown from Compeer, LaGuan Rodgers from Be-A-Friend, Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Erie County, Lori Overdorf from The Valley, Beth Anzalone from WNY United and Sharif Shahied the Youth Detention Clubhouse Director for their time in helping make this newsletter successful.

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