

Profiles in Success

WIA Summer Youth 2009

Summer Programs at Workforce Solutions Gulf Coast and Upper Rio Grande

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) was passed by Congress in 1998 to consolidate, streamline and better coordinate the nation's job training system. Like its predecessor, the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), it has separate funding streams for adults, dislocated workers, and youth.

In a departure from prior workforce legislation, the WIA does not authorize a separate appropriation for summer youth programs. Therefore, while summer youth programs were standard practice under the JTPA, the current WIA focuses more on year-round programs, with an emphasis on out-of-school youth.

As will be discussed in more detail below, the recent economic downturn and the influx of stimulus money from the federal government in 2009 have combined to bring summer youth programs back to the forefront of youth activities.

WIA youth services and programs are designed for young people between the ages of 14 years and 21 years who face barriers to school completion or to employment. WIA requires that youth participating in these programs receive preparation for postsecondary educational opportunities or employment including individual skills and service needs assessment, access to skills training, and work experience. Youth services also include guidance and counseling. WIA seeks to avoid one-time and short-term interventions and does so by offering a system of services that includes mentoring, community service, leadership

development, peer-centered activities and long term follow-up.

Under WIA, 95 percent of federal allocated monies must serve low-income youth. Five percent may go to youth who do not meet the income requirements but who do face barriers, are a grade level behind, or who have a disability. Barriers under WIA are defined as being a dropout, deficient in basic literacy skills, homeless, a runaway, a foster child, an offender, being pregnant or being a parent, or needing help to either complete an education program, or needing help to get and keep a job.

In early 2009, the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) allocated \$1.2 billion nationwide to WIA youth programs to create summer (and year-round jobs) for low-income youth. The ARRA extended youth eligibility from 21 to 24 years of age and streamlined performance measures, only requiring summer



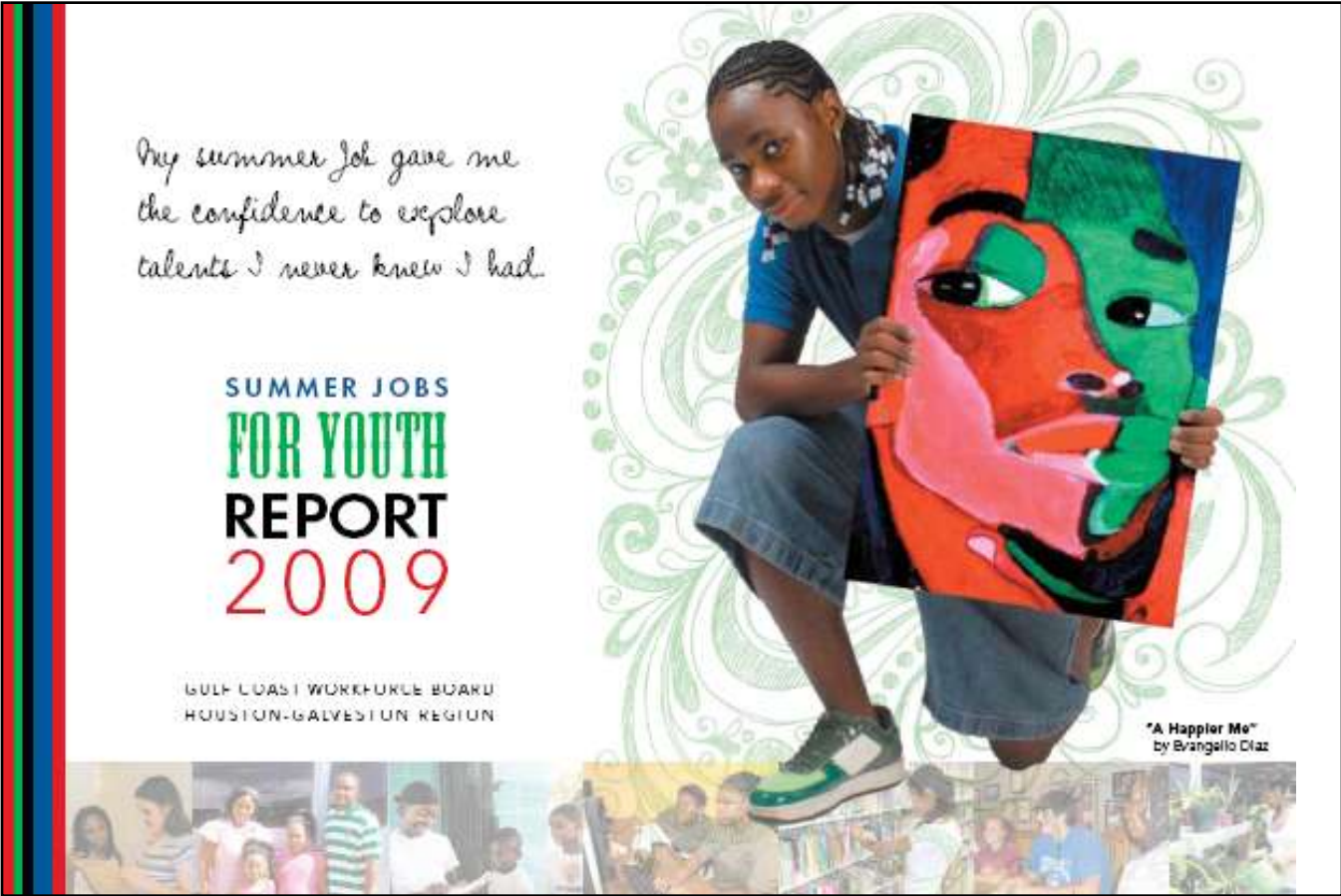
programs to show performance gains under one indicator, which was the achievement of work readiness goals. Programs were charged with making work readiness the core of the summer youth program and were encouraged to integrate green jobs and apprenticeship where possible. The federal stimulus allowed program operators to both expand existing programs and create new programs, which resulted in youth services reaching many more young people during the summer in 2009. In addition, 2009 summer youth programming reached populations that had not been previously targeted, such as rural and disabled youth.

Nationwide, states and local areas enrolled more than 355,000 youth, 345,000 of whom enrolled for the summer between May and September. Of that number, youth programs placed 314,000 in summer jobs across the country. The return of summer youth programs has given youth opportunity to learn the value of work and to

experience the self-confidence that employment brings. With their focus on work readiness and skills training, these programs can play a very important role in the successful transition of youth in high school to college and career.

In Texas, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) and 28 regional workforce development boards comprise Texas Workforce Solutions, a market-driven workforce system that serves both employers and job seekers. Workforce Solutions collaborates with employers, economic development organizations, schools and training providers to offer training programs and job search assistance to all Texans, including youth. Emphasizing summer employment opportunities that link training and work experience to credentials, Workforce Solutions encouraged Boards to use ARRA funds to teach communication, interpersonal, decision-making, and learning skills to young people. In 2009, ARRA funds for summer youth programming of

Gulf Coast Workforce Board Houston-Galveston Region



nearly \$70 million helped serve over 24,000 youth in Texas. The summaries below show successful summer youth programs at Workforce Solutions Gulf Coast and Upper Rio Grande.

Workforce Solutions Gulf Coast was recognized by TWC as the Outstanding Summer Youth Employment Program at the 13th Annual Texas Workforce Conference in December of 2009. Through the Gulf Coast Workforce Board, the Houston-Galveston Gulf Coast region received over \$14 million dollars that provided job opportunities starting at minimum wage for youth. During the summer of 2009, over 4,000 young people worked between 30 and 35 hours a week. The Gulf Coast Workforce Board collaborated with 13 educational, business and community organizations to bring together more than 400 employers at 700 worksites to provide a total of 5,127 young people practical exposure to a variety of work environments and occupations. Depending upon age requirements, career activities ranged from youth working at museums, parks, and healthcare facilities, to others placed at construction and manufacturing companies, to still others placed at public offices, such as the Houston District Attorney’s Office.

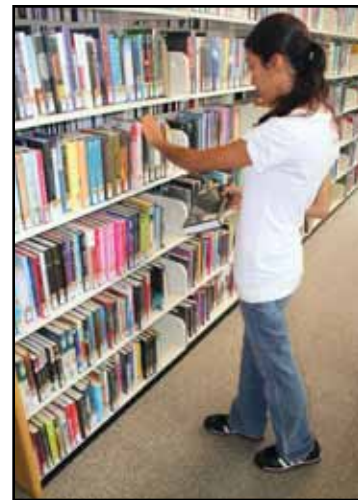
Gulf Coast’s summer program infused more than \$7.3 million youth wages into the region to help families in need and to stimulate the local economy. The city of Houston hired over 600 youth to work in its parks, libraries and courts. Dow Chemical Company provided substantive work experience to 25 young adults that included coaching and supervision from trained industry professionals. In addition, as a direct result of their experience at Dow, six participants are planning to go to college, one is enrolled in a program to be certified as a process operator and applied at Dow, and several young women have applied to Dow’s Women in Welding program.

“The participants in the Dow Summer Jobs program had exemplary attitudes. They showed a great work ethic. And, they really seemed to appreciate the opportunity to work for a company like Dow.”

**—Ronda Hall,
HR local talent acquisition lead**



“My dad says I look more confident and that he’s proud of me. Everything I learned will help me reach my goal of becoming a lawyer.”
—Maverick, age 15



“I knew from the start that school was important, but being here I saw the results of staying focused the whole way through and what it would get me.” —DeBrea, age 19

The success of Gulf Coast’s Summer Youth program is shown through testimonials and illustrations in its creative **Summer Jobs for Youth Report 2009** at:
<http://www.wrksolutions.com/jobs/youth.html>



WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS

UPPER RIO GRANDE

Workforce Solutions Upper Rio Grande's 2009 ARRA Summer Youth Program was funded at \$3,858,004. The program operated from June 1, 2009 to September 30, 2009, with start dates staggered for different participant age groups. Weekly schedules varied, but averaged 25 to 30 hours of work experience each week in the government, healthcare, service, retail, and finance sectors of the six-county El Paso region. The Summer Youth Program target was originally 798 participants for the six counties, but Workforce Solutions Upper Rio Grande more than tripled this figure, enrolling 2,980 youth.

To expose youth to career and education pathways, summer camps were structured around the following areas: health sciences, engineering, information technology, career exploration, energy efficient construction, culinary, visual and cultural arts, and customer service. Summer camps designed work-based projects for youth where they learned and developed skills related to nursing, physical therapy, pharmacy, and medicine. For example, in Camp Minor MINER Health Sciences at the University of El Paso (UTEP), students visited hospitals and shelters and had the opportunity to learn CPR and earn first-aid certifications. Students were also able to learn how the disabled community functions and took classes in American Sign Language. With regard to engineering, basic principles were explored in Camp Minor MINER Engineering (also at UTEP) through hands-on projects such as building model cars powered by solar panels. During the IT camp at El Paso Community College (EPCC) Valle Verde Campus, called EPCC ITeens, each student assembled a computer from scratch. They

learned about system components, and were able to take their computers home at the end of the course. Centro de Salud La Fe in El Paso worked with Workforce Solutions Upper Rio Grande to conduct art camps where youth worked on the El Paso Beautification Project. Others learned about culinary occupations at a camp designed to offer cooking experience ranging from kitchen basics to producing and presenting restaurant quality food.

El Paso's small to large-sized employers (both public and private) provided worksites and employment activities ranging from clerical assistance to computer maintenance, and from hands-on work in grounds maintenance to client-care in the healthcare sector. All together, 142 employers provided 2,500 opportunities for youth to be exposed to the working worlds of government, information technology, health care, service, retail, and finance. Youth also had opportunities for work experience in law and law enforcement, and in accounting. Participants were able to acquire "soft skills" as well, such as learning to follow directions, punctuality, team work, internal and external customer service, and time management. Employer response was positive, as indicated by the remarks of Captain Spencer Lee, Deputy Chief of Patient Administration at the William Beaumont Army Medical Center:

“These students assisted in eliminating a six month backlog in requests for copies for medical records in the Correspondence Section. By so doing, we are now able to meet our goal of filling requests in two to four weeks, the first time we have been able to do so in at least three years.”

Where appropriate, Summer Youth Program participants received guidance for obtaining financial aid and other tuition funding options to help them continue their education. As the profiles below illustrate, others pursued the option to enroll in year-round WIA youth programming that offer support services designed to assist youth complete postsecondary education options or other workforce opportunities.

Summer Youth Success Stories



Gustavo Quezada, age 19, graduated from Irvin High School in El Paso in 2009. He heard about Workforce Solutions Upper Rio Grande's Summer Youth Program during the spring of his senior year and decided to apply. When he received his call from program directors in July, he was happy to learn that he would start the following week. Gustavo was assigned to a warehouse facility where tables, desks, and chairs were assembled for distribution to new schools in El Paso. The work was physically challenging, but what impressed Gustavo most was the team work and collaborative atmosphere among the youth. He admits he was surprised to see young women hoisting and moving fifty-pound boxes with no hesitation. Laughing, Gustavo explains that as the Summer Youth Program helped him recognize and overcome his own stereotypes, he had the opportunity to change those of his parents. He eventually persuaded them to accept it as normal, but he remembers many amusing conversations with his parents who listened in amazement when he returned home each day describing the challenging physical work accomplished by his

female co-workers. After completing his work for the El Paso Independent School District, Gustavo's next summer assignment was at the Workforce Solutions Upper Rio Grande on Lomaland Road in El Paso. This job was a sharp contrast, giving him exposure to working exclusively indoors in an office environment. Gustavo is currently working part-time at Workforce Solutions doing clerical work. In addition to filing, he uses computer skills to create spreadsheets, manage timesheets, and help with payroll. Gustavo is refining people skills as well, since he is charged with follow up calls to job seekers and monitoring young people in programs at Workforce Solutions.

His experience through the Summer Youth Program brought Gustavo's interests into focus and gave him direction. Gustavo had worked on and off at his father's business, Quezada Construction, since he was 13 years old. Working both an outdoor and indoor job last summer made him realize that while he loves the quick, physical challenge of construction work, he also values the administrative skills that are critical to running a successful business. Gustavo's parents encouraged him to pursue higher education for a more secure future and Gustavo is already taking classes (and making As!) to earn an administrative assistant certificate at Anamarc College. His long-term plans are to pursue an associate degree in business administration so that one day, Gustavo will be able run to his father's business.



Eduardo Mora, age 19, heard about the WIA Summer Youth Program in the spring of 2009 when he was a senior at Horizon High School in El Paso. He was very attracted by the program's offer to pay students while they learned, so he applied. Shortly after he graduated he was contacted by

program directors and asked to be a counselor for the Minor MINER Summer Camp taking place at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). Eduardo worked for two four-week periods, shepherding 20 students daily to and from various sessions held at UTEP's Healthcare Camps.

His first impression was that his assignment would be extremely challenging—it was hard to keep so many teenagers in line—especially since he was just barely older than they were. Eduardo quickly learned the fine line between being a peer and being an instructor. He developed a way to command the respect of his students by being authoritative, but remaining friendly, or being “direct but nice,” as he told his campers. Eduardo enjoyed taking the students to their various destinations at hospitals, rehabilitation facilities, and homeless shelters, and learned a great deal about the professional world and the system of higher education at UTEP himself. Eduardo realized he was not alone in enjoying the learning at Camp Minor MINER when he overheard a lively conversation one day between campers discussing “undercover learning.” The kids found their activities to be so exciting, they could not refer to what they were doing each day as plain old “camp”—instead, they all called it, “undercover learning!”

Working as a camp counselor gave Eduardo the opportunity to fine tune his leadership skills and also was an excellent lead into his current job. He is working for the University Medical Center as a foreman and must often be “direct but nice” since he is responsible for many things, including the work of a crew that has to dig ditches to particular specifications. Currently, Eduardo is working full time and attending night classes at El Paso Community College. He is fulfilling his basic requirements and intends to transfer to UTEP in 18 months to work on a degree in civil engineering. Eduardo is no stranger to construction sites: starting at age nine he worked as a “go getter” for his father and grandfather, who own A1 Plumbing in El Paso. This industrious young man is in the first stages of clearing the land where he and his new bride plan to build their house themselves. When Eduardo is not working on that project, he is snapping photographs at weddings and special events for friends and family, for his small business named A1 Events.



Leonel Estrada, age 22, was applying for insulation as a construction worker in El Paso when one of his friends told him about the Summer Youth Program sponsored by Workforce Solutions Upper Rio Grande in the spring of 2009. Leonel had heard the opportunity would be something to do with computers and since he had enjoyed working with computers in high school, he thought this would be an excellent opportunity to learn more about them. Two months after he applied, he received a phone call that offered him work experience with Workforce Solutions in their IT department. Leonel says that as of the first day, he knew this was the kind of job he would enjoy for the rest of his life. He felt welcomed by his employers and a part of their team. Working with and around computers that summer, Leonel saw how they function on many levels and how essential computers are to any modern working environment.

Work experience through the Summer Youth Program at Workforce Solutions put Leonel on a career track in an area he really likes. In October 2009, he was hired by Workforce Solutions Upper Rio Grande to work as a part-time intern in their IT support department. He works with staff in all areas, troubleshooting computer problems or scanner issues and sometimes solving problems associated with telephone and fax lines. Leonel loves his work and says the people at Workforce Solutions are like family because they provide a supportive and nurturing environment. He feels that he is contributing to their team and at the same time, he continues to learn about computers and computer programming. His immediate plans are to complete an A+ Certification at El

Paso Junior College, Valle Verde campus, which will demonstrate his competency as a computer technician. After that, Leonel's goal is to attend the University of El Paso and earn a four-year degree in computer science.



Alfredo Olivarez, age 22, was enrolled at the University of El Paso (UTEP) as a computer science major, but in the spring of 2009, he ran into difficulties. A burdensome tuition and worries for his future led him to consult with a UTEP dean who encouraged him to participate in the WIA Summer Youth program sponsored by Workforce Solutions Upper Rio Grande. With hope that he would earn money and could remain in his chosen field, Alfredo applied. Alfredo was assigned to a work project designed to assist the El Paso Independent School District with middle school and high school computer installations using an inventory program to tag equipment throughout the school district. Working with a dozen other young people, Alfredo enjoyed the challenge

and team spirit of meeting their daily inventory schedule. The program offered Alfredo regular hours at minimum wage and the opportunity to do something he enjoyed. After a month of inventory work, Alfredo was placed in a STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) internship at Workforce Solutions on Lomaland Drive. In this position, he works half days, doing a variety of IT support tasks: checking resource computers used by center customers, troubleshooting staff computers, and helping job seekers at Workforce Solutions who need basic instruction to use the resource computers.

For Alfredo, the weeks he worked in the WIA Summer Youth program were an enormous relief from what had become a tedious scramble to keep up with his studies and pay his tuition. The Summer Youth Program offered him a constructive work experience when he felt discouraged and overwhelmed by circumstances. Working at computer-related tasks kept him in touch with his basic interest in computers, and the environments associated with the Summer WIA Youth Programs kept him interacting with people. Alfredo has realized that one of the most important and satisfying aspects of his job at the Lomaland Center is working with the public. Rejuvenated and encouraged, Alfredo is back on track to pursue a career in computer science. He plans to apply to El Paso Community College and first earn an A+ Certification that will demonstrate his competence as a computer technician. He is also interested in earning a Network Certification before returning to UTEP to complete his baccalaureate degree in computer science. After all, he says, he is half-way there already!

The Texas Workforce Investment Council promotes the development of a well-educated, highly skilled workforce for Texas and advocates a workforce system that provides quality workforce education and training opportunities.

**For more information, visit:
<http://governor.state.tx.us/twic/>**