

Summer Programs Offer Employment Opportunities for area Youth

Seventy local youth are participating in much-needed youth employment and job-readiness programs thanks to several grants from the Workforce Partnership of Greater Rhode Island (WPGRI). Family Resources Community Action (FRCA) of Woonsocket received three grants totaling more than \$218,000 for summer youth employment funded by the WPGRI (using funds from the American Recovery and Investment Act) for youth ages 16-24 who meet eligibility criteria. A total of 45 youth have been placed in 20 hour per week minimum wage jobs. The program covers 12 weeks for out of school youth and six weeks for in-school youth. All sites include job readiness and career exploration programming.

"It is great at this time of increasing unemployment to provide youth an opportunity for solid work experience for a longer period of time," said Kerri Kanelos, FRCA Employment & Training Director. "This summer we've been able to serve many more youth up to age 24 in a variety of placements. The older youth are great mentors to the younger kids," Kanelos noted. The June unemployment rate in Woonsocket was 14.3%, and youth historically have a particularly difficult time securing jobs.

Three separate summer employment programs were funded. In the Grow Up Community Garden project for 15 youth (in partnership with Franklin Farm in Cumberland), youth will work on a range of gardening projects including tending the vegetable garden for the Rhode Island Food Bank and indoor activities such as cooking demonstrations. In the Hospitality and Tourism Project for 20 youth (in partnership with Blackstone Valley Tourism Council), youth will gain customer service experience by interacting with visitors at local tourism centers and will work on a My Town Woonsocket tourism and beautification projects. The Construction project employs 10 older youth ages 18-24 in learning about the construction industry while working on the renovation of a two-story home owned by FRCA. The building, formerly an adolescent residential shelter, will be converted into a visitation center for parents trying to reunify with their children.

In addition to the summer youth employment grants, FRCA received \$45,500 in funding from the Workforce Partnership of Greater Rhode Island (with Job Development Fund money) for We-Can-2, a five-week career exploration project for 25 youth ages 14 & 15.