

URBAN LEAGUE OF HUDSON COUNTY

THE ROAD TO
PROGRAM
IMPROVEMENT

URBAN LEAGUE OF HUDSON COUNTY'S
PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT STORY

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM PRIOR TO EFF

The Urban League of Hudson County (ULOHC) is one of the satellite sites in New Jersey that offer the Workforce Learning Link Program. This unique and innovative program merges high-tech, computer based, self-paced learning with instruction by ULOHC Staff. The program curriculum teaches participants how to improve their communication skills, along with basic computer knowledge and skills essential to functioning in a workplace environment. Participants are introduced to the internet through NJN's Job Cast, a daily 5 to 7 minute web broadcast focusing upon a distinct occupation and tips from experts in various employment fields. The Workforce Learning Link Program is administered in collaboration with the Department of Labor Work First New Jersey initiative. The process of enrolling customers into the program relied on the standard referral procedures. The customer's focus for enrollment was geared towards employment, enhancing computer skills and their level of employability.

The Workforce Learning Link Program offered the above services and based the success rate of our program on the Department of Labor (DOL) Work First New Jersey guidelines. These standards include gauging success by increased skills level and job placement of the customers serviced.

Staff observations identified customers' barriers to employment and learning outside of the DOL guidelines, including but not limited to poor communication skills, lack of interpersonal skills and not taking responsibility for their current status. These customers had no plan of action to determine future goals. We captured this information as a result of **1)** the intake process to refer customers for employment opportunities and **2)** the standard forms generated by the Department of Labor Work First New Jersey for enrollment in Workforce Learning Link.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EFF STANDARDS

Based on the above staff observations and the EFF Framework which was introduced into both the Employment Center and Workforce Learning Link Program, the journey to program improvement began with identifying the customers' occupational and educational skill levels, interests and family responsibilities. In order to implement program services we first identified the changes, which could be incorporated into the program without alienating funders. The final team who were responsible for integrating the EFF Standards into the pre-existing programs, offered by the ULOHC Employment & Training Division, Workforce Learning Link Program and Employment Division, consisted of staff members working directly with the customers, the Instructor, the Intake

Coordinator and Employment Counselor, a Communications Specialist, and the Educational Director of the Hudson Correctional Facility and Clergyman. The team identified the intake process as the first tool to determine the customer needs as per the individual, educational and occupational skill levels, along with family responsibilities and verbal communication techniques. We then sought to amend the curriculum in the Workforce Learning Link Program to accommodate both the learner's goals and funder's expectations for reporting purposes.

The processes that led to finalizing changes to make and the products themselves were challenging. In observing input from the team members, it appears those persons who maintained an ongoing dialogue with and prior knowledge of the organization's inner classroom structure and clientele serviced were able to offer specific changes and products, and report the outcomes. This also supported where the changes could be made for a more efficient flow in delivering services. Additionally, ULOHC Staff/Team Members had the benefit of EFF Standards for Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning and Role Maps posters as a resource to utilize on a daily basis. We reflected regularly on the posters while incorporating the EFF Standards as a guide in our daily communication with the adult learners and commitment to our program improvement. The opportunity to incorporate additional teaching mechanisms is a direct result of the EFF Module. The Instructor had the flexibility to incorporate lessons, discussions and field trips based on a need identified by the adult learners. EFF validated the need to bring life learning lessons into the classroom without a need for additional materials, including monetary resources.

The varied backgrounds of the team members worked well in the beginning of this process. Program improvement team meetings in the first couple of sessions were well attended. Feedback from these meetings validated the necessity for change. We agreed on the issues plaguing adult learners, all of which are outlined in the sixteen EFF Standards. It later became evident that schedules and team members' outside priorities would be a determining factor to commitment and the level of responsibility each individual would be willing to accept.

As a result of changes in staffing, the Employment and Training Divisions was reorganized. The revision included incorporating EFF into the Employment Division, now allowing for all staff members to better serve the clients seeking services at the ULOHC Employment and Training Division. Now that the Employment Specialist has a working knowledge of the EFF Framework and program improvement goals, she is able to utilize intake methods based on the EFF Framework and gear the customer to the appropriate services, not limited to within our agency.

The participation in the program improvement process impacted staff's professional development by working to implement the process, professional relationships and interaction between the divisions. Staff do not limit themselves to narrow goals when servicing our walk-in participant. For example, a customer seeking employment is not only assessed for employment opportunities but placement with one of our training programs based on staff knowledge of the program improvement goals and implementation of the EFF Framework. Increased enrollment of walk-in customers for the Workforce Learning Link Program is a noteworthy result of program improvement.

Recruitment call-ins and flyers (which are widely placed throughout the agency and community) were modified to reflect a program that not only addresses the ABC's of learning but also would appeal to personal growth including communication techniques, resources available at the ULOHC and how to address WFNJ participation issues. The Recruiter translates these selling points during his monologue at the recruitment sessions and closes with giving the potential customer options to make a decision that would reflect long-term goals. Communication with the Hudson County Welfare Agency Case Managers regarding ULOHC programs in cases of "hard to serve" customers has

generated an increase in our program's level of service. The Case Manager is advised of the additional support mechanisms that we utilize to address the barriers faced by this population.

The program improvement process has been and is on going as we implement the EFF Framework.. We experienced challenges, as the changes in staff were critical to this process. It appears from the organizational structure of this program that the team members could and possible should have included the entire Employment and Training Division as original members of the team. This would allow for meetings on a regular basis. Once the final team was constructed we moved forward to bring the EFF standards outside of one particular program. We observed that the intake forms could be utilized in other areas of service, namely employment. Community awareness regarding services has increased at this time based on the feedback received from the Communication Specialist and referrals from past and present customers. Data collected by the Employment Counselor also supports this statement.

We were challenged by time to formally document curriculum. Attempting to have the original team participate in this process may have been a step that could have been put aside in the interest of moving forward.

The Urban League of Hudson County is a community; a part of our mission is to empower the community. The EFF Framework supports this mission by way of giving guidelines to implement into programs. The "bottom line" results to report include the increase in the number of customers serviced, customer satisfaction (data obtained from surveys), job retention, and testimonials.

Students collectively at work with the assistance of Instructor. The EFF PI process allowed for today's curriculum to be chosen by the students. Students are working on a budget plan that includes all real life income.



“The Urban League of Hudson County has enhanced my social skills. I am presently more involved in community activities, such as voter registration drives and attending community meetings”

Participation in the EFF PI process realized the relationships between the learner and community involvement.



“I have not only increased my math and reading levels, the support and guidance I have been given by staff has shown me that I am a valued family member”

The EFF PI process was the catalyst, which brought staff together in a plan to service this customer.





LEARNING IS A LIFELONG PROCESS ...

Are you ready to improve your skills?

Let us assist you on getting started!

THE WORKFORCE LEARNING LINK

Even in today's job market everything is built on the basics, **reading, writing, math, computer skills and communication skills.**

The **WORKFORCE LEARNING LINK** sponsored by the Urban League of Hudson County (**ULOHC**) can help you sharpen your basic literary skills and help you acquire some new ones.

SIGN UP TODAY!

- **“Hands on Training” at the ULOHC computer lab**
- **Learn basic skills needed for employment**
- **On-site support services available**
- **We have incorporated the Equipped for the Future (EFF) program quality model**
- **Methods on how to enhance Leadership Capabilities and Organizational strength.**

To obtain information or to enroll please call or visit our offices Monday thru Friday 9:00am-5:00pm:

253 Martin Luther King Drive, Jersey City, New Jersey

Or contact

Mr. Kemp at 201-451-8888ext.176

*Urban League of Hudson County
Workforce Learning Link Program
253 MLK Drive
Jersey City, NJ 07305*

As a participant of the Workforce Learning Link Program, you will be offered the opportunity to gain skills in the following areas: 1) Communication Skills, 2) Decision –Making Skills, 3) Interpersonal Skills, and 4) Lifelong Learning Skills. Enabling you to think broader, and link these skills with your goals.

Please complete the following questions:

<i>EDUCATIONAL GOAL (S)</i>
<i>What are your educational goals and how will it impact your life?</i>
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PARENT/FAMILY MEMBER GOAL (S)

How will participating in this program affect you as a parent/family member?



WORKER MEMBER GOAL (S)

How will this program increase your employment opportunities?



I understand that I will be asked to write a narrative when I have completed the Workforce Learning Link program.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

