



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DISCUSSION PAPER

Toward a More Prosperous Springfield: A look at the barriers to employment from the perspective of residents and supporting organizations

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Background

Compared to the city, the region, and the state, labor force participation rates in Springfield's downtown and surrounding neighborhoods¹ are very low. Residents and community leaders have expressed concerns about the employment prospects for the low-income residents that make up these neighborhoods. The purpose of this discussion paper is to highlight the perspectives of residents and community-based organizations on why so few residents of Springfield's downtown neighborhoods are employed and to look at some of the resources available to Springfield residents to help them address barriers to employment.

The neighborhoods that surround Springfield's downtown area have high concentrations of poverty and unemployment rates more than twice those of the MSA at the 2000 census. Residents and community-based organizations cite a number of barriers to employment for low-income residents. Among the most significant barriers are a lack of education and skills, absence of previous work history and/or job references, evidence of criminal histories, and transportation issues. Job seekers from these neighborhoods describe their situation as hopeless and feel left out of the competition for the few jobs they think are available.

A second focus of this discussion paper is to discuss the resources available to Springfield residents to help them address these barriers. The paper provides an overview of some of the programs available to residents, and looks in more depth at several programmatic approaches to education and workforce development.

Much of the information presented in this paper is based on an extensive interview process with local organizations that took place over 12 months in Springfield. Interviews were conducted with 16 organizations, including nonprofit agencies, community-based organizations, education institutions, career centers and government agencies and programs. A list of organizations is provided in the Appendix. Organizations were selected based on the role they play in assisting residents of downtown

Among the most significant barriers are a lack of education and skills, absence of previous work history and/or job references, evidence of criminal histories, and transportation issues.

¹ These neighborhoods include: Brightwood, Liberty Heights, Memorial Square, Metro Center, McKnight, Old Hill, Six Corners and the South End.

Springfield's neighborhoods, and extensive efforts were made to meet with a mix of organizations and individuals.

Interviews consisted of a set of similar questions focused on the organization's role in helping Springfield residents identify and secure jobs, and on the organization's perspectives on the job market, hiring processes and barriers to employment for downtown residents. Where relevant, this information is linked with employers' perceptions of the hiring process and the barriers that residents face in securing and maintaining employment. Employer perceptions were published in an earlier discussion paper and are also based on in-depth interviews and a survey.²

In addition to the interviews, we also conducted a survey of local residents in one area of Springfield, the North End. The North End is a predominately Latino section of Springfield just north of downtown and is made up of two neighborhoods, Brightwood and Memorial Square. The North End has among the highest unemployment rates in the city of Springfield and the lowest labor force participation rates of all Springfield neighborhoods.³ The survey consisted of questions about current and previous employment experiences, as well as job searching methods and perceived barriers to employment. A local, bilingual resident from a neighborhood organization was hired to circulate the survey and collect responses by canvassing the neighborhood. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish, depending on the resident's preference. In a three week time period we collected 64 responses. The information helps supplement the interviews and provides a more 'on the ground' perspective by asking residents directly about their experiences. Although the sample size was small, the findings are nevertheless interesting and useful to our overall inquiry into employment barriers.

Along the same lines, we organized three small discussion groups of local residents to ask in more detail about their workforce experiences. These discussion groups were generally conducted in English although

² Plasse, David et. al, "Greater Springfield Employment Challenges: Findings of Employer Survey and Interviews", Federal Reserve Bank of Boston Community Affairs Discussion Paper No. 2009-4, December 2009.

<http://www.bos.frb.org/commdev/pcadp/2009/pcadp0904.pdf>

³ Brightwood, Six Corners and Memorial Square have the highest unemployment rates (in that order).

some discussions took place in Spanish. Again, the language selected was based on participant preferences. Each discussion group had between 5 and 7 participants, all of whom were local residents.⁴

Based on the results of the various interviews, surveys, and focus groups, the final section of the discussion paper identifies several avenues to explore in an effort to improve the employment prospects of the low-income residents of Springfield's downtown neighborhoods. Topics suggested for further exploration include creating a better integrated workforce training system, identifying opportunities for flexibility in hiring practices, and expanding transportation options for city residents to reach manufacturing and other jobs on the outskirts of the city's borders.

Barriers to employment

Residents and leaders at local community organizations describe a number of barriers to employment for residents of Springfield's downtown neighborhoods. Significant barriers to employment are said to include a lack of education and skills, having a criminal record, and not having prior work experience. Additional barriers include family obligations, language difficulties and the lack of a reliable public transportation system during evening and late shift hours. Discrimination is also cited as a barrier. Residents describe being discriminated against based on race, language, age and residential address. Some of the barriers appear insurmountable to residents. In one focus group, residents stated that the most important thing one must do to find employment is get an education, yet they did not see an education as providing a sure path for them to employment. They are discouraged and frustrated, and feel isolated from the larger economy that surrounds their neighborhood. The common sentiment is that jobs 'for people like me' do not exist.

They are discouraged and frustrated, and feel isolated from the larger economy that surrounds their neighborhood.

Information gathered from local employers on their recruiting and hiring experience concurs with many of the barriers described by residents and community organizations.⁵ Discussions with employers reveal an

⁴ Participants were not necessarily North End residents, unlike the survey which was conducted only in the North End.

additional barrier for residents of Springfield's low-income neighborhoods, which is that many local employers rely on existing employees as a source of referrals for job openings. Word of mouth is a strong recruitment tool and it works well for employers. However very low employment rates in downtown neighborhoods mean that many residents lack personal and professional networks that would generate referrals.

The following is an overview of the description of the major barriers to employment as described in interviews and discussions.

Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI)⁶

Most interviewees point to having a criminal history as the number one barrier to getting a job for young adults in Springfield's downtown neighborhoods. Crime is a top concern for residents and business owners in Springfield.⁷ In 2006, a local nonprofit commissioned a Community Assessment of the North End, the area just north of downtown. It was a yearlong effort at gathering data from over 1,000 residents including parents, stakeholders, and youth. As part of this effort, over 700 local students between the ages of 10 and 18 were surveyed on a number of topics including criminal activity.⁸ The results show that 19 percent of the respondents had a close friend who had been arrested in the last year. Nearly half of the respondents had a friend who had been suspended from school.⁹

These neighborhoods also have a number of vacant and abandoned properties which can attract criminal activity.¹⁰ And even a minor offense can keep you out of the employment system for some time.

Employers do conduct criminal background checks when hiring. Seventy percent of the employers we surveyed require a background check when hiring, although a majority of the employers that conduct them stated

Perhaps the second highest barrier for residents to overcome in seeking employment is a lack of education and skills.

⁵ Large and medium employers in the region were surveyed on their hiring practices. Some in depth interviews were also conducted in 2009.

⁶ Criminal Offender Record Information is a record of Massachusetts criminal history.

⁷ See <http://www1.wnec.edu/news/index.cfm?selection=doc.2507&DCId=13463>.

⁸ North End Community assessment Report, Pioneer Valley Gang Prevention Coalition, 2006.

⁹ 90 percent stated that they themselves had never been arrested, 38 percent reported never having been suspended from school

¹⁰ Peter Gagliardi, "Housing Programs in Weak Market Neighborhoods," White Paper No. 36 (Boston: Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research, December 2006).

they would consider hiring an applicant with a criminal history. Certain types of employers are required by law to do official CORI checks to screen applicants.¹¹ Others may use their own discretion when hiring. For example, some companies are willing to hire individuals whose criminal histories include minor offenses or offenses that date back several years.¹² Several interviewees suggested that if employers were willing to be as flexible in their hiring practices as the law allowed, many more capable young adults would be in jobs today. “A person with a record gets disqualified from the gate regardless of the type of crime committed.”¹³

In addition to barring job seekers from employment opportunities, a criminal history also prohibits participation in certain government programs and subsidies, such as receiving housing vouchers. A criminal history can also exclude individuals from internship opportunities, and it limits a parent’s ability to volunteer and chaperone at their children’s school activities.¹⁴

Lack of education

Perhaps the second highest barrier for residents to overcome in seeking employment is a lack of education and skills. In the discussion groups, participants nearly universally acknowledged that having an education was the single most important qualification in finding a job and felt that a GED was not necessarily sufficient. Residents talk about strong competition for jobs, sometimes with overqualified candidates in the region competing for the same opportunities.

Springfield has a low rate of high school completion. In 2008, the graduation rate for students entering high school in the Springfield Public Schools was 54.4 percent.¹⁵ Jobs do exist at the entry level that do not require college degrees, but even for those jobs most employers require a high school diploma or GED. The employer survey found that 85

¹¹ For example, schools much conduct CORI checks for all employees and volunteers. The same is true for organizations that work with the elderly, disabled or children (such as nursing homes, schools, camps, hospitals, and government agencies serving these populations).

¹² There are existing laws that limit the kinds of work that one with a specific kind of criminal history can get (for example working with young children). However, many private employers are able to use their discretion when hiring.

¹³ From discussion group conducted September 15, 2009.

¹⁴ See <http://www.massresources.org/pages.cfm?contentID=122&pageID=35&Subpages=yes#problems>.

¹⁵ Springfield Republican “High School Graduation Rates Mixed in Western, MA,” February 5, 2009, Jeanette DeForge.

percent of responding employers required a high school or general equivalency diploma (GED) for entry-level positions that did not require a college degree.¹⁶

Some discussion group participants refer to gang recruitment as a factor in producing high dropout rates. Participants describe the combination of a lack of after-school activities, lack of encouragement from school counselors and effective gang recruitment starting at young ages as drawing many youth from school. Parents who responded to the North End Community Assessment survey confirm that once a child joins a gang, it is likely they will stop going to school and become more involved in the criminal justice system.

Employers see previous work experience as an indication that a prospective employee is capable of showing up to work, interacting with peers, and taking direction from supervisors.

Need for work experience

Previous work experience is important to employers and helps to open the door to additional work opportunities. Based on interviews with local organizations that work with youth, it appears that many young adults in the downtown neighborhoods lack any work experience.

There are two main reasons why work experience seems to be an important factor in looking for a job. First, employers see previous work experience as an indication that a prospective employee is capable of showing up to work, interacting with peers, and taking direction from supervisors. According to employers, the type of work experience that one has is not as critical as having some general work experience. The employer survey indicates that more employers require work histories than use a drug test or check a criminal background.

Second, employers use existing employees to help recruit for job openings. For example, some employers offer financial incentives for existing employees to refer a family member or friend for a job opening. This means that to some degree the loop is closed to people outside of these networks.

¹⁶ Plasse op.cit.

Discrimination

In several of the interviews and in each of the discussion groups residents talked about discrimination. Racial and ethnic discrimination were mentioned with the most frequency and concern. However, age discrimination was also raised.

Residents describe being discriminated against in several ways. Some residents sense that putting a Latino-sounding name on a job application counted against them. One participant said that her home address counted against her because being identifiable as a North End resident carried a stigma, and that stigma may contribute to having fewer opportunities.

Several participants describe their age as a hindrance to finding jobs. Each was forty years of age or older, and had some job experience. One described a situation where she was told she looked much different than she sounded on the phone when she came in for an interview. She felt that they were referring to her age, and the interviewer went on to describe how the technology skills required for the job were likely beyond her experience and capacity, although she was sure she could learn them.

Discussion group participants paint a picture of isolation. They describe their sense of being undesirable to employers because of their language skills, ethnicity, age, background and income status. Some look for jobs on the internet and try to take advantage of career centers and other resources. The youngest participants seem earnestly hopeful, having been guided by community organizations into a potential career path. However, older participants who had been in and out of the workforce are downbeat about their opportunities as less educated Latinos.

Young single parents

In our survey of North End residents, more than one-third of respondents indicate that family obligations were a barrier to employment. Community leaders describe young, single mothers lacking a high school diploma or GED and struggling to make ends meet. Springfield's downtown neighborhoods have more than twice the state percentage of homes

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The need for affordable and accessible childcare can present challenges for entering the workforce or attending educational courses. Of the survey respondents who cited family obligations as a barrier to employment, just over half were females. The majority of respondents had not finished high school. More than half had taken classes at local organizations or community colleges but were unemployed at the time of the survey.

On-the-job challenges

In addition to identifying a number of barriers to obtaining employment, our research has also uncovered a number of on-the-job challenges that can lead to high turnover rates.

Tardiness and attendance issues are the number one contributor to high turnover rates as reported in our employer survey. Interviews with employers paint a picture of some entry-level workers not showing up on time or at all. A “lack of work ethic” was the second-highest concern. This term encompasses things like “lack of ability to follow directions, lack of ability to work independently, and general deficiencies in basic literacy and numeracy skills.”¹⁸

Some employers mention that mismatches between job expectations and reality can also lead to an employee’s departure. Because of such challenges, employers often prefer to use existing employees and networks as a recruiting tool.

Community organizations and job training groups recognize these challenges. Discussions in several interviews with training organizations focused on the need for trainees to understand on-the-job expectations, how to take direction from supervisors, appropriate ways to interact with colleagues and the importance of a reliable attendance record. Many of the organizations focus on these on-the-job performance requirements in

¹⁷ According to the 2000 US census, the figures were 23.8 percent for Springfield and 11.9 percent for the state of Massachusetts

¹⁸ *Greater Springfield Employment Challenges: Findings of Employer Survey and Interviews*, Federal Reserve Bank of Boston Community Affairs Discussion Paper No. 2009-4, December 2009. <http://www.bos.frb.org/commdev/pcadp/2009/pcadp0904.pdf>.

their curriculum and course offerings. In some cases, they also work with employers directly to monitor on-the-job performance so that issues can be addressed as soon as they arise, with the goal of avoiding job termination. Training organizations are clear that they aim for a positive experience by the employer as well as the employee; they stress that addressing these on-the-job issues is important to their job placement success.

Addressing the Barriers

Springfield has a number of programs operated by nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, and government agencies that focus on connecting residents to jobs. Many of these programs seek to help individuals gain the skills and education they need to join the workforce. There are alternative schools, training centers, career centers, community based organizations, community colleges and more.

Each of the barriers mentioned above is addressed in one way or another by different organizations, some of them offering multiple services. Below is a brief overview of what is being done by local groups to attempt to address specific barriers.

GED and education

When thinking about solutions to workforce barriers, most residents and interviewees focused on education. Public school administrators appear entirely aware of the challenges they face, including among dropouts. The school system has programs that try to address these challenges—for example, by strengthening the ties between parents and the school through outreach efforts and home visits through their Parent and Community Engagement Program. School administrators are also looking for ways to bring kids back into the educational system by hiring deputies¹⁹ to visit truant students and by changing policies such as automatic failure for missing too many days.

For adults, there are a number of programs and trainings. GED and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs are the most commonly

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¹⁹ This program uses state funding.

offered programs, although waiting lists persist at many organizations who offer these courses. Springfield Technical Community College (STCC) and nonprofits including the Urban League, YouthBuild, and the Massachusetts Career Development Institute (MCDI) all offer GED programs. Enrollees in many of these programs are starting below a 7th grade reading and writing level. This makes it hard for them to get up to speed in some courses.²⁰

Early childhood education is a major focus of the Irene E. and George Davis Foundation, a local family foundation. In addition to providing grants, the Foundation has its own program, Cherish Every Child.²¹ Cherish Every Child focuses specifically on preparing children under five years of age to arrive in kindergarten healthy and ready to learn. The program engages parents, the business community, political leaders, and community based organizations to create a supportive network.

Job training

There are also a number of job training courses available for job seekers in Springfield. Many of the organizations that provide educational courses also provide job training. For example, STCC, MCDI, and YouthBuild train individuals in specific skill-based areas. YouthBuild focuses on construction. STCC and MCDI offer courses in the health field, manufacturing, and computer technology, to name just a few. MCDI has the capability of serving 1,800 students per year. STCC divides their programs between credit-based and noncredit programs. Credit programs require a GED for entry. STCC estimates there are from 4,000 to 5,000 students in their noncredit program. Many are incumbent workers. The noncredit program offers certificates in health care or information technology.

Each of the three aforementioned programs aims to place graduates in jobs upon program completion. Placement rates vary, and it is difficult to follow trainees in their job for an extended period of time. Job continuation is followed by some organizations (depending on funding source) for a specified period of time but generally for under one year.

²⁰ Information on enrollees' level of education and experience comes from various interviews.

²¹ See <http://www.cherishspringfield.org/>

Most of the programs that do have industry-specific training are overseen by an advisory board made up of employers from the region who have a sense of the skills needed on the horizon. For example, the STCC advisory board includes major employers in the region and is therefore able to identify new areas of job growth and suggest programs that STCC might set up to address the opportunities. Not all programs are able to respond with the same speed or flexibility, however, which may result in a mismatch between programs and opportunities.

Local experts also emphasize that the best model for preparing youth for the workforce combines the opportunity to work with the education or training that is offered. Hampden County has an active Regional Employment Board (REB) with a strong focus on youth and jobs. And many employers partner with the REB to provide opportunities to young adults through internships. Hands-on experience is a motivator, and knowing what kinds of opportunities are possible upon program completion keeps youth focused on real-life possibilities. Better yet, local experts say, is to provide a stipend. Some of the programs are at least full-day, making it difficult to earn a supplemental income. Some participants have families to support, and realistically cannot commit to a program that does not provide an income.

Criminal histories

In response to the number of young adults who face barriers because of a criminal history, there are programs in Springfield that work directly with former offenders to help them get skills and experience in the working world. For example, the Martin Luther King Jr. Center (located in the Old Hill neighborhood but serving all of Springfield) received funding to help a small number of young adults tap workforce opportunities while earning a stipend. The young adults find jobs at community-based organizations in the area that are willing to hire former offenders and provide them with the opportunity to learn on-the-job skills. For most of the participants, this was their first experience with a job.

The Hampden County Sheriff's office is also proactive in linking inmates to programs pre and post release. In FY2008, 117 inmates received their GED. In the same year, 123 incarcerated students attended college

In FY2008, 117 inmates received their GED. In the same year, 123 incarcerated students attended college courses through a partnership with the Springfield Technical Community College.

courses through a partnership with the Springfield Technical Community College. This partnership includes some hands on technical assistance provided by the college around GED testing and filling out paperwork requirements.

Other programs, such as YouthBuild, also help former offenders learn and develop skills. However, upon completion of any of these programs, individuals still are disadvantaged by virtue of having a criminal record.

Job Location and Transportation

The physical location of jobs may also be a barrier. A look at manufacturing, for example, indicates that more residents of Springfield are employed in this sector than there are jobs in the city of Springfield.²² Therefore, a number of residents commute to the outskirts for manufacturing jobs. There are a number of manufacturing and technology parks just outside of Springfield's borders. Chicopee and Longmeadow, for example, have technology parks and warehouses offering entry-level jobs. Many are second or third shift jobs; openings in these shifts are much more common.

Many households in Springfield's poorer neighborhoods lack access to a car.²³ During interviews, employers and residents expressed mixed responses concerning the usefulness of the public bus transit system, but on the whole residents found it to be insufficient for their individual needs. Although bus routes expand outside the cities borders into places such as Chicopee, Longmeadow and Holyoke, most of the concerns relayed by residents had to do with specific routes and schedules. For example, some residents of the North End said that the route to their neighborhood ends too early to allow them to commute. This would be especially true for those looking for entry level job openings in the second and third shift.

A Look at some Program Approaches

²² *Jobs in Springfield, Massachusetts: Understanding and Remediating the Causes of Low Resident Employment Rates*, Federal Reserve Bank of Boston Community Affairs Discussion Paper No. 2009-5, February 8, 2010, <http://www.bos.frb.org/commdev/pcadp/2009/pcadp0905.pdf>.

²³ Ibid

Many of the local organizations in Springfield seek to address these barriers by providing educational and skills based programs, first time job opportunities - including to those with criminal histories - and access to job opportunities through networks they have created with local employers. Here is a brief description of some of the different ways programs seek to address the barriers described above.

Training and job placement

Healthcare is a major industry in the region and will likely continue to add jobs over the next decade.²⁴ Baystate Medical is the largest employer in Springfield, employing around 7,000 individuals at many levels of job skills at their hospital and other health care facilities. They have created their own program, the Baystate-Springfield Educational Partnership. This is a partnership between Baystate and Springfield Public Schools which “builds relationships with interested and committed students from the Springfield Public Schools and guides these students’ experiences and academic paths towards careers in the medical field.”²⁵ Baystate is also an active member of the Healthcare Workforce Partnership of Western Massachusetts, which includes a number of funders, businesses, educational institutions and employment focused agencies such as the REB.

In addition, Baystate works with the local community colleges and community-based organizations to help train potential workers.

In addition, Baystate works with the local community colleges and community based organizations to help train potential workers. STCC offers programs both in nursing and allied health.²⁶ The allied health program is their largest, but they also get many more applicants for the nursing program than they are able to accept. They train about 100 people per year in their program and Baystate, along with other local hospitals, works with STCC to directly place people into jobs once they complete the training. Job placement rate appears to be high for the healthcare field, and many interviewees pointed to the large number of openings at any given time at various levels of skills requirement.

Wraparound services

²⁴ *Towards a More Prosperous Springfield, MA: What Jobs Exist for People without a College Education*, Federal Reserve Bank of Boston Community Affairs Discussion Paper No. 2009-02, September 2009 at http://www.bos.frb.org/commdev/pcadp/2009_pcadp0902.pdf.

²⁵ See <http://baystatehealth.com/Baystate/Main+Nav/About+Us/Community+Programs/Baystate-Springfield+Educational+Partnership>.

²⁶ Allied health refers to clinical healthcare professions. This is distinct from medical and nursing programs.

Many nonprofits describe the needs of the people they serve as beyond the need for a GED or particular job skill. There are accompanying issues. Examples provided by community organizations interviewed include previous sexual and physical abuse, learning disabilities, and undiagnosed health issues. Therefore, organizations that serve the most at-risk youth often offer additional services that would accompany, say, a GED course. These are often referred to as wraparound services. For example, YouthBuild has a GED program and skills training in the construction trade as the core elements of its program. However, all of the YouthBuild applicants in Springfield are dropouts, and many have criminal histories - some come directly from jail to the program. In their initial testing, the program found that a majority of their students had some sort of learning disability that had not been diagnosed. So in addition to offering a GED course and skills training, they offer counselors and nutritionists in a more holistic approach.

The more intensive programs, such as YouthBuild, require students to check in on a daily basis, wear uniforms (to avoid gang issues around wearing certain colors), and drug test regularly. The programs can vary slightly from site to site. In Springfield, they require weekly participation in substance abuse courses and monthly drug tests. If students fail the drug test, they are not compelled to leave the program as they are in some other locations. However, students who fail must pay for the test, and they lose their opportunity to get promoted, which means no increase in stipend. They also cannot be recommended for certain construction jobs.

The Big Y, a large supermarket chain headquartered in Springfield, operates a program called the Springfield Work Scholarship Connection.

Jobs, school, and a mentor, for years

The Big Y, a large supermarket chain headquartered in Springfield, operates a program called the Springfield Work Scholarship Connection. The program is based on a model rolled out by Wegmans, a large supermarket chain headquartered in New York, that has received positive attention since it was created in the 1980s. The program has since grown and is now managed by the Hillside Family of Agencies and administered in Rochester and Syracuse, NY, and Prince George's County.

The Springfield program started in 2009 as a pilot with close to 30 at-risk students participating in one Springfield high school. Advocates hope to expand it to additional schools as more employers participate. Springfield Work Scholarship Connection links students with mentors, called youth advocates, starting at the transition between the 8th and 9th grade. The same students apply for summer jobs at the Big Y. The youth advocate serves as a workplace mentor for on-the-job coaching. Students also participate in workshops and other learning opportunities through this program. The advocate stays with the student through his or her high school career. Students are also required to keep a minimum GPA and meet attendance goals. The REB describes this program as a well-researched approach and hopes to involve additional employers.

Programs such as the Springfield Work Scholarship Connection address issues such as attendance both at school and the workplace. They also provide an on-the-job mentor to the students when they work at their summer jobs at the Big Y. This can help address issues around taking direction from supervisors, interacting well with peers, and other overall work ethic issues that were raised by a number of employers in our survey. The New York program has served 2,106 families. High school graduation rates for participants have increased. The program reports that “61 percent of students exposed to the program for at least seven months graduate, compared to 31 percent of comparable urban students.”²⁷ They also report between 70 and 80 percent of those students going on to postsecondary education. At this time, the Springfield Big Y program is too new to be able to measure comparable outcomes.

The Job Corps program is an example of the residential approach to providing education and training. This is a federally funded education and training program with locations across the country.

The residential approach

The Job Corps program is an example of the residential approach to providing education and training. This is a federally funded education and training program with locations across the country. There are two in the Springfield area, one in Westover and the other in Hartford, although the programs attract people from all over the country. Some students prefer to leave their area entirely when they enter such a program. So for example, the Westover program estimated that about 50 percent come

²⁷ See <http://www.hillside.com/Who/HWSC.htm>.

from the Springfield/Holyoke area. They also have a small number of commuter students who do not live on campus, although program administrators prefer on-campus living.

The Westover Campus has 16 vocational programs and enrolls students weekly. Students can select the vocation of their preference, and efforts are made to connect the student with their first choice. Students are allowed to stay in the program for up to two years. They can stay longer if they are enrolled in a specific higher level program at STCC.

There is a five-week orientation, and students are drug screened and are given 45 days to get clean if they do not pass the initial screening. The target population is low-income youth between the ages 16-24. The Westover campus sees more males than females on campus, and estimates their student population at somewhere around 44 percent black students and 35 percent Hispanic. Per statute, the program does not allow convicted felons to enroll.

The curriculum for vocational programs is checked by local industry councils. Like STCC, Job Corps uses an advisory council to keep abreast of changes in workforce demands. They have a strong focus on the hands-on aspect of the trades. Students build and renovate the facilities on campus, for example. Students receive a small stipend while working at the program.

While on campus, students adhere to a schedule that begins first thing in the morning and includes classes throughout the day as well as weekly school-wide assemblies to discuss recent activities and recognize outstanding students. Students are responsible for their behavior, and being respectful of oneself and others is a widespread theme on campus. The purpose is to increase morale among students and reinforce a positive attitude toward education and work. Students get referred to the program by schools, the REB, Career Centers, and local community-based organizations.

The Westover Job Corps has onsite job fairs and works with local employment agencies such as FutureWorks and one-stop career centers

to help place students in jobs. The program cites a 90 percent placement in employment, the military or two-year college upon program completion.

Conclusion

This review has revealed that Springfield has a number of programs and resources available to help connect residents to jobs, some of which are innovative and working from the ground up.²⁸ But when it comes to accessing jobs and economic opportunity, it is clear that the need outweighs the supply. Many programs describe long waiting lists for essential services such as GED or Adult Basic Education (ABE) courses. Enrollment has increased greatly in places like the Springfield Technical Community College (STCC), but resources have not matched that growth.

To make further progress in improving the employment prospects of the residents of Springfield's downtown neighborhoods, civic and business leaders may need to be creative in their solutions. To help address a few of the main barriers mentioned in this paper here are several suggestions to consider: build on an integrated, multifaceted workforce development system; incentivize flexibility in recruiting and hiring practices; and improve the current transportation system.

Partnerships are essential in creating a successful workforce development system. Research has shown that the need for a multifaceted approach necessitates partnerships of various organizations, including regional employment boards, community colleges, community organizations, and employers. A recent article by the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco²⁹ highlights nationwide models for workforce development and suggests that breaking down "traditional workforce silos" to incorporate additional supports such as access to child care or health services provides a more holistic approach. It could be a helpful exercise to look at the current connection points among the programs that serve Springfield's low income

²⁸ This paper has described only some of the programs available to residents.

²⁹ "Addressing the Challenges of Unemployment in Low-Income Communities," Community Investment, Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco. Spring 2009 Volume 21 number 1.

neighborhoods to identify opportunities to enhance referrals and complimentary services.

Second, employers and employer organizations should consider hiring innovations that would expand access to Springfield-area workplaces. For example, they might consider hiring youth who have imperfect backgrounds but come directly from a partner program that vets potential employees. Employers could also consider recruiting outside of the traditional networks they currently use to find employees. By expanding recruiting networks and advertising strategies, employers could expand their pool of applicants. This includes working more with one-stop career centers and local training organizations whose clients include eager job seekers living in downtown Springfield.

Finally, large employers outside Springfield's borders who need to fill second- and third-shift low-skilled job openings might consider ways to offer transportation to downtown residents. Reliable transportation could make a difference for job seekers who can be flexible in their schedule but face transportation barriers. There are examples of several efforts in the United States to better link low income residents with job opportunities through alternative forms of transportation, such as vanpools.³⁰

There may be other strategies to be considered in addressing workforce barriers for low-income residents of Springfield. These suggestions offer a starting point in addressing some of the major barriers identified through our extensive interview and discussion process. Working together to address these barriers might start with a conversation on each organization's existing and potential role in any of these areas. There are willing partners in Springfield as well as existing efforts to build on.

³⁰ Two examples of are: "Vanpool Benefits: Implementing Commuter Benefits as one of the Nation's best Workplaces for Commuters. http://www.bestworkplaces.org/pdf/vanpoolbenefits_07.pdf. "Better Connections for Minnesotans with low incomes and limited transportation options." http://www.growthandjustice.org/sites/2d9abd3a-10a9-47bf-ba1ae315d55be04/uploads/Better_Connect_Brief_Web_7-27-2009.pdf.

Appendix I

Names of Organizations Interviewed

Type of Organization

Hampden County Sheriff's Dept

Sheriff's office

Holyoke Community College

Community College

FutureWorks Career Center

One stop Career Center

Job Corps (Westover)

Career training program for

young adults; residential

Social service provider and

community center

Martin Luther King Jr. Community Ctr

Training and education center

Massachusetts Career Development Institute

(MCDI)

Massachusetts Latino Chamber of Commerce,

Business Development

Springfield Office

Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission

Social service agency

Office of Governor Deval Patrick, Western

Government agency

Massachusetts

Regional Employment Board of Hamden County,

Workforce development

Inc.

agency

South End Community Center

Neighborhood organization

Spanish American Union

Social service provider

Springfield Technical Community College

Technical Community College

Western Mass Electric

Community development

Western Massachusetts Enterprise Fund

finance institution (CDFI)

YMCA of Greater Springfield

Health and wellness

YouthBuild

Youth and community

development program

Appendix II**Survey Details- North End**

	Total	% of Total
Respondents		
Male	34	
Female	30	
Median age	35	
Average age	35	
Employed	31	48%
part time	17	27%
Finished high school (does not include GED)	27	42%
GED	5	8%
Taken some kind of course or training	34	53%
Identify language as an issue	21	33%
Identify transportation as an issue	21	33%
Identify family obligations as a barrier	26	41%
Use newspaper as source for jobs	44	69%
Use the internet as source for jobs	37	58%
Use employment agencies and community groups as a source for jobs	35	55%
Use family and friends as source for jobs	44	69%