

Ministers and Employers Notes
September 25, 2006, 11:30 – 1:00

Department of Children and Family Services

In Attendance: Deborah Gowen- Athens Justice Project, Jannis Mathis- Chestnut Grove Baptist Church, Stanley Johnson and Harriett Collins- Georgia Department of Labor, Lewis Shropshire- Holiday Inn, Dr. Washington- New Grove Baptist, Peter Van Brusselt- Noramco, Bart Freeman- Power Partners, Rev. Killian- St. Mark AME Church, Clay Gilbert- Thornton Brothers, Sally Walker- St. Mary's, Sige Burden- UGA HR, Rev. Stewart, Robert Stovall, Barbara Sims- All God's Children, Judge Steve Jones, Red Petrovs, Tim Johnson- Family Connection, Judge David Sweat, Jim Geiser, Delene Porter, Sandy Christopher

- I. Welcome and Introductions-
 - a. Clay Gilbert opened and had group introduce themselves
- II. Update from previous meetings-
 - a. Gilbert gave overview of previous conversations. Strong state need to focus on felons, but that this group also had a broader mission and would look at Education/GED and Mentoring Families through Employment.
- III. Education Update
 - a. Judge Jones and Tim Johnson discussed cuts in funding to local GED and ESOL programs including UGA's Educational Opportunity Center and the School District's Even Start (which combines both child care and adult education)
 - b. Judge Jones encouraged the group to look at this problem, not just the loss of funding but also the need to serve the entire community (Even Start has a long waiting list).
 - c. Clay Gilbert pointed out the need for our community to become more self-sustaining so that successful programs don't disappear because of changes in federal funding.
 - d. Lewis Shropshire said that he and many of the employers would surly sponsor their own employees who are interested in getting a GED.
 - e. **Judge Jones asked for information on the cost of scholarships and the programs in town.**
 - f. Jannis Mathis pointed out that good programs are being undermined at the federal level and that national studies that show poor results in the programs do not reflect how well our local programs are doing. These successes need to be publicized.
- IV. Mentoring Families through Employment
 - a. Athens Justice Project/Family Mentoring- Deborah Gowen talked about her program's intensive, comprehensive approach - the look at housing needs, mental health and substance abuse needs, as well as employment needs. Success depends on a long term relationship. They have a part time attorney and social worker and go into the jails to meet with about 15 people per month. Of those, they usually take on 1 or 2 people. AJP recently got a DOL grant to work with parolees and she hopes to be able to serve more people. This grant may allow AJP to serve 4 more a month-

50 per year. AJP spends at most \$1100 per client per month for 18 months and it costs \$17,000 per year to jail someone so it is a money saving investment.

- b. TOPPSTEP- DOL- Stanley Johnson spoke about the Department of Labor's program in conjunction with the Departments of Corrections and Parolle called TOPPSTEP which helps people coming out of jail re-enter society. He talked about the Federal Bonding Program and how employers who agree to take ex-offenders can be ensured against theft. He also talked about the Work Opportunity Tax Credit- a tax break for employers who hire ex-offenders. TOPPSTEP has 330 person case load in Athens and most of these people have unstable employment. Employers in the room said that 30-40% of their applicants have some criminal history and that doesn't include people without GED's since they can't apply for most jobs. Stanley pointed out that because jails are full, many people come out of jail without a GED since those programs are used as rewards and punishments. He said it is about 50/50 whether you will get a GED in prison.

Employers said they'd be willing to pay the cost of classes and taking the test. Ministers pointed out that people couldn't wait till they got a job, to get a GED- one suggestion was that they have an agreement that you could start work if, in the first 6 months, you completed a GED program.

Stanley also talked about the re-entry housing project where you could get federal dollars to house people coming out of jail for 2 months.

TOPPSTEP has a 76% success rate- people are still employed after 1 year from getting the job. Employers said they have only a 25% success rate in keeping people a year.

- c. Jobs For Life- Dr. Washington presented the Jobs for Life Program- we don't have to reinvent the wheel on teaching soft skills and creating a mentoring system to help the unemployed and underemployed (not just felons) get jobs. This is a Christian based program, but it is a good model and it needs to be a community wide program, not just belonging to one church- this has to be a partnership between the churches, employers and community. We don't have to follow the curriculum verbatim- look at our needs and adapt it.
 - i. How do we get young people motivated to go? This is only one approach, if it doesn't work for the youth, we'll keep looking for other approaches.
 - ii. Since it is a Christian based program the judges can't mandate people to take it and the employers can't mandate that their employees go.- This will just be one option- we will look for others.

V. More discussion of Next Steps

- a. GED within 6 months- if we hire people without GEDs, we couldn't change are whole policy and do that for everyone- how would this work?

Clay recommended that we create two groups to follow up on the recommendations presented:

- 1) Working with Felon Re-entry and Jobs- Deborah said she would help**
- 2) Jobs for Life- Dr. Washington said he would help get people together to discuss adopting this program**

Also, Earned Income Tax Credit- need a presentation- maybe Sandra from St. Mary's who is working on this could give her experience

Next Meeting- October 16, 11:30-1 at DFCS

VI. Adjourn