

Community Needs Assessment, Literacy, & Disability Services
February 20, 2025

Zoom Participants

Tom Bianco, Chair
Stephanie Buscher, GC Div. Social Services
Julie DeLaurentis, Business
Alicia Battaglia, Commissioner Aide
Lois Forman, Jewish Family Federation
Jenn Macchione, St. John of God Community Services
Stacey Smith, DVRs
Alisha Thompson, DWD
Rachael Bonaventure, GC Economic Development
Allison Spinelli, WDB Staff

Christine Arpino, GC Probation
Lorrie Covolesky, Abilities Solutions
Heather Faulkner, GC Housing Authority
Eric Fisher, GC Div. Senior Services
Frances Harwell, FBO
Nicole Quinn, Literacy NJ
Joseph Spencer, RCSJ
Christina Velazquez, GC Economic Devel.
JaNea Wilson, NJLWD
Bridget DiGiambattista, WDB Staff

Tom opened the meeting at 8:00 am.

A motion to approve October 17, 2024 minutes was made by J Spencer, seconded by C. Arpino.

Status of Reports

Title II Services Update: Joe S. reported RCSJ has 205 clients in the first six months of the fiscal year, with a goal of 213. They have already exceeded this goal with 282 students for the year, with a significant influx of ESL clients. Joe noted a significant influx of ESL clients, with about 2/3 of the 282 students being ESL clients, driven by individuals seeking information about citizenship. He stated that many ESL clients are interested in citizenship, leading to an increase in students seeking information and assistance in this area. He reported they hold quarterly workshops with representatives USCIS who come from Trenton to provide the training specifically for ESL students.

Joe announced that a new ESL class will be starting at Rastelli Food Groups in March, with 22 students. They will also provide ServSafe food handling training.

Joe announced RCSJ will hold open house on March 5th at the Gloucester campus and March 12th at the Cumberland campus.

Transportation – Tom B. reported a 13% decrease in ridership in December due to the holidays, with numbers rising in January. Tom attended a SNJDC meeting where they discussed the fragmented transportation system in South Jersey and efforts to address it.

Project Search - Stacey S. announced an open house for Project Search on Tuesday from 12 to 1 at Jefferson Hospital, Washington Township, where the community can learn about the program and tour work areas. She mentioned that they will start accepting applications for the upcoming school year 25-26 during the open house.

Literacy NJ - Nicole Q. reported that Literacy NJ has 57 active students with a goal of 60 by the end of June. She reported they offer 7 in-person classes, 3 online Zoom classes, and 6 tutor-student pairs meeting throughout the county. Two students obtain citizenship so far this year. Nicole highlighted that they offer GED prep classes online, available statewide through Literacy NJ. A computer and financial literacy class will start in March, likely in Woodbury. A literacy for life conference will be May 2nd.

Updates/Report

Christina V. explained that the Community Development Block Grant funds are aimed at supporting social service agencies and supportive services for low and moderate-income households which are disabled, migrant, those with language barriers. Christina emphasized the importance of public participation in assessing community needs and priorities for the county and how we can serve these populations with funding. Christina mentioned a survey sent out to gather input, with a deadline of February 28th.

GC Housing Authority - Heather F. explained the lease in place preference for the Section 8 program, allowing qualified individuals to use Section 8 for their current apartments. She reported there are

vacancies in the Camp Salute project-based voucher program for veterans, with a short waiting list. Heather described the family self-sufficiency program, which helps participants achieve goals and improve their lifestyles, with an escrow account incentive. She reported that last year, the program awarded close to \$100,000 to participants who completed their goals and moved to homeownership or no longer needed assistance.

Abilities Solutions - Lorrie C. shared information about the youth paid internship program at Abilities Solutions, which serves youth aged 14 to 21, offering 150-hour paid internship at \$18 per hour, including work readiness training. They are doing this grant in partnership with DVRS and are currently taking referrals. They also have no waiting list for their services and are preparing for their three-year CARF survey which runs February 24-26.

Jewish Family Federation - Lois F. announced they are offering a workshop called "The Seasoned Professional" on May 14th, which will focus on helping older workers improve their skills and find employment.

GC Human & Special Svcs. - Michelle P. shared information about Educational Partnership and Missing & Abused Children sub-committees partnering to create a speaker's bureau to connect with schools in Gloucester County. They plan to deploy this initiative in the 25-26 school year and are looking for participants.

A motion for adjournment was made by J. Spencer, seconded by H. Faulkner.

The next meeting will be held May 15, 2025.

Respectfully submitted,
Bridget A. DiGiambattista, WDB Staff