



## ERI's Words of Advice

- **High teacher to student ratio.** Whether the program is Youthbuild or WIA, youth work with a number of adult mentors who help them focus on the steps they need to take to reach their dreams.
- **Create the program, and then find funding sources.** ERI is in touch with the needs of youth in their community and is creative in showcasing their programs and services to fit various funding sources.
- **Know your niche.** Identify your strengths and focus on who in your community needs the programs or services you can provide. Partnering and collaboration are not just "buzzwords" but rather the key to success.
- **Give youth a variety of opportunities.** Encourage youth to really get to know themselves so that they are able to make informed career and life decisions.
- **Individualize.** Our youth are typically the square peg trying to fit in the round hole. Tailor your program so that it fits their commitment level, interests and goals.

## HUD Youthbuild Effective Practices



### Youthbuild Organization Provides Individualized Service

*Meeting the needs of at-risk youth, especially with seemingly decreasing funding opportunities, is never easy. Employment Resources Incorporated has found a way to effectively seek money from the right places while providing seamless services to each youth who walks through their doors.*

When asked what makes Employment Resources Incorporated (ERI) so successful, staff immediately answer individualization. While their various locally, state and federally funded programs have different eligibility requirements, service components and required outcomes, ERI staff work with each youth to tailor a program of services that meets his or her academic, transition and workforce development needs.

#### Beginnings

ERI, as a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization, opened its doors in January of 1991 in Fredericksburg, Virginia. Joan McLaughlin and Gladys Oberle, who had previously worked in other education and workforce development initiatives, decided to use their experience to meet the growing education and employment training needs of youth and adults, especially those with disabilities, in the George Washington region of Virginia.

ERI offered limited job training services through a small federal grant and opened The STAR Center, later renamed The Gladys H. Oberle School, an alternative education day school for disabled

students. The School is licensed to operate by the Virginia Department of Education and accredited through the Virginia Association of Independent Specialized Education Facilities.

In 1994, Andrea Kenny was brought on board to oversee the company's job development programs. At that time she managed adult, youth and dislocated worker training programs funded through the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). When the Workforce Investment Act was enacted in 2000, ERI made the strategic decision to focus solely on youth to provide them with the education and training they needed to successfully transition from high school into post-secondary education/training and work. In 2002, ERI opened a second office to better serve youth who reside in the Northern Neck.



Verlane Mack was hired to manage the programs and services offered in this very rural area of Virginia. A second Oberle School campus was opened in this area in 2003 and a very successful Youthbuild Program was implemented in 2005.

ERI has been recognized on both a state and national level for its comprehensive programming. In addition to operating programs in-house, ERI provides workforce training and academic, transition, career and technical education to youth through contracts with local agencies and school systems. These services are designed to complement those offered by the agency or school.

Every young person who walks through ERI's doors is assessed to identify his or her individual

#### Inside This Issue

Youthbuild Organization Provides "Individualized" Service	1
Nomination Form	5

#### Events

<b>Oct. 22-23</b> National Schools Initiative San Antonio, TX
<b>Oct. 23-25</b> Making Partnerships Work Workshop San Antonio, TX
<b>Nov. 2-5</b> National Youth Workers Convention St. Louis, MO
<b>Dec. 27-30</b> National Network for Youth Washington, DC



## Youthbuild Organization Provides Individualized Service (Cont.)

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workshops offered  
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International

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**866-383-8900**

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academic strengths and weaknesses as well as career interests. The staff then work with the youth toward his or her career goals (short and long-term) and life goals. A Service Plan is created that includes those activities that will help the youth achieve success.

Some participants arrive with a fully formulated idea of the type of job they want, but lack the ability to access training. Others come in with the simple goal of obtaining their GEDs. Students placed in the Oberle School all have the goal of returning to public school; this may take a few months, or a couple of years. Again, the success of ERI is their ability to provide exactly what each youth needs to move forward in his or her life.

As funding is always shrinking, participants are dual-enrolled in compatible programs whenever possible. This management approach allows ERI to offer the comprehensive programming it is known for—and is how they (and the youth they serve) have experienced so much success in the last 16 years.



### Giving Youth Opportunities

ERI spends a significant amount of time exposing its youth to variety of occupations that are related to their interests and abilities. Staff work with participants to identify their aspirations, and help them to identify different possibilities in a given career field. For instance, when students come in wanting to be football players (and who hasn't had that happen!), ERI staff introduce them to the wide range of sport careers that include sports medicine, marketing and management. When aspiring singers come in wanting to be the next Beyoncé, ERI helps them to explore the various career opportunities that are also available the music industry such as voice coaching, sound technicians or studio engineers.

Through individualized career exploration, ERI is able to help each youth discover the career that he or she wants to pursue—and the type of education and training needed to reach that goal. ERI has found that by providing every youth who walks through its doors with opportunities to explore himself AND the work world around him, helps the youth to see the relevancy of education and training and more fully participate in the other components on his or her Service Plan.

ERI strives to provide its participants with a desire for life long learn-

ing. Many of the youth who come to ERI have had bad experiences with their past educational programs. To introduce youth to post-secondary options, participants are taken to local community and four-year colleges to eliminate any fear or awkwardness of being on campus.

Staff link participants with the appropriate resources and classes available from the community college—this initial introduction is often the first step in their process to reach their future careers. Arrangements have been made with community colleges to test at ERI so their students are tested in a comfortable environment. Many of ERI's participants are enrolled in community college, and some have even been placed in four year colleges.

Andrea Kenny is quick to point out that having access to properly trained and caring staff is key to each youth's success. Certified teachers are available to assist youth with their academic needs. Transition specialists provide leadership and independent living skills training to young adults (many of whom are transitioning from the foster care system) and employment specialists provide work readiness and job placement assistance.

### Upcoming Workshop...

## Making Partnerships Work By Heartlands International

**When:** Oct. 23-25, 2007

**Where:** San Antonio, TX

**Description:** the workshop will provide training on:

- Laying the ground for successful partnerships;
- Stages of partnership development;
- Maintaining communication and direction in partner ships;
- Overcoming difficulties in multi-sectoral partnerships; and
- Methods for evaluating and sharing credit in each partnership.

**Register:** <http://www.youthbuild.org/>



## Youthbuild Organization Provides Individualized Service (Cont.)

### Job Placement

Many participants choose not to go onto post-secondary education and instead are placed directly into jobs. Community-based skills training is also available to youth who need to develop or enhance their work readiness and job specific skills prior to obtaining a job (ERI has connections with over 200 local employers). Using individualized training plans, ERI monitors the participants' progress during his or her training program.

ERI has an impressive 86% placement rate in their federally funded programs. ERI states that this level of placement is not due to good initial matches, but because of the support work. ERI works diligently with the employers to ensure that placement goes smoothly. ERI staff frequently stop by job sites to follow-up with both the youth and employer, providing help the instant something goes wrong and implementing strategies to help the youth maintain his or her job. The reason they have a pool of 200 employers willing to provide training and employment opportunities to their participants is that ERI has a proven reputation for providing them with youth who understand the world of work.

### How to Fund It All

ERI strongly believes that programs should arise from identified community needs not just from the current flavor of Washington. They research state and federal funding opportunities that have similar goals as their mission. Various sources end up funding bits and pieces of their complex service structure. For example, students placed in their alternative school may be funded through the Comprehensive Services Act, the Department of Juvenile Justice (they are registered vendors) or local school systems. A substance abuse grant was used to fund career education programming in an alternative school (the majority of youth in this class were expelled for drug-related offenses). These students not only received classroom and community-based training, but earned up to 2 high school credits!

Federal funding (JTPA and WIA) has enabled ERI to help over 3,500 people gain the education and job skills they need to become productive adults. And, since 2005, ERI has used Youthbuild funding to provide comprehensive education and construction skills training to youth in the rural Northern Neck Region of Virginia.

### Why Youthbuild?

ERI was aware of the Youthbuild program before applying and had liked the holistic approach this program offered to its participants. This approach mirrors that of ERI. After hurricane Isabel devastated a large portion of the Northern Neck, ERI decided it was time to apply for Youthbuild funds and add construction skills training (a high growth industry in their region) to its core offerings. This very rural region is located on the Chesapeake Bay and was once a summer destination for the rich in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Colonial Beach, a 3-square-mile town located on the water and dependent on tourism, was devastated by Isabel. All major hotels and restaurants were destroyed along with many homes. ERI's initial grant of \$400,000 helped 17 young men and women obtain their GED, gain valuable work skills and enter into post-secondary education and employment. In the process, four new homes were built and 15 homes rehabilitated for low-income people, ERI will continue its great work with their new \$700,000 grant

Having worked under various funded programs ERI has found believes that the Youthbuild model most closely mirrors what they themselves have striven to provide since first

opening their doors. "The time-intensive, holistic model is the approach to use when dealing with at-risk youth," states Andrea Kenny. "We have found that being able to spend real time with each youth (and having the funding to pay for it!) enables them to implement real changes in their lives."

ERI believes in partnerships and has found that the Youthbuild program fully supports this belief. ERI has made use of both YouthBuild USA and Heartlands International for technical assistance as well as a means to expose their participants to broader learning opportunities. ERI sent two groups of Youthbuild participants to Gulf Port to help rebuild homes after Katrina. Through their partnership with the National Homebuilder's Association, their graduates have received Pre-Apprenticeship Carpentry Training Certification, recognized by thousands of homebuilders across the United States.

*To read our past issues of Effective Practices, or get information resources and a list of trainings offered by Heartlands International check our website at*





# Heartlands International Inc.

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**We enhance the capacity and effectiveness of organizations to better peoples' lives**

**Would you like to nominate a program for HUD Youthbuild's Effective Practices?**

- Entire Program
- Organization and Management
- Youth Development
- Workforce Development
- Retention Services and/or Alumni Program

**First Name**

**Last Name**

**Middle Initial**

**Title**

**Organization**

**Street Address**

**City**

**State/Province**

**Postal Code**

**Country**

**Work Phone**

**Fax**

**E-mail**