

Handout 5B.1

CAREER OPPORTUNITY AWARENESS: RESOURCES & PROGRAM-BASED STRATEGIES FOR HELPING YOUTH LEARN ABOUT JOBS AND THE LABOR MARKET

Career opportunity awareness is the process of exposing young people to information about the job market, job related skills, the wide variety of jobs and work environments that exist, and the education and training they require. The information learned by participating in career opportunity awareness activities can help young people identify careers of interest, learn how they can prepare for them, and help them match their interests, personality and abilities to careers. Youth service professionals can play a critical role in increasing the career opportunity awareness of all youth, both by developing learning activities and by engaging local employers to support those activities.

There are many strategies that youth service professionals can use to deepen the career opportunity awareness of youth. Youth can:

- **Review basic information** about a wide variety of careers. Provide materials (such as excerpts from professional magazines, newspapers and other written materials) and plan structured, guided discussions or activities. For youth with reading challenges, provide alternate formats for information that they can use (such as electronic, large-print, Braille or audio formats). For example, youth could read an article about a birth at the zoo and discuss: what it would be like to work there, the various types of zoo jobs, and the education required. (This could be followed by a “behind the scenes” visit to the zoo or a nearby veterinarian.)
- **Explore careers and the labor market using the Internet.** There are a wealth of resources that provide information on careers and the education and training required for entry-level work. Numerous websites can provide information about the job market, careers that will be in demand in the future, sources of education and training, and professional organizations. These websites include:
 - » U.S. Department of Labor’s Career OneStop, www.careeronestop.org.
 - » Bureau of Labor Statistics Youth Section, www.bls.gov/k12/index.htm.
 - » America’s Career InfoNet, www.careerinfonet.org (includes projected occupational job openings by state).
 - » U.S. Department of Labor’s O*Net Resource Center, www.onetcenter.org.
 - » America’s Career Resource Network, <http://cte.ed.gov/acrn/>.
 - » Vocational Information Center, www.khake.com.
- **Visit different workplaces** and talk with the individuals performing the work. You might be able to coordinate this activity through your chamber of commerce, a professional association or other employer-led organizations. For example, youth could tour a cable company and visit all the departments (customer accounts, technical support, installation and engineering), learning about work settings, required attire, educational requirements, pay scales and benefits.
- **Invite guest speakers** to provide information about different careers, guidance in planning for them, and to discuss the skills needed for future success. Guest speakers can come to your site with sample applications, job descriptions and

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materials for hands-on learning. For example, a hospital human resource manager could talk about all the divisions (transportation, billing, cafeteria, pharmacy, administrative, nursing, radiology and physical/occupational therapy), application requirements, career paths, benefits, typical workdays and salaries at a hospital.

- **Arrange informational interviews** with individuals who do a job of interest, and help youth to develop questions that will help them guide their decision about how well their skills match with the job requirements. After the interview, discuss their perceptions and the realities of the job and help them identify what they liked and didn't like about the job, as well as related types of jobs that they might like to explore.

The interaction of local employers with youth can make a real difference in the career opportunity awareness of those youth. Representatives of local businesses can expose youth to various career paths, teach essential work readiness skills, and help youth understand the educational requirements and work environments related to specific occupations. You may contact business leaders through a local chamber of commerce, Rotary Club, Lions Club, Business Leadership Network (BLN), Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), American Society for Training and Development (ASTD), as well as industry associations such as the Information Technology Association of America.

Local employers can be engaged to support efforts to deepen youths' career opportunity awareness by:

- **Providing written materials** (about their company, its place in an industry, and the kinds of employment it offers) for reading activities with youth.
- **Providing sample applications and performance reviews** for hands-on practice.
- **Hosting site visits** at their workplaces.
- **Serving as guest speakers.**
- **Participating in informational or mock interviews** with young people.

Source:

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