

Press Release

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The Vermilion County Workforce Investment Board (VCWIB) and Vermilion County Job Training Partnership (VCJTP) congratulate the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Title I Youth Provider: Center for Children Services (CCS) GRADS/GED Program in Danville Illinois for receiving the "IL Workforce Conference Outstanding Youth Program Award" for the State of Illinois sponsored by the Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunities, Bureau of Workforce Development.

The VCWIB awarded in May of 2005 CCS \$260,000 to serve 110 Youth for youth activities to enable youth to be successful in achieving their educational, employment, and career goals with strong connections between academic and occupational learning, including youth activities to promote youth development, citizenship and employment success.

The Youth Program targets the population for low-income youths ages 14-21 that meet the following criteria: deficient in basic literacy skills, school dropout, pregnant or a parent, truancy, substance abuse, offender, physical disability, learning disability, mental illness, developmental disability, need for

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pre-employment and work maturity, workplace skill deficient as defined by standardized assessment, living in a single parent household, or living with a person who is not a legal guardian.

Jeff Fauver, Chair to the VCWIB stated "We are honored to learn that CCS has won the "Illinois Workforce Conference Outstanding Youth Program Award" for the State of Illinois this year. Every year CCS has taken the hardest to serve youths in Vermilion County into their program. The results have been an overwhelming success with students receiving their GED. Their entrepreneurial training has taught these same students valuable work experience including running a small business". Brian Hensgen, Executive Director to the VCJTP added " For many years The Center for Children's Services GRADS program and staff have offered extraordinary services to Vermilion County's most in need youth and it is wonderful that the State is recognizing them at this years Workforce Conference. CCS has developed an innovative strategy to prepare our youth with the employment skills employers' demand while offering GED classroom instruction. Their program's success is a tribute to their hard working staff and we look forward to their organization being honored as the Outstanding Youth Program in the State of Illinois"

CCS will be presented the award at the Illinois Workforce Development Conference sponsored by Illinois Department of Commerce, Bureau of Workforce Development on October 26th & 27th, 2006 in Springfield Illinois. CCS Executive Director, Dr. Ed

Michaels; GRADS/GED Program Coordinator, Muriel Barnes and Staff: Bill Miller and Sarah Petsch will be present to accept the award.

Vermilion County Workforce Investment Board Members: Chuck Brooks, Vermilion County Federation of Labor AFL-CIO, Brian Hensgen, VCJTP, Peggy Kunze, Walgreen's Accounting Center and VCWIB Director, Lori Brewster will be attending the Illinois Workforce Conference to support CCS.

Below is the winning program submission to the State of Illinois.

The GRADS/GED Program is part of the extensive child welfare services available at the Center for Children's Services in Danville, Illinois. During the 2005-2006 program year, the GRADS/GED Program served a total of 111 youth (91 out-of-school and 20 in-school). Youth attended educational (high school, GED, or post-secondary) classes and participated in employment skills trainings after class and throughout the summer. For many years, the GRADS/GED Program has consistently met or exceeded all of the youth standards established by the Workforce Investment Act, the Vermilion County Workforce Investment Board (LWIA18) and the local Job Training Partnership. The GRADS/GED Program continues to be an active and growing opportunity for the often underserved youth of Vermilion County.

The GRADS/GED Program works with the hardest to serve youth in Vermilion County. During the 2005-2006 program year, the program served young people with multiple barriers to their education and employment success: 65% were pregnant or parents, 57% had admitted to substance abuse, 6% had been homeless or in foster care, and 21% were convicted offenders. At enrollment, TABE testing indicated that 72% were skill deficient but only 19% had a documented disability. Over 28% of these youth dropped out of school in the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade. Collectively, 48% of the program's youth dropped out of high school before finishing the 9th grade. The program served 58 youth parents with 103 children. While shocking to many, these statistics are merely numbers that represent a population of young people with unique needs that are often overlooked in traditional educational

systems. Identifying this need in Vermilion County, the GRADS/GED Program has grown and developed unique programming to work with and serve these youth.

To best serve Vermilion County youth and to meet the ten required WIA service elements for youth, the GRADS/GED Program has developed many small business ventures. During 2005-2006 program year, youth participants generated over \$28,800—all from youth driven entrepreneurial projects. The Café on the Lawn, begun in 2000, is the largest of these participant projects. Youth participants construct and manage a small outdoor café on the front lawn of the Center for Children's Services from approximately June 1 to July 31—this occurs literally from the “ground up” and is a huge undertaking. The core of the Café is constructed under a 20 ft x 20 ft tent with hot and cold running water, sewage run-off, electricity, refrigeration/freezers, food preparation, and serving areas all which need to be taken from storage, set up, and connected each year. A large grill tent housing eight grills and a few preparation tables is attached at the rear of the main tent. A final tent at the front of the complex is raised for the cashier and serving staff. Youth participants serve roughly 200 meals between 11:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. each day with one evening event added so participants can experience a double shift and the organization of a special community event. The Café experience trains participants in every area of designing, running, and managing a restaurant or small business. At the end of each business day, the youth “business partners” discuss cost containment, personnel issues,

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scheduling, food service regulations, and other business challenges using the Robert's Rules group decision making model. The development and management of the Café project also involves many community partners including, but not limited to, the Salvation Army for industrial kitchen use, Logan Appliance for freezer/refrigeration, American Pavilion for tent rental, Vermilion Valley Produce for fresh produce, and Danville Paper and Supply for restaurant supplies.

The Café on the Lawn has expanded to become Café on the Lawn, Inc. Café projects now include landscaping, catering, and special events. The Café on the Lawn Landscaping Team has designed and managed the extensive Center for Children's Services' gardens. In program year 2005-2006, the landscaping team began taking jobs in the community. The Village of Tilton hired the team to plant beds around the village and at Tilton City Hall. The 2nd Annual Mother's Day Flower Sale was both profitable and well-attended. The Café on the Lawn Landscaping Team was given the honor of being selected by the University of Illinois' Vermilion County Extension office to be a part of the area Master Gardeners' Garden Walk. The Center for Children's Services was one of five county-wide gardens selected to be viewed as a part of this fundraiser for the Master Gardeners. The Café on the Lawn Landscaping Team partners include Schultz's Nursery and Danville Gardens for discount products, technical assistance, and landscaping projects as well as the Vermilion County Master Gardeners for volunteer support and consultation.

Café on the Lawn Catering projects also started coming in during program year 2005-2006. Café Catering accepted its first job catering at an open house for the local Illinois Employment and Training Center in the fall and continued to bid and accept jobs throughout the program year. The Café on the Lawn and Café Catering hosted its 1st Annual Christmas Bazaar during December. This undertaking involved a variety of new partners and was designed to give program participants small business experience by analyzing the local market to select and purchase products, assess and assign costs, manufacture products, and market to the community in addition to designing, creating, and serving a luncheon. This venture was an exceptional learning opportunity for participants and was well-received by the community. New partnerships include Teresa's Candles, Yoder's Country Kitchen, and Jan Meeker Consulting in addition to many long-term partners like Danville Gardens.

All revenue generated from these entrepreneurial ventures (over \$28,800) was returned to the program to pay for training, student salaries, supportive services, and other program elements that have been lost due to reduced funding. In anticipation of further financial limitations, the GRADS/GED Program has begun to look for a site to buy (or accept as a donation) to create a year-round Café on the Lawn. The Center for Children's Services' Board of Director's Strategic Plan includes looking for a site to remodel and house the Café's innovative projects which will include a distribution business to manufacture and

sell (on site and online) student-made products that match the agency's mission to assist children and families.

The GRADS/GED Program continued to stress educational attainment for the youth involved in its programs. All in-school youth completed the school year by graduating or advancing to the next grade level. Of the out-of-school youth served during 2005-2006, 54 have attained their GED and the others are working toward that goal. At this year's community-wide GED Graduation at Danville Area Community College (DACC), one of the program participants was asked to represent the graduating class as the student speaker. DACC continues to be a strong educational partner for the GRADS/GED Program, providing an additional instructor/mentor, educational and testing materials, administrative assistance, referrals, and organizing the graduation ceremony. The Vermilion County Regional Office of Education is also a key educational partner by providing the GED testing as well as referrals and administrative support.

In addition to educational and job opportunities, the GRADS/GED Program has the opportunity to offer truly specialized retention, referral, and follow-up services. Because the program is housed within a comprehensive mental health agency, the program can provide on site counseling (group or individual) and crisis intervention services. A youth in need can access clinical assistance 24 hours a day/7days a week within minutes. The Center for Children's Services also provides Helping Homes for respite or foster care and therapeutic advocates who

work one-on-one with youth participants as part of their individual treatment plans. On-going case management maintains and connects participants to these services. A committed relationship between staff and participants combined with effective retention services ensures that youth stay engaged and moving toward meeting the Workforce Investment Act performance outcomes.

Each of the aforementioned program pieces are enriched by the strong collaborative partnerships delineated in the program's Memorandum of Understanding. The Memorandum of Understanding outlines over 25 collaborative partners with in-kind donations equaling over \$400,000. The Center for Children's Services acts as the "service broker" by coordinating the operation of the GRADS/GED Program through these wide-reaching partnerships.

The GRADS/GED Program's unique approach to serving Vermilion County youth has resulted in a wide range of positive outcomes. In the 2005-2006 program year, they earned an Overall Outcome of Exceed by exceeding their negotiated goals. Youth entered employment (YEER) at 113% of negotiated goal and obtained diplomas or equivalent (YDER) at 131% of negotiated goal. Placement and retention rates (YPRR) were at 152% of negotiated goal and credential attainment (YCAR) was at 146% of negotiated goal. Clearly this program is a success at meeting the needs of Vermilion County youth. Young people are more likely to earn their GED and more likely to gain employment after receiving training from the GRADS/GED program. The Vermilion County Workforce Investment

Board, The Job Training Partnership, The GRADS/GED Program, and The Center for Children's Services put the development of youth first. Through carefully crafted and innovated programming, these highly at-risk young people are meeting and exceeding the entire community's expectations and they are truly building a powerful workforce and a strong community for a lifetime.