

# Program Summary: Youth Ready Chicago Summer Jobs (ARRA)

City of Chicago Department of Family and Support Services

November 2009

## Overview

In 2009, the City of Chicago provided over 7,800 additional summer job opportunities for low-income youth thanks to funding provided by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Combined with other summer employment opportunities funded by the City and its partners, nearly 20,000 youth jobs were created. The Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS), which administers the City's Youth Ready Chicago Summer Jobs Program, partnered with 34 organizations that acted as hubs for recruiting and enrolling eligible youth participants, matching them with work opportunities, and providing work readiness training and support services. The hubs coordinated with over 850 job sites throughout Chicago where youth participants were employed.

- **Applications Received:** 75,000
- **Youth Participants:** 7,800  
(19,900 total youth jobs - combined ARRA and City/partner agency funding)
- **Average Duration and Wage of Work Experience:** 6.4 weeks; 23 hours/week; \$8.70/hour
- **Total Hours Worked:** 1,150,000
- **Total Youth Wages Distributed:** \$10,000,000
- **Hubs:** 34; Contracted organizations included sister City agencies (e.g. Chicago Public Schools, Chicago Park District, etc.), Workforce Investment Act contract agencies, museums, non-profit community development organizations, and community-based and faith-based organizations.
- **Job sites:** 850; Job sites included 285 government agency sites, 280 non-profit organizations, 200 private businesses, and 85 faith-based organizations.
  - Private Businesses included 50 food establishments, 35 retail businesses, 20 financial/insurance firms, 10 law firms, and five hotels.
  - Non-profit and public institutions included 177 Chicago Park District sites, 160 community development and social services organizations, 92 public and private schools, 90 programs for children and youth, and the offices of 62 elected officials.
  - Other specialized fields included 20 health-care related organizations, 20 arts/media organizations, 17 colleges and universities, 10 landscaping/agriculture organizations, seven science/technology institutions, and six museums.

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In 2009, the City of Chicago provided over 7,800 additional summer job opportunities for low-income youth thanks to funding provided by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Combined with other summer employment opportunities funded by the City and its partners, nearly 20,000 youth jobs were created. At the conclusion of the program, the Department of Family and Support Services administered an online survey to youth and employers, soliciting feedback on their experience as part of the Youth Ready Chicago Summer Jobs Program (ARRA-funded portion).<sup>1</sup>

## Youth survey response highlights include:

- Over 90% of youth respondents reported that participating in Youth Ready Chicago helped prepare them for future jobs or careers, and nearly three quarters felt the program helped them academically.
- Over 90% rated their overall experience in the program as good or excellent, and an equal percentage rated the supervision and guidance at their job site as good or excellent.
- Teamwork (83%), workplace conduct (66%), and public speaking (50%) ranked highest as concrete professional skills young people felt they developed during the program.
- Over half reported dedicating job earnings toward household expenses and savings.
- Three in four reported that they would have been unemployed over the summer without the program.

## Employer survey response highlights include:

- Over 90% of employer respondents expressed that they would participate in the program again.
- Nearly 90% of employers were satisfied with their youth workers.
- Over 95% of surveyed employers evaluated their youth workers' ability to satisfactorily complete assignments and tasks as average (26%), good (44%), or excellent (26%). Ability to learn new skills and roles and interpersonal and teamwork skills were also rated highly.
- Nearly 60% reported that they had never participated in a summer jobs program previously.

## Areas for Improvement:

- Many surveyed youth cited the need for increased program opportunities, including more work hours, weeks, and training. They also expressed a desire for continued job programming beyond the summer.
- Some youth and employers reported experiencing administrative challenges, particularly with the eligibility documentation and verification requirements.

## Future implications

The success of Youth Ready Chicago, and other programs across the country, not only demonstrates the benefits youth summer jobs programs provide to young people, employers, and communities – it also confirms the need for continued funding and program improvement. With the beginning of 2009 marking the lowest national youth employment rate in over 60 years, the federal government has an historic opportunity to build on the achievements of summer 2009 and make a sustained investment in the next generation of American workers through youth employment programs.

<sup>1</sup> DFSS received responses from 919 youth and 196 employers. The current survey participation was strictly voluntary and the authors therefore recognize the limitation of the data and sample size. Future consideration will include plans for expanding the scope of the data collection.