Monterey County Administrative Office
Lew C. Bauman, CAO

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Workforce Investment Board Takes Aim at Gang Prevention with Federal Grant, New Program

Monterey County’s Workforce Investment Board (WIB) has received a $3 million grant for an innovative program using employment and comprehensive services to combat gang violence.

WIB was one of only 11 organizations from around the nation to receive federal Workforce Innovation Fund grant monies which are earmarked for agencies to expand partnerships and target improvements in job training programs. In Monterey County’s case, WIB will be partnering with the Youth Ambassador for Peace Program and using economic opportunities to break the cycle of gangs and violence.

“This program will target youth in the greatest need and offer a comprehensive workforce development experience,” says Joyce Aldrich, Executive Director of the Workforce Investment Board.

Aldrich explains the program concept, development and expected outcomes:
Q. How did this program go from concept to reality?

A. It came from a collaboration identifying grant opportunities. Several years ago, Elliott Robinson (Director of Social Services) and Vinz Koller (Director of Training and Technical Assistance at Social Policy Research Associates, which has worked with the County on gang violence prevention efforts) worked on a ‘theme’ to assist youth that were either impacted by gang involvement already or were at risk of gang violence in their families. They submitted the concept to the Department of Labor (unsolicited) and although the Department thought it was a good idea and should be developed into a program proposal, at the time there wasn’t any funding. When I came to work for WIB, Elliott shared the project idea with me and suggested that if there ever was an opportunity, I should consider going after a grant where the ‘Ambassadors for Peace’ concept could be developed into a program.

Q. How will the program operate?

A. The Workforce Investment Board oversees all programs within our system, but the Office for Employment Training will provide case management services. The grant term is October 1, 2014 through September 30, 2019, and youth can enroll in the program beginning approximately April 1, 2015 through September 30, 2018. The last year of the grant cycle is Program Evaluation, which is a requirement of the Department of Labor. We are able to collaborate with community partner agencies already working with at-risk youth to reach those in need of these services.

Q. Is there a target goal for number of youth in the program and what is the targeted outcome for these participants?

A. The target goal for the number of youth is 240 to be assisted in two separate cohorts of 125 each. The Department of Labor does not allow a work experience component as part of this grant proposal; instead we will be offering youth in the program services such as:

- Individual capacity & team-building activities
- Action research
- Gang intervention
- Mentoring services
- Job Fairs with strong business/employer representation
- Career & skills exploration
- Interpersonal communications
- Restorative Justice
We will hire a full-time Behavioral Health Social Worker to work with the youth as well.

The targeted outcome for participants in the short term is mastery of ‘soft skills’ such as earning a credential or higher, participating in an internship program, learning to serve as a mentor themselves and engaging with positive adults. In the long term, the targeted outcomes are for youth to become employed in the industry they have completed a credential for, to earn higher wages and land a job with benefits, to have a strong civic engagement, to avoid gang involvement and criminal activities and to become a mentor to others facing the same challenges they have faced.

Library Summer Reading Program a Success Targeting Teens

Monterey County Free Libraries’ (MCFL) summer reading program is over, and organizers say one of the targets of this year’s program, to engage more teens in summer reading, is a success.

Summer reading programs are a beloved staple of libraries everywhere. It is well known that reading during the summer prevents the ‘summer slide,’ helping children maintain their reading skills when school is out.

While young children are usually enthusiastic participants of the program and love to earn prizes for their reading, it can be harder to keep teen readers engaged and involved. So this year, MCFL tried something new to attract more teens to visit the libraries: a teens-only drawing, with the prize being a Kindle Paperwhite device.

For those who don’t know about this particular kindle, the Paperwhite has a high-resolution screen making it as easy to read as a print book and also has a backlight for reading in poorly lit areas. To earn tickets for the drawing, teens had to fill out a bingo card showing that they read books in various genres. They received an extra ticket for the drawing by participating in the Libraries summer teen workshop about comic/manga drawing which allowed teens to develop characters and create stories using a storyboard format.
Jenna Severson, who coordinates the Summer Reading Programs for MCFL says library branches reported that more kids were interested in participating in summer reading when they heard about the drawing for a Kindle.

“Teen participation in summer reading was dramatically up this year, with almost 100 more teens signing in this summer over last,” says Managing Librarian, Be Astengo.

When the reading program came to a close, there were two Kindle Paperwhite drawings held, one for those in the North County and the Peninsula areas and one for South County. There were also second place prizes for a set of headphones.

“We’re glad the chance to win the Paperwhites generated so much enthusiasm,” says Library Director Jayanti Addleman. “E-reading is the way of the future.”

Monterey County Animal Services Shares Happy Ending Stories from the Shelter

The dedicated staff at Monterey County Animal Services (a service within the Health Department’s Environmental Health Division) works tirelessly to care for the animals that come into the shelter, and when those efforts are rewarded with heartwarming stories of finding ‘forever’ families for homeless pets, it’s a reason to celebrate.

The shelter staff has two happy endings to share this month, thanks to a creative effort of matching homeless animals in Monterey County with potential adopters out of state. The shelter has been working collaboratively with a variety of shelters for placing animals, and a local pet rescue organization plays a critical role in transporting the pets to their new shelter.

“Once or twice a month, I contact the shelters we work with out of state, or they contact us,” explains Joanie Bruno-Compagno, Senior Animal Care Technician. “We choose
adoptable dogs that fit each of the contact shelter’s criteria, usually 15-20 dogs. The dogs are given a health exam thanks to AFRP (Animal Friends Rescue Project) before being sent to a new shelter and a second chance at adoption.”

One of the shelters which frequently takes adoptable dogs from Monterey County is Greenhill Humane Society in Eugene, Oregon, which updated staff on the fate of two dogs it received, ‘Caspar’ and ‘Stanley.’

Caspar was matted and messy when he arrived at the Monterey County shelter September 7th. Shelter staff gave him a second chance by putting him on the transport to Eugene, Oregon on September 24th. It was a second chance that paid off.

“When ‘Casper’ came in, I contacted a family who had been waiting for the right dog for their autistic son and it was a match,” says Kimber Elliott, Kennel Manager at Greenhill Humane Society. “We do what we do for the animals, but our work has a tremendous impact of the lives of people as well. A little boy struggling to connect with the world now has someone that can transcend his barriers and be a source of comfort.”

Caspar’s adopters sent a photo collage of the dog then and now and these comments about the dog now named Crackers.

“We were the lucky ones to find Crackers!! He is, literally, amazing! He does not bark, does not startle and is friendly, sensitive, intelligent and 100% tolerant of my two young and doting boys. According to our trainer, he is going to make an exceptional service dog for our autistic son who is six years old.”
Another other happy ending came for a second dog on that same transport to Oregon, a little dog named Stanley, who was brought to the shelter as a stray from Moro Road on September 18th. According to the Greenhill staff, Stanley was taken by a trainer for a disabled vet with PTSD for training. We hope to hear more about his story soon.

Maybe there is a happy ending waiting for you at Monterey County Animal Services? You can always check out adoptable pets at the shelter which is located at 160 Hitchcock Road, Salinas.

‘Stanley’ when he arrived at Monterey County Animal Services.