

Dane County: Increasing investment in youth employment programs to \$625,000 as part of 2022 budget to help serve at-risk youth

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Today, Dane County Executive Joe Parisi announced plans to increase funding for youth employment programs to \$625,000 to help at-risk youth pursue employment opportunities, as part of his 2022 budget proposal. Right now, the Dane County Department of Human Services contracts with Operation Fresh Start, Common Wealth, and Briarpatch—around \$525,000 budgeted each year—to help young people obtain work permits, do pre-employment training, and connect with employers. This almost 20% increase in funding will help serve about 60 at-risk youth.

“Our investments in youth employment programs over the years have helped hundreds of young people gain valuable work experience and build critical skills for a lifetime of success,” said Dane County Executive Joe Parisi. “This additional funding in the 2022 budget will help young people get on track and enable them to achieve future success in the workforce.”

Workforce development and the availability of workers was one of the reasons why County Executive Parisi first created the Dane County Division on Workforce and Economic Development in 2013. Not long after that, he helped bring Project Big Step to Dane County, a unique project that helps develop job skills and match those workers with opportunities in the trades. Through funding to Operation Fresh Start, Dane County Conservation Crews were created, which have helped dozens of young people gain work experience in parks and natural resource areas and go on to other career opportunities. Thanks to the leadership of Supervisor Carousel Bayrd, County

Executive Parisi is upping funding for other county support youth employment programs by \$100,000 in the 2022 budget.

“This increased funding ensures that more Dane County teens will have job training, mentorship, a place to belong, and the ability to financially support themselves and their families,” said Dane County Board Supervisor Carousel Bayrd. “Coming out of the pandemic, the need for youth employment has grown, and not just for the summer but year-round. This is a top priority of the Education Committee, and I’m excited to see it in the budget.”

Currently, Dane County Department of Human Services – Youth Justice contracts with three agencies to provide youth employment services, including Operation Fresh Start (OFS), Common Wealth, and Briarpatch. Each agency serves a slightly different population and delivers services according to their program structure. Youth need to be at least 14 years old in order to be employed and need work permits. The number of hours a youth is eligible to work depend on child labor laws, age, and whether it is during the school year or not.

Operation Fresh Start serves an older set of youth who are 16.7 years old or older. The youth participate in four days of crew work and one day of educational support around HSED completion. Approximately 81 youth are served annually, with funding totaling \$315,098.

The Common Wealth Youth Business Mentoring Program serves 15 to 17 year-olds. Training is provided through a variety of two week training sessions. Upon completion, all youth are guaranteed a match with an employer. Follow up support is provided to the youth as well as the employer. A portion of the youth’s wages are paid by Common Wealth as an incentive to hire youth. Approximately 150 youth are served annually, with funding totaling \$136,810.

The Briarpatch Youth Job Center serves youth 14 to 16 year-olds. Pre-employment training is provided to youth and some are offered subsidized work crew opportunities or job placement depending on youth’s readiness for employment. Approximately 75 youth are served annually, with funding totaling \$73,253.

Under the budget proposal, Operation Fresh Start will receive an additional \$60,000 to serve approximately 15 youth, Common Wealth will receive an additional \$25,000 to serve approximately 30 youth, and Briarpatch will receive an additional \$15,000 to serve approximately 15 youth.