

Ramsey County Workforce Investment Board Building Lives

The Building Lives program was a demonstration project funded by the United States Department of Labor that served adjudicated youth. The focus was on providing a caring adult and guide to the adjudicated, or at risk, youth while s/he participated in the program which promoted education, personal growth and career building opportunities. The program, which ran from June 2002 to December 2005, was successful with results citing 94% of the participants did not re-offend.

From 2002 to 2005, Building Lives served 406 youth who were in the justice system or at high risk of entering the criminal justice system. These youth were 16-24 years old and lived in the most disadvantaged area of St. Paul, MN. There are 50 active gangs in St. Paul with 40% involved in drug sales.

Building Lives was a partnership with Ramsey County Workforce Solutions, St. Paul Public Schools, Ramsey County Corrections and community based organizations. Each organization adjusted their practices to work together, and create a new synergy. For example:

- Building Lives was fundamental in creating "systems change" in the way the Ramsey County Corrections system and its offender population was connected to workforce.
- The St. Paul Public Schools, through a special Building Lives Learning component, developed effective systems to serve this population, resulting in increased attendance, increased credit accumulation, and fewer disciplinary actions for students that were at high risk of dropping out of school.
- Community based non-profit organizations worked with Building Lives to jointly serve their populations. One example is Hmong American Partnership, an expert in working with Hmong gangs. These two programs complimented each other and jointly used resources to help participants.

Federal funding for Building Lives was \$1.5M (\$3,700 per participant.) The Ramsey County WIB would like to obtain funding to reinstate this program, and is seeking \$1M per year to fund the program through legislative action. The Ramsey County WIB will reallocate the dollars to Workforce Solutions who will again administer the program. A Request for Proposals will be issued and based on the goals and objectives of the intended program, the best-rated proposal will be selected and contracted to deliver the services.