



COMMONWEALTH CORPORATION

SEPT/OCT 2005

## YouthWorks Provides Job Opportunities

September 30th marked the successful completion of this year's YouthWorks Program in Massachusetts. YouthWorks is a state-funded program, which provides summer jobs for at-risk youth in urban areas. CommCorp targeted funding for 21 cities across the state, helping youth between the ages of 14 and 21 who met family income eligibility requirements to find a job over the summer.

More than 2000 youths participated in the program this  
(continued on page 2)



*Edwin Rodriguez (left), YouthWorks participant from Lawrence, and Ephraim Weisstein (right), Vice President of CommCorp.*

## Career Coaching Session Shares Lessons Learned

Commonwealth Corporation, in its ongoing effort to share the promising practices throughout its programs and partnerships, held an informational session called Career Coaching: The BayStateWorks Experience. The session was a chance for Workforce Investment Board and program staff who had experience with career coaching models to share what they had learned with others who may be interested in developing these positions in their own BayStateWorks or other workforce projects.

Rebekah Lashman and Karen Shack of the Boston Private Industry Council offered an overview of career coaching, discussing common elements and challenges. Their experience implementing a career coaching component in

their Nursing Career Ladder Initiative grant make them a great resource for those in the room just beginning to think about career coaching within their own projects.

Other speakers described their career coach models, challenges and lessons learned in an interactive presentation. Presenters included Henry Bryson of the Metro South West Regional Employment Board, Ailsa Benell from Jewish Vocational Services and Shannon Pignatelli of Berkshire Community College.

About 30 people attended the session, which was held in Worcester. Similar sessions to share learning on other topics are also in the works.

## YouthWorks

(continued from page 1)

year, gaining valuable work experience in a range of jobs, including day care, administrative, landscaping and maintenance work.

In Pittsfield, the Berkshire County Regional Employment Board managed the program, which not only provided jobs for the 12 participants, but provided seminars to help build self-confidence and life skills, career planning and counseling, and addressed safety and health concerns in the workplace.

In Haverhill and Lawrence, the Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board helped 75 youths find

employment and explore career opportunities through career skills development workshops offered through the ValleyWorks Career Center.

From Boston to Worcester, to Springfield and Fall River, the YouthWorks Program, in partnership with local communities, provided much needed income and an invaluable learning opportunity for youth who probably would not have otherwise had the chance to gain this work experience.

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## Responding to Growing Drop Out Rates

**O**n October 19th, Commonwealth Corporation hosted a briefing about the high school dropout rate and how Massachusetts can more effectively serve out-of-school youth.

The briefing featured a welcome by Jane C. Edmonds, Director of the state's Department of Workforce Development and Chair of Commonwealth Corporation's Board, comments by Stafford Peat of the Department of Education, and presentations by Ilene Berman of the National Governors Association (NGA) and Adria Steinberg of Jobs for the Future. The meeting addressed the alarming growth in the real high school drop out rate nationally (approximately 30%) and the disproportionately high number of African American and Latino students who leave the secondary education system (50%). This is compounded by the fact that Massachusetts currently lacks a definition of graduation rate that all stakeholders

agree to, which undermines our ability to develop good data on the problem.

In 2005 Massachusetts was one of ten states to receive an NGA grant, funded by the Gates Foundation, to increase high school graduation and college and work readiness rates. As an NGA "Honor" state and participant in the American Diploma Project, as well as home to a cross-agency organizing mechanism (Pathways to Success by 21 or P21), Massachusetts has a unique opportunity to explore strategies for raising the visibility of the alarming growth in the drop-out rate, and finding ways to invest more effectively in prevention. Commonwealth Corporation will continue to participate in stakeholder discussions and help coordinate efforts that contribute to the development of more reliable data and that identify promising policy and practice strategies.

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*Mitt Romney, Governor; Kerry Healey, Lt. Governor; Jane C. Edmonds, Director, Mass. DWD; Jonathan Raymond, President, CommCorp*