



LACKAWANNA COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD



The "New Normal" of Success or Success in Abnormal Times

The Lackawanna County Workforce Development Board (WDB) and administrative staff salutes the industrious people of Lackawanna County for their fortitude in striving to overcome the devastation caused by COVID-19. From the implementation of a *Regional Economic and Community Recovery Task Force* to the re-opening of businesses, retail operations, restaurants, and offices to the re-establishment of programs and services, Lackawanna County is beginning to, however slowly, once again, come alive. In the wake of all of the necessary changes that have occurred since mid-March and are continuing, the Lackawanna County Workforce Development Area (WDA) has proactively approached both a re-opening of its PA CareerLink® Lackawanna County One-Stop center and the implementation of a summer work experience program specifically designed to support the local community.

The PA CareerLink® Lackawanna County went dark with locked doors and empty cubicles in mid-March, 2020. Unprecedented in nature, as a service-oriented facility, PA CareerLink® Lackawanna County staff and partners faced the need for an immediate overhaul and were charged with the development of virtual services/activities to support our customer base: those enrolled in training classes that immediately went to a virtual learning platform; job and training seekers now stuck in a void; and a struggling business community. They stepped up to the plate. Contacts with clients were handled from the living rooms and kitchen tables of our staff; on-line workforce-related workshops were developed for those seeking employment; our Business Services Team (BST) began surveying businesses to determine their immediate needs with a "how can we help" mentality. And so it went, for the next 3½ month period with on-going expertise in virtual service provision gained daily. Administrative staff developed *Red, Yellow, and Green Phases of Operation* as well as a *COVID-19 Re-Opening Plan*. Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) was accumulated and the One-Stop Center went through a rigorous re-design of its floor plan and usage pattern to ensure maximum safety for both staff and customers.

Itching to get back to the business of helping people, staff braved the virus and returned (with masks and shields and gloves and hand sanitizers and cleaning supplies) on July 2nd. All were introduced to the new normal of site operations and, on July 6, 2020, the PA CareerLink® Lackawanna County re-opened its doors to the citizens of Lackawanna County. On-going customers are scheduled by appointment but walk-ins are welcome. An immediate surge of customers has given way to a much less than expected daily flow but the doors are open, and we are proud to say that we are back in the business of supporting those with workforce needs in Lackawanna County.

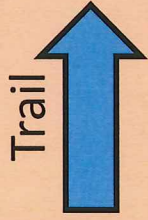
Given the situation, the Lackawanna County WDA was forced to make a decision: cancel the traditional summer work experience program for 100-150 disadvantaged Lackawanna County youngsters or re-design an activity to allow for a safe and effective project. Of course, there was only one choice BUT how could we do this? From much staff collaboration and creative thinking came the “Summer 2020 Outdoor Work Experience Project.” Over a period of 2 weeks, 44 youngsters were recruited and enrolled, counseled as to COVID-19 restrictions, and scheduled at four worksites across the City of Scranton and Lackawanna County: The Lackawanna Valley Heritage Trail, McDade Park, Nay Aug Park, and Connell Park. With teams of 5-7 workers per crew and an assigned crew leader to each team, these four areas saw major improvements that included garbage and brush removal, graffiti coverings, newly painted fences, picnic area restorations, and the like. The attached pictures tell the story. We also found time to provide each participant with information on career awareness (including interest inventories), soft skills and workplace requirements, and financial literacy, all at their outdoor sites. The youngsters gained valuable work experience and earned a few dollars to put in their pockets. They learned that a hard day’s work comes with financial benefits. They learned how to work under supervision and get along with their peers. These public parks and outdoor recreational areas were beautified for all of our citizens. Successful? You bet.

As we here in Lackawanna County continue to learn how to matriculate through “new normal” situations, we are poised to address each challenge as it comes and provide the best possible services to our constituents.

McDade Park



Lackawanna
County Heritage
Trail



Lackawanna County Workforce Development Board

"A group of high school students performed maintenance on the trail recently in West Scranton and did a marvelous job. They always wear bright orange T-shirts. The trail looks even more beautiful because of the diligent work of these students. They deserve praise."



**Summer 2020 Outdoor
Work Experience Project**



Connell Park



Nay Aug Park

