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## **Kern County REAP Program: Additional Information about Programs, Supportive Services, 3-D Conferences, and Success Stories**

### ***Additional Information about REAP***

REAP matches needs, abilities, and interests of targeted youth by providing a combination of educational, supportive, and training services along with emotional support from caring staff. Youth targeted are in desperate need of educational services, tutoring, academic counseling, and lack self-esteem, work readiness and soft skills. Because many are parents, REAP individually assigns an educational plan to meet the student's childcare, work, and transportation needs. Students may attend day, night, or weekly classes. This flexibility encourages the students to believe completion of high school diploma is actually possible!

Participants are offered several paid options during year-round and summer components of program. Project-based learning and 3D Conferences are the most common paid activities for REAP students primarily due to the flexibility and creative nature of instruction. REAP students feel more comfortable, and learn more effectively in this "family" type of environment. A support system evolves during the course of the project or conference, and as that trust matures, students begin to gain confidence and success.

Industry-based paid project-based learning activities combine creativity, technology, work readiness, soft skills, and academic skills. This blend is good for REAP youth because they are very interested in working and earning money, but may not be ready to be placed at a worksite. In addition, REAP 3-D Conferences engage the students in topics that affect them daily. They are allowed to express themselves in discussion and ask questions of professionals in the community about how to control their baby's asthma, how to stop binge drinking, and where to go for drug counseling or get tested for HIV. Again, these topics are "real" and touch upon "here and now" situations they are facing in their own lives.

### ***3D Conferences***

REAP challenges youth to "head in the right direction" with REAP 3D Conferences that focus on *development*, *diversity*, and *discipline*. Each month, a different 3-day conference is held late afternoon at the Career Resource Department for enrolled REAP youth. Conferences are a popular feature of the REAP program and attendance has often almost exceeded room capacity!

Samples of conference topics include: family planning, confidence and self-esteem building, problem-solving, diversity and tolerance, conflict resolution, and career exploration. Each conference is tied to a WIA goal that is assigned to each participant. The students participate in a nice variety of modules relating to the topic, guest speakers, videos, and interactive activities. Some activities include games focusing on the financial, emotional, and physical price of having a child to quiet introspective activities such as drawing and writing about personal conflict. A snack break is provided as well as prizes for various activities and attendance. Upon completion of the conference, each participant is tested for knowledge learned and applied and is eligible for a \$50.00 stipend. Participants completing 1 or 2 days still have an opportunity to earn quarterly incentive points for attendance and goal completion.

In addition to flexibility of education, project-based learning activities and conferences, the REAP monetary incentive program has proven to maintain engagement of the participants. Last school quarter, 80% of enrolled students received an incentive payment for participation in REAP. Twenty students



received GPAs of 3.0 or higher and were rewarded for their achievements. Many others increased GPAs from 1.0 or lower to 2.0 and higher. Overall, the incentive payments have motivated and encouraged youth to remain engaged in activities and remain in school. This monetary support fulfills a need and helps them buy school clothes and food for their children.

### ***REAP Youth Leadership Team***

There are currently three REAP participants serving on the 2004-2005 REAP Youth Leadership Team. Members of this team applied for the position, interviewed, and made a commitment to become leaders for their peers in REAP, school, and at home. After attending three days of leadership activities to prepare them for the role, team members currently plan monthly 3D Conference activities, assist staff at 3D conferences, and prepare materials for REAP activities. In addition, these youth also serve as student staff members on the WIA Star Newspaper, serve on the planning committee for Leaders in Life, and serve as CRD Youth Advisory Council members.

### ***Year-End Leadership Conference***

At close of year-round component, this leadership celebration promotes youth to build self-confidence and reinforces positive behavior patterns established during the program. The youth conference gives participants an opportunity to celebrate their successes for the year, be treated to lunch, and learn valuable advice from a well-known motivational speaker such as Scott Greenberg.

### ***Supportive Services***

Out-of-school youth are evaluated on a regular basis by Attendance Specialist, Career Consultant and Job Coach for supportive services needs. Barriers preventing participant from success in program are identified in Individual Employment Plan (IEP) at time of enrollment, but are continually reassessed as many students' lives are in frequent turmoil. Recently added to all CRD program is the Health Intervention Program (HIP). KHSD's Registered Nurse comes to CRD once a month to provide basic health care screening for all participants. Also made are referrals to partnering agencies for services ranging from dental to mental health services.

On-going supportive services may include transportation assistance, work and school clothing, child care referral to Cal Learn or Adolescent Family Life Program, drug/alcohol abuse counseling, mental health services, family violence and sexual assault referral for counseling, basic skills tutoring, health services (i.e. eye glasses), nutritional assistance, and emergency food baskets. Participants who request information on family planning/contraceptive counseling are given lists of other agencies that provide these services, and KHSD Special Projects provides guest speakers for HIV/abstinence education at REAP 3D Conferences.

### ***Project Based Learning Activities for 2005-2006***

**Focus on Facilities:** New this summer is Focus on Facilities project. In this 5 week project, participants are placed at a high school campus and taught custodial and groundskeeping skills by on-site staff. Positions are rotated on a weekly basis to allow each participant to learn the skills required to perform the various custodial jobs on campus. Because summer is the best time to rejuvenate school classrooms and hallways, major cleaning, repairs, and floor waxing is much needed at the high schools. Since the project began, participants have learned how to map rooms before removing furniture to make sure everything is put back the way it was before cleaning, strip wax off floors, wipe down classrooms, wax and buff floors, minor repair work, and groundskeeping. Also learned are safety skills on the job when using chemicals and machines. Students for this project are a mix youth age 18 and older, must be fingerprinted prior to placement, and are outfitted with custodial attire to blend in with regular staff and also to provide them



with the confidence to look and feel like regular employees. In addition to the 5 hour per day work on the campus, Friday career workshops are conducted by the coordinator of the project. This coordinator also supervises and coordinates job assignments with the head custodians as well as handles any disciplinary or work-related issues. Friday Workshops consist of modules vary from writing a cover letter and resume, to how to answer interview questions successfully. Culminating workshop activity is the creation of a work portfolio to take to prospective employers when job-hunting. At the close of the program, participants may apply for unsubsidized substitute custodial positions in the District. Students who successfully complete project will be placed in the fall at a school site for work experience if not hired first by the school system!

**Customer Service Training Program:** This 8 week course is designed to give up to 20 REAP participants skills needed to interact with customers and prepare them for an entry-level position in the world of retailing. Students are paid minimum wage for simulated retail business training Monday through Friday, three hours daily at Career Resource Department. The first 72 hours of classroom instruction includes role-playing that prepares participants for 100 hours of internship at local retail establishments. 10 elective credits and incentive points are awarded at successful completion of project. Additional outcome is opportunity for REAP participant to obtain unsubsidized employment as a result of internship in private sector. Skills learned include: cashiering, making change, handling difficult customers, conflict resolution, approaching and speaking to customers, self-esteem, sales techniques, and appropriate dress for the workplace and interview.

In 2004, in the Customer Service Training Program, 42% of participants who completed were hired in retail settings as a direct result of project training. Of those hired, roughly 50% are still working (six months retention) for the employers that hired them upon project graduation in August, 2004. Without the formal customer service and cashier training, employment for these young people would have been much more difficult. In fact, managers from work sites and employers like Footlocker and Sears eagerly seek to hire our students because they recognize that for the last four years, the Customer Service Training Program consistently sends them trainees who are polite to customers, ready to work on time, dressed appropriately, can make correct change, and eager to learn new tasks.

**Basic Quilting as an Art:** This project encourages artistry to unfold and provides a creative outlet for the participant to redirect energy in a positive manner. Basic Quilting is a good combination of business and independent artistry skills. Participants learn how to run a home business and use creativity to make money while learning to blend color and patterns to create quilts and pillows. Primary skills learned are how to master use of the sewing machine and sew a straight seam, design and match color, and market products. Overall, participants increase artistic and math skills while earning \$6.75 per hour. Culminating project includes donation of quilts to local convalescent homes, Jamison Center, and sales of lap quilts and raffle tickets for queen-size quilt and pillow shams. For the 2005-2006 school year, Basic Quilting as an Art will be offered as an “after-school” activity to engage students and keep them doing something positive while going to school. Purses, pillows, lap quilts, crocheting, and fabric painting are some activities that are planned and donations will continue to be made to various organizations in the community.



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**(COMB) Computer Office Microsoft Basics – Level I, II, and III:** COMB I, II, and III are projects that expose and prepare youth to careers in Business and Professional Services.

- **Level One Project Description:** Participants are enrolled in this 70-hour computer project that is operated like a simulated business. Project is conducted up to 4 hours daily at minimum wage. Upon completion of Level I, students receive incentive points, 5 elective credits, and are eligible to participate in COMB Level II. Stations are set up like an office and each student has their own computer to learn proper techniques in: keyboarding, introduction to Microsoft Office, word processing, Excel, job seeking skills, printer use, and problem-solving. This course is the prerequisite for COMB II and III.
- **Level Two Project Description:** Upon completion of COMB Level I, participants have the opportunity to enroll in this 70-hour intermediate computer course. Project is conducted up to 4 hours daily at minimum wage. Upon completion of Level II, incentive points, and 5 elective credits are offered. Skills taught include: increased keyboarding skill, intermediate word processing, more advanced spreadsheets, tables, columns and rows, and update of resume and portfolio created in Level I. This course is prerequisite for COMB III.
- **Level Three Project Description:** Upon completion of Levels I and II, participants have the opportunity to enroll in this 70-hour advanced computer course. Skills learned in Level III include: increased keyboarding skills, alpha and numeric filing, ten-key machine calculation, and personal portfolio update of resume and references. Job referral and individualized work experience in clerical site is planned for reliable Level III completers. Upon completion, students are eligible for paid work experience for 150 hours at a local business to apply learned clerical, computer, business, and soft skills.

### **Success Stories**

85% of students who completed COMB projects in 2004 obtained unsubsidized employment. Of those who obtained employment, 62% have since obtained diploma or GED, have sought post-secondary and/or advanced training, and are still employed while attending college and/or training. Although many of these students did not receive employment specifically as a secretary or data-entry clerk, all are working in jobs like a cashier or front counter helper, that require people-skills, maturity, and ability to multi-task. The real work experience, computer training, and soft skills instruction that COMB provides motivates these youth to continue their education beyond high school and seek part-time employment. The self-confidence youths earn from COMB completion is a catalyst that moves them upward to seek advanced training or education to accomplish career goals. Two COMB graduates in particular, are now attending advanced training to become medical assistants.

Projects like COMB and Customer Service make success for youth a reality when a student gets hired and makes more money than the instructor and people involved with the coordination of the program. One graduate completed COMB III work experience training in July, 2004 and received employment as a direct result. He was hired upon completion of the program and is now working for the KHSD as a full-time Computer Technician II making \$3950.00 per month! This young man spoke at the WIA Youth Council meeting several months ago to describe to WIA Youth Council Board members how programs like REAP changed his life. He is just one of many youth that have turned their lives around after receiving support, training, and guidance from project-based learning, work experience, and alternative education.