

Your Public Library

A Partner in Job Development



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The economic distress of the last year has been very difficult for many New Jersey residents. Municipal officials have been working in many areas to address their needs. During this difficult time, people need information. They need to know where can they get the resources to get on with their lives.

Library leaders, including author Patricia Tumulty, Executive Director of the New Jersey Library Association, have seen a tremendous increase in the demand for library services. We have seen the greatest increase in the areas of employment, small business development and computer training. A recent survey found that close to 160,000 people use New Jersey libraries every day.

In municipalities throughout the state, libraries are wonderful partners and resources in their communities. The public libraries of New Jersey have been in the forefront of providing local assistance during the recent economic crisis.

THE PUBLIC LIBRARIES OF NEW JERSEY HAVE BEEN IN THE FOREFRONT OF PROVIDING LOCAL ASSISTANCE DURING THE RECENT ECONOMIC CRISIS

Here in Bloomfield, where we have a problem with unemployment, our residents are able to try and get their lives back together with the help of our Free Public Library. Bloomfield residents are finding many of the supports they need to improve their employment opportunities at the library.

We would like to share with you some examples of how library programs throughout the state are helping residents to survive this depressed economy. Public libraries are working to meet the growing demands from the public for employment-related assistance. Help with resume writing, Internet job searches, e-mail and basic skills are now offered in most public libraries. In addition, libraries routinely help those starting new small businesses. Libraries are part of the solution for bringing residents the 21st century skills they need to gain new employment or start new businesses in our communities.

Several key partnerships have also been developed this year which can serve as models of cooperation and collaboration among government organizations to meet community needs.



Wayne Public Library: The state's libraries are doing more than ever before to support the unemployed. Here a man receives support at the Wayne Public Library.

Unemployment Benefits Assistance The first concern of those facing a sudden job loss is how to connect with unemployment benefits. These benefits are critical to providing support to their families while they look for new employment.

Fortunately the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development (LWD) has over created 30 One-Stop Career Centers throughout the state. However, these One-Stops were quickly overwhelmed by the large numbers of those seeking assistance. People could apply online without coming to a One-Stop Center, but the reality is that thousands of New Jersey residents do not have computer access at home or have given it up during this difficult time.

To assist the unemployed, the New Jersey Library Association, the New Jersey State Library and LWD formed a partnership to train librarians in how to help residents fill out the unemployment forms online at their local libraries. Through this project over 100 librarians throughout the state were trained. This cooperative project was designed to ensure that people could obtain employment benefits quickly by using the library in their own town.

Both the library community and the Department of Labor (DOL) consider this to be an extremely successful cooperative program. Julie Senack, a librarian from Atlantic City Public Library who participated in the training, summed up the experience of many librarians when she said, "Our patrons are steadily coming in during this recession, telling us that they have lost their jobs and that they need our assistance. We so desperately wanted to help people in this situation. The training given by the DOL helped us help our community."

Internet Training and Access Once a person connects with the unemployment system, they can focus on finding new employment or a new career. Unfortunately, many individuals have had no previous experience using a computer or with the Internet. They need training in basic computer skills such as word processing, Internet searching and how to use e-mail. Most public libraries have numerous training courses for their residents on a variety of topics such as using word processing and spreadsheets. In Bloomfield, the library offers individualized computer tutoring sessions which are very popular.

A recent survey by the Gates Foundation found that in 78 percent of New Jersey's towns, the local public library is the only place for free, public Internet access in a community. Internet access is a key resource for finding a new job. Many employers will only accept Internet applications or post applications on an Internet site. The local public library becomes an essential source for job success. In Bloomfield Public Library the computers are in constant use, and skilled librarians are always available for assistance.

In addition, hundreds of programs were given in public libraries through-

out the state to provide guidance on a variety of employment topics such as resume writing, job searching on the Internet, interviewing skills, filling out job applications online and getting an e-mail account. From Englewood to Moorestown to Scotch Plains to Bridgeton public programs focusing on job skills became the main priority for public libraries.

Many of these programs were given in cooperation with other local agencies such as community colleges, the local Workforce Investment Boards, nonprofit organizations and SCORE.

Long Branch's Virtual Career Center The Long Branch Public Library has been a leader in developing new innovative programs for job seekers. They have created the Virtual Career Center, a comprehensive online employment resource through the library's web site. The Center offers links to a wide variety of services including computer training classes, job search sites, specialized services for senior citizens, ex-offenders and working parents. The library has also worked with local employers to list job opportunities in the area which might not be listed elsewhere.

A local resident praises the services he received: "I was unemployed after 22 years on the same job and I was computer illiterate. The computer lab staff put me at ease and showed me the basic skills computer program and then helped me get set up to e-mail. I've gotten 2 jobs lined up since then and I am connected to friends and family around the country. Thank you Library of Long Branch!"

His story is repeated in New Jersey public libraries every day.

State Library Programs A second partnership is the cooperation of the New Jersey State Library (NJSL) in providing statewide resources focusing on governmental services and business resources. The Virtual Career Center has been such a success that the New Jersey State Library has used it as a model for statewide job resources. Its "Get Help!" web site is designed to help New Jersey residents through tough economic times by providing links to a variety of governmental services such as housing, employment and financial assistance. NJSL and local libraries are also sponsoring "Get

Help!" fairs in Trenton, Paterson, Brick, Newark, Hoboken and Cherry Hill.

The New Jersey State Library has provided every public library with online job hunt and business building resources. One statewide tool is RefUSA which provides information on over 12 million US companies. It is an essential resource for every job seeker. It would be cost prohibitive for an individual library to purchase this resource. This is a resource which neither Bloomfield nor Long Branch Public Libraries could possibly purchase through their individual library budgets, yet we can now provide it to our residents because it is a statewide resource.

Support for Entrepreneurs Many of our residents are now looking to create new business opportunities in our communities by becoming entrepreneurs. The local public library has become a source for getting information on small business development. Again, The State Library provides critical statewide business resources. These resources are the basis of many of the new reference services such as Burlington County Library's Business Gateway which provides expanded services to small business and entrepreneurs. The Business Gateway builds on several of the resources on business which the New Jersey State Library provides to all public libraries called Business Source Premier. Assisting those who want to start their own small business promotes economic growth for a community. Our libraries can be the foundation.

Our residents are facing enormous challenges during this recession. Municipal leaders need to leverage local services to meet community needs. Understanding the programs your library provides to support your residents is essential for promoting economic development and job development on the local level. Through expanded partnerships with our public libraries, we are directly assisting our residents and businesses in our communities. As State Librarian Norma Blake states, "In tough economic times, libraries have not just maintained but added new services to help residents and businesses in each community. Our libraries have never been more important to the citizens of New Jersey. Libraries are making the economic recovery go faster." ▲