Committee on Youth, Sports, Parks, & Recreation

The mission of VIDOL is to administer a system of effective programs and services designed to develop, protect, and maintain a viable workforce.

GARY MOLLOY
COMMISSIONER
FEBRUARY 24, 2021
INTRODUCTION

Good Morning, Honorable Senator Samuel Carrion, Chairman of Youth, Sports, Park, and Recreation Committee, Senator Steven D. Payne, Sr. Vice Chair, other members of the 34th Legislature, the viewing and listening audience. I am Cindy L. Richardson, Assistant Commissioner of the Virgin Islands Department of Labor, here before you today on behalf of Commissioner Gary Molloy. Alongside me today is the Director of Youth and Apprenticeship, Ms. Shenika Sebastien, and our newest member of the Youth Team, Territorial Project Coordinator, Mr. Kevin Dixon. Thank you for inviting us to provide testimony regarding the youth-related programs administered by the Virgin Islands Department of Labor.

The VI Department of Labor Youth Services Division provides year-round training, employment, and educational opportunities for in and out of school youth ages 14 to 25. The Youth programs are designed to help young people of the community to do the following: access opportunities to explore career pathways, increase skills, work-based training to earn while you learn, obtain industry recognized credentials and employment in demand occupations.

The Youth team provides in-house academic and career assessments to determine each youth’s services and activities. Individual Employment Plans or Service Strategies are developed, and referrals are made to the service providers.

Youth Services may include, but are not limited to:
- Job Preparation Skills
- Resume Building
- Job Search Assistance
- Career Counseling.
- Paid/Unpaid Work Experience.
- Training Opportunities
- Labor Market and Employment Information
- Apprenticeship Opportunities
- Leadership Development Activities
- Financial Literacy Education
- Supportive Services.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted our service delivery since the suspension of in-person meetings in April 2020. However, the Youth Team has continued to offer employment assistance through alternative methods, including telephone and the use of online technology when possible.

Services include:
- One on one assistance with a Youth Case Manager
- Career Coaching
- Resume Writing
- Interview Preparation
- Job Search Assistance
- Labor Market and Employment Information
- Access to Education and Training Options
Based on the consequences of COVID-19, some programs and services were impacted by worksite availability and providers which lead to a significant reduction in the number of customers who received services in 2020. Pre-pandemic, the Youth Team, provided services to over seven hundred (700) customers annually. In 2020 the team provided services to about eighty-eight (88) customers, including essential career services, referral to partner agencies, provision of Labor Market information, work experiences, and training services.

After experiencing this decrease, the department is ready to put forth the following program offerings to the youth of the territory.

**Work, Learn and Earn Program (Work Experience)**

The Work Learn and Earn Program is a twelve (12) week paid work experience for out-of-school youth ages 17-24 with little or no work experience. By connecting these individuals to a paid work experience opportunity, it is our expectation that this activity will provide them with the skills development, orientation and exposure to career opportunities, and connections to full-time employment. During this time, participants engage in work-ready foundational skills development and career planning-related workshops offered by the Youth Team.

The Program was initially launched in 2016 to provide work experience opportunities for 20-25 out of school youth annually. With a temporary suspension in 2020, to date, the program has provided opportunities for seventy-five (75) participants with a success rate of 81%.

We are currently recruiting participants and collaborating with mandated and community partners.

**Summer Youth Work Experience Program (SYWEP)**

The Summer Youth Work Experience Program is the largest youth employment program in the Virgin Islands, connecting over six hundred (600) youth between the ages of 14-25 with career exploration opportunities and paid work experience each summer.

The Summer Youth Work Experience Program is a component of the year-round youth program that strives to provide youth with the opportunity to earn and develop the skills, attitudes, and commitment necessary to successfully transition to post-secondary education and employment; facilitate career exploration; and earn income and gain practical hands-on work experience.

In 2019, the SYWEP provided 623 students with paid summer employment opportunities with over 113 employers, earning $849,226.77 in total wages. However, in 2020 the uncertainty of COVID-19 social distancing guidelines forced us to redesign the structure of the Program.

**Plans for Summer 2021**

While we are aware that we are in the midst of a pandemic, we are striving to provide meaningful work experience to our youth while keeping them safe. Thus, we surveyed past employers to gauge interest in hosting our program participants and to determine the delivery of our programs. After receiving responses from over 55 employers as of February 18, we decided to move forward. Based on the survey, 58% of employers prefer to have the participants on-site and 40% preferred a hybrid approach. In comparison, 2% of the employers preferred virtual delivery. With the safety of our students in mind, potential employers were asked if they will be able to provide the proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and ensure health/safety precautions are in place in accordance with OSHA requirements during participants' experience; 98% of employers are prepared.

We are excited to share that the application window for our 2021 Summer Youth Work Experience Program is currently open and will close on April 23, 2021. This year we intend to provide a five (5) week work experience to five hundred and sixty-eight (568) participants ages 16-25 and a four (4) weeks virtual career exploration
program to two hundred (200) participants ages 14-15. To prepare participants, we have tentatively scheduled a Resume Writing workshop on March 19, 2021.

**Labor Investing for Tomorrow (LIFT) Internship Program**

Serving as one of the most prominent work experience/internship programs in the territory, the Labor Investing for Tomorrow is a component of the Summer Youth Work Experience Program (SYWEP) that provides thirty (30) college juniors and seniors with eight (8) weeks of work experience in their field of study. LIFT interns are exposed to the workforce in the Virgin Islands, motivating them to stay or return home. During the program, interns can also gain college credits while obtaining hands-on experience and an opportunity to network with professionals in their field. Admission into the LIFT program is contingent upon meeting program requirements.

In 2020, the program structure was redesigned to adapt to the COVID 19 social distancing requirements offering opportunities virtually, on-site, or blended. Twenty (20) interns participated in a work experience combining a series of live online training (Project Management, Analytical Skills, and Business Communication) provided by the American Management Association (AMA) and open access to self-directed learning content supplied by LinkedIn Learning.

**Plans for LIFT 2021**

Now in its 32nd year, we are currently accepting applications. This year fifty (50) eligible participants will have the opportunity to participate in an eight (8) weeks internship.

Marketing efforts for all three programs mentioned above started earlier this week and applications are available online on the VIDOL website [www.vidol.gov](http://www.vidol.gov) and at both DOL locations and at the St. John Administrator’s Office. We do encourage students to apply online.

**Jobs for American Graduates (JAG)**

JAG-VI is a program jointly operated by the Department of Education and the Department of Labor annually serving approximately one hundred twenty-five (125) high school students. Job's for America's Graduates (JAG) was established to prepare high school students for life after high school, the world of work, and post-secondary success. The program helps identify incoming high school juniors and seniors acquire employability skills, graduate, and receive twelve (12) months of follow-up services that will transition them into a career and/or have them pursue post-secondary education to enhance career entry and advancement.

The JAG program exists in four public high schools (two on St. Thomas and two on St. Croix) with 127 students enrolled in the 2020-2021 school year.

In 2020 the Virgin Islands received “5 of 5” recognition for of its programs. The “5 of 5” Award is the most prestigious national award that a JAG program can attain. JAG National recognizes states and sites for achieving or surpassing the “5 of 5” performance outcomes, including:

- Graduation Rate - 90%
- Positive Outcomes Rate - 80%
- Employment Rate - 60%
- Full-Time Jobs Rate - 60%
- Full-Time Placement Rate 80%
A Registered Apprenticeship Program is an employer-driven training model that combines a structured on-the-job training (consisting of at least 2,000 hours depending on the occupation) with a minimum of 144 hours on job-related instruction. Apprenticeship training is distinguished from other types of work-based training. Apprenticeships are jobs; apprentices earn wages from their employers during training. Registered apprenticeships meet national and state standards for education and safety resulting in a nationally industry-recognized certificate.

This earn and learn approach helps workers start new careers and helps businesses recruit and retain a highly skilled workforce. Businesses can hire new workers or select current employees to join apprenticeship programs.

Recognized as a State Apprenticeship Agency, the Virgin Islands Department of Labor formally recognized Gold Coast Yachts, Inc. as the first RAP in the VI in January 2020. GCY anticipated interviewing for the first Registered Apprentices in February, but efforts were interrupted by the COVID-19 guidelines & other financial impacts.

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the Virgin Department of Labor continued to work with the US Department of Labor to develop apprenticeship opportunities. Two additional Apprenticeship Programs were approved: Peace of St. Croix and Plessen Healthcare.

The Apprenticeship Council has been created and consists of nine (9) members with Dr. Suzanne Darrow-Magras as the Council Chair. The Council and VIDOL participated in an intense three (3) day training with USDOL in November 2020. This Apprenticeship 101 training assisted the council in refining roles of the council based on the state of Rhode Island model and shared the ways to effectively engage employers in the territory. This training also shed light on how COVID-19 affected apprenticeships across the nation.

The Council also held its first official quarterly meeting on February 16, 2021 with meetings scheduled for May, August, and November 2021.

### Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) Sponsors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RAP Sponsor</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Openings</th>
<th>Program Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gold Coast Yachts, Inc.</strong></td>
<td>• Boat Builder (2yrs).</td>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>Paused due to COVID-19 impact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multihull experts for over 35 years; one of the longest continuous running US boatbuilders with a proud tradition of innovation and quality.</td>
<td>• Marine Service Technician (2yrs)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peace of St Croix Inc.</strong></td>
<td>• Certified Massage Therapist (CMT) (1yr)</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>Pending start date of CY2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Division of Massage Academy)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offers chiropractic, rehabilitative, and massage therapy services in St Croix.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plessen Healthcare</strong></td>
<td>• Medical Assistant/Patient Care Coordinator (1 yr.)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Identified 3 incumbent workers; start date delayed to April 2021 due to demand of the COVID vaccine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-service, multi-speciality medical clinic, and the first AAAHC accredited, and CMS certified surgical center in the</td>
<td>• Life Safety Coordinator (1-2 yrs.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
USVI; Urgent Care and Specialty Clinic

- Surgical Technologist (1-2yrs)

The Department of Labor is collaborating with the Workforce Development Board to provide guidance/policy on using Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds to support registered apprenticeship programs. WIOA funds can be used in a variety of ways to help job seekers and workers prepare for, enter, and complete apprenticeship programs. With the support of WIOA funds, program sponsors can offset the cost of related classroom instructions as well as the on-the-job training component.

**OTHER PROGRAMS AVAILABLE TO YOUTH**

**CDBG-DR Workforce Development Grant**

The department has submitted a dual application to VI Housing Authority to complete a portion of the Workforce Development component of the CDBG grant. The application has been accepted and is the RFP contracting phase. There were nine (9) respondents to the RFP with an anticipated start date in April 2021. The training will take place in four phases:

**Phase One - Skills for Today** – the focus will be on the construction industry and will prepare individuals with little or no formal training and provide them with general knowledge to proficiently perform entry-level positions in masonry, carpentry, electrical, and plumbing. Students will receive National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER) Core Curriculum certification and NCCER Level 1 certification upon successful completion of training. Target of 400 participants.

**Phase Two** – will focus on those individuals who excel in the first phase and builds a career pathway in construction supervision. Students will receive NCCER Crew Leadership certification upon successful completion of training program. Training will combine direct classroom instruction plus 6-8 months of on-the-job training.

**Phase Three** - will create additional employment opportunities beyond construction in areas such as Marine, Cybersecurity, Administrative Services, and Hospitality. Individuals will be immersed in their chosen industry and occupation through real-world, work-based learning experiences as they simultaneously learn and earn.

**Phase Four** – will focus on job retention with intensive job readiness preparation to enter the workforce which will include life skills training, resume development, self-marketing tools, building a responsible social media presence, networking, interviewing, working with peers, and working with management.
NEW Programs/Initiatives

The Youth Team is currently developing new programs and initiatives to augment our current programs and prepare our community for the workforce's demands. Today, we will briefly discuss a few of the new initiatives in the early stages of development.

Work Readiness Program (Virtual)
Now more than ever, today's employers are seeking more than technical ability; they are looking for real team players who possess strong communication and problem-solving skills, and who demonstrate resourcefulness and leadership in the workplace.

The Work Readiness Program is designed to focus on developing employability and soft skills to help prepare In-School youth (14-21yrs old) for the job market and success in the workplace. Participants will complete a nine (9) week program focusing on career exploration, resume writing, interviewing skills, financial literacy, workplace communication, leadership skills and public speaking.

Leadership and Career Development Conference
The Leadership and Career Development Conference will prepare participants to compete in today's very competitive global workforce. This Program is intended to develop participants' leadership skills, provide participants the skills necessary to succeed, and explore post-secondary career opportunities. A key component we are hoping to implement is a recruitment fair where government agencies, not-for-profit organizations, and private 'companies' representatives will offer jobs, internships, and continuing education opportunities for the participants. The Program intended to develop participants' leadership skills, provide organizations access to a talented and diverse population, and help participants make connections that lead to careers. Tentative date is set November 2021.

Entrepreneurship Bootcamp
The Entrepreneurship Bootcamp will allow participants the opportunity to connect with business owners and exploring the various facets of entrepreneurship while highlighting the opportunities available in that space. Additionally, it will connect participants with resources available through different agencies. Participants will be engaged through numerous activities such as Roundtable Discussions and a Pitch Competition. The participants will be tasked with developing solutions to business, social, or educational problems and then pitch their ideas to a panel of expert judges comprised of entrepreneurs, small business owners, and other investors. To the end, it is our goal to equip participants with knowledge and experience in the areas of financial literacy, team building, business model canvas, customer discovery, and pitching. This unique environment will provide fertile ground for the growth and development of startups. Tentative date is set for October 2021.

Roundtable Discussion & Training Series (Quarterly)
As the workforce continues to shift, the Department of Labor will continue to implement training series and roundtable discussions. These trainings will provide participants the necessary tools to be successful in the job market. The Department will collaborate with local and national entities to provide timely training to the customers we serve.

The Virgin Islands Department of Labor is committed to helping to prepare youth for the workforce. On behalf of VIDOL, I would like to thank the Committee on Youth, Sports, Parks, and Recreation members for allowing VIDOL to provide testimony on the Youth Initiatives. This concludes my testimony. My staff and I welcome any questions you may have.
OUT OF SCHOOL YOUTH AGES 17-24

WORK, LEARN AND EARN

NOW HIRING!

PAID WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAM

LEARN ESSENTIAL LIFE SKILLS • GAIN VALUABLE WORK EXPERIENCE

YOU GET

• Work Readiness Training
• Up to 360 hours of paid work experience ($10.50/hr.)

• Free employment assistance and career coaching
• Connection to training opportunities

CALL OR EMAIL THE VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND SPEAK WITH ANY MEMBER OF THE YOUTH TEAM TO SCHEDULE AN INTERVIEW AND DETERMINE YOUR ELIGIBILITY.

St. Croix
4401 Sion Farm
Christiansted, VI 00802
(340) 773-1994 ext. 2140
Kevin.Dixon@dolvi.gov

St. Thomas/St. John
2353 Kronprindsens Gade
St. Thomas VI 0802
(340) 776-3700 ext. 2080
Shenika.Sebastien@dolvi.gov

THE VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF LABOR IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER WITH EQUAL OPPORTUNITY PROGRAMS. AUXILIARY AIDS AND SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST TO INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES.
Attention all college juniors, seniors, and graduates!

The Virgin Islands Department of Labor is currently accepting applications for

2021 LIFT PROGRAM

(The Labor Investing for Tomorrow Summer Internship Program)

Eligibility Criteria:

- Be a full-time college junior or senior, or a college graduate
- Have 60 credits or more
- Have a GPA of 2.8 or better on a 4.0 scale
- Applicants must be between the ages of 18-25

Application are available on www.vidol.gov/forms under the “Youth Employment Opportunities” section.

For additional information, please contact us at Kevin.Dixon@dol.vi.gov, or at (340) 773-1994, EXT. 2202 (St. Croix) or (340) 776-3700, EXT 2080 (St. Thomas)
APPLICATION DEADLINE:
APRIL 23, 2021
(for priority consideration)

LOOKING FOR A SUMMER JOB?
APPLY TODAY | SPACE IS LIMITED!

The Virgin Islands Department of Labor is currently accepting applications for the:

2021 Summer Youth Work Experience Program
• Gain Meaningful Work Experience and Training
• Learn and Explore Various Career Pathways
• Begin that Transition from School to Work
• Participate in Work Readiness Workshops and More!

Eligibility:
• Youth Ages 14-25
• In School Youth (Junior & High School/ College Students)
• Out of School (College graduates/unemployed high school graduates/high school drop outs)

HERE’S HOW TO APPLY:
Visit www.vidol.gov/forms/

PICK UP APPLICATION FROM ONE OF THE FOLLOWING LOCATIONS:

St. Croix
4401 Sion Farm
Christiansted, VI 00820
(340) 773-1994 ext. 2140

St. Thomas
2363 Kronprindsens Gade
St. Thomas VI 00802
(340) 776-3700 ext. 2080

St. John
Office of the St. John Administrator
Office of the Governor St. John, VI 00831
(340) 776-6484

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT US AT
Kevin.Dixon@dol.vi.gov, or at (340) 773-1994, EXT. 2202 (St. Croix)
or (340) 776-3700, EXT 2080 (St. Thomas)