

Building Futures: How Cumberland County's Youth Career Center Program is Helping Young Adults Find Their Path.

Part One: A Community Resource Creating Opportunities

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Across Cumberland County, many young adults face barriers that make it difficult to continue their education, find employment, or build a stable future. For youth ages 16 to 24 who are out of school, these challenges can often feel overwhelming. The Cumberland County Youth Career Center Program (YCC) was created to change that reality.

Funded through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the Youth Career Center provides free services designed to help young adults overcome obstacles and achieve their educational and career goals. The program serves out-of-school youth throughout Cumberland County by offering individualized support, academic remediation, financial literacy training, career exploration, job readiness training, work experiences, and connections to local employers.

Since opening its doors in November of 2025, the Youth Career Center has focused on meeting young people where they are. Some participants enter the program seeking their first job. Others need help obtaining their high school diploma, obtaining industry-recognized credentials, or navigating personal challenges that have interrupted their path to success.

As Program Coordinator for the Career Center, I feel our goal is not simply to help young people get their high school diploma or find a job. We work with each participant to create a plan that supports long-term success. We want them to gain confidence, build skills, and see opportunities they may not have known existed.

The Youth Career Center Program goes beyond education and employment, recognizing that many participants need support in other areas of their lives. Participants receive incentives for completing various components of their individualized plan. They also receive supportive services, including transportation assistance that makes it easier to get to the center, job interviews and training, work-related clothing, and driving lessons, as well as referrals to other agencies for issues with housing, mental health concerns, and lack of food.

Participants receive guidance in career planning, resume development, interview preparation, workplace expectations, and professional communication. Through partnerships with local employers and community organizations, youth also gain valuable hands-on work experience that allows them to apply their skills in real-world settings.

The program places a strong emphasis on helping participants identify careers that align with their interests, strengths, and the needs of the local labor market. Using New Jersey labor market information, youth learn about high-demand occupations, expected wages, training requirements, and potential career pathways available throughout the region.

Community partners have played an important role in supporting the Youth Career Center's mission. Local businesses, workforce development agencies, educational institutions, and social service providers collaborate to create opportunities for participants and strengthen the county's future workforce.

As Cumberland County continues to invest in its young people, the Youth Career Center stands as an example of what can happen when communities provide meaningful support, guidance, and opportunity.

In Part Two, we hear directly from the young adults whose lives have been impacted by the program and who are preparing to take the next step toward their futures.