

MCCG Model Program Policy or Procedure Award (MP3) 2009  
Awarded to the City of Woodstock

Job STEPS (Smart Techniques for Employment Planning and Success)

Over the past two decades, the business climate across the country has changed dramatically. Companies large and small have downsized or restructured their workforces, leaving fewer entry level positions in which graduating students can gain experience. Many positions now require a higher degree of customer service expertise, or specialized technical skills and competition for limited desirable work opportunities has become fierce. Municipal recruitments for basic clerical or labor positions, for example, often receive hundreds of qualified applications.

Given this increasingly competitive climate, it is incumbent upon public entities to offer their community's young people the greatest possible edge in attaining valuable work experience. In the mid-1990s, discussions between Woodstock's City Manager and local business leaders revealed a perception that graduates of Woodstock High School were perhaps not as "employment-ready" as some other area students.

Therefore, in concert with District 200 and WACEP (Woodstock Area Community Education Partnership), the City of Woodstock developed a program to help provide WHS seniors with an intensive interactive workshop in employability skill building. Called Job STEPS, this award-winning program is now in its 13<sup>th</sup> year and continues to grow in popularity, both with students and with the business community participants.

This half-day workshop, held during the school day in late November, begins with human resources and business community executives giving lessons on writing resumes, completing employment applications and basic business etiquette, such as attire, body language and conveying enthusiastic attitudes. These lessons are then put into "real world" practice, as the students undergo mock personal interviews with business volunteers. The morning concludes with a luncheon, allowing additional opportunities for students to network with many of the business professionals. As many as 50 students per year take advantage of this elective educational activity. While some of these young people demonstrate considerable poise and maturity already, there are many others who truly have had very little exposure to the business world prior to this activity. The opportunity to develop a viable resume, to understand the implications of a poorly-completed application, or to realize how quickly an impression can be made by a too-casual appearance have undoubtedly had long-term positive impacts on many participating students' futures.

Between 30 and 40 business volunteers contribute immeasurably to the success of this venture each year. Follow-up surveys with these individuals speak to the tremendous satisfaction they receive from working with these students. There have also been several instances through the years where Job STEPS introductions have resulted in subsequent internships or entry work opportunities for students with local organizations or companies.

The program represents a true inter-governmental partnership, with coordination shared between D200 and the City of Woodstock HR Department. This event also benefits students by introducing them to a formal setting outside the school environment, with meeting space donated by Bull Valley Golf Club, and luncheon costs generously sponsored by the Rotary Club of Woodstock. The

community benefits by having its young people exposed to a unique character-building and practical skills learning opportunity at no cost to participants. The activity continues to enhance the cooperative working relationship between D200 and the City of Woodstock, reflecting the importance of the Woodstock community's approach to education. Programs such as Job STEPS provide progressive action to contradict any possible perception of declining societal standards, by imparting positive impressions of the community's involved leadership to all residents and businesses, both new and long term.