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CCPD and Camden School District work with partners to create new truancy program with Hopeworks

Invitation to Cover/Photograph:

Date: June 3, 2024

Time: 11 a.m.

Location: Hopeworks
1st Floor
808 Market Street
Camden, NJ 08102

Attendees: Commissioner Director Louis Cappelli Jr.
Commissioner Jeffrey Nash
Camden City Mayor Victor Carstarphen
Camden County Police Chief Gabriel Rodriguez
Superintendent of the Camden School District, Katrina McCombs
CEO of Camden Community Partnership, Dana Redd
CEO of Hopeworks Dan Rhoton
Young Hopeworks professional Janiyah Gonzalez

Details: Since the pandemic took hold of the nation and the world in 2020, school districts everywhere have been negatively impacted by skyrocketing truancy. This is especially true in urban landscapes and Camden City was not immune to these national trends. Based on that, the Camden County Board of Commissioners will spearhead a multi-pronged partnership to create alternatives for Camden students who are no longer engaged in the traditional school system.

This new program is rooted in identifying at risk youth and then offering them an alternative by providing individuals a seat in the Hopeworks program. This time-tested career center will pay them to attend, offer transportation to their new workspace and work with young adults through other methods to stabilize them and find them gainful employment. Hopeworks has a long track record of success with a 93% retention rate for their 12-month program.

Commissioner Director Louis Cappelli Jr. talked about the need for new alternatives for truancy and tapping into a renowned program that is grounded in youth employment.

“Time and again we are seeing members of our youth population that have given up on school and are out in streets with negative results in our neighborhoods,” Cappelli said. “That said, we have seen the success that Hopeworks has had in Camden and the innovative way they facilitated a second to none workforce training program. Based on their results we thought they were the perfect fit to facilitate this program.”

The overall scope of the plan is being funded by the Camden County Youth Services Commission, the Rowan-Rutgers Joint Board of Governors, the Camden Community Partnership and the Camden City School District. These four organizations have invested \$250,000 to create 50 specialized spots in the Hopeworks program. They have also joined the Camden County Police Department to make a positive impact on the social determinants of health for the city and the region by enhancing the lives of young adults that are facing the adverse effects of being out of the classroom and unemployed.

Overall, the largest driver of violent crime in the city has been focused on the 16–19-year-old age cohort. These are individuals that the Camden County Police Department has identified as being most at risk in our community and most in need of an alternative route to get them off the streets and into workforce training.

According to the Camden County Police Department’s Record Management System, in 2023, the average age of youth engaged in negative behaviors leading to delinquent activities in the city was 16 years old. Out of that cohort, from the ages of 16 to 19, the city had 95 repeat violent arrests with 24 of them being associated with a firearm. Six of these youth were shot, and eight homicide victims were brought down by youth in this age group. In addition, this cohort made up the largest number of repeat arrests in the city at 119. Out of the top 10 most frequent offenses, possession of a firearm was the number one charge for our youth in this age bracket and narcotics distribution was number three.

Camden County Police Chief, Gabriel Rodriguez, was adamant about the need for a program like this that will provide stability to young people in the city.

“Right now, a lot of violent crime is being driven by teenagers who are mostly outside of the school system,” Rodriguez said. “During the pandemic we lost thousands of kids to the street and that has created a real challenge to public safety. I want to applaud the funders of this program and thank them for their foresight because I believe a program like this can have lasting long-term benefits to all of us in the city.”

About Hopeworks

Hopeworks is a social enterprise that uses technology, healing, and entrepreneurship to transform lives. Hopeworks’ unique mix of training, trauma-informed care, and real-world experience is what leads to extraordinary results. The approach, combined with high-demand, high-wage technical training and paid work experience is helping to build a workforce that can not only get the job, but keep it, transforming their lives and the lives of their families. To provide this experience, Hopeworks runs real businesses, providing technology solutions for businesses in web design and Geographic Information Systems (GIS), and trauma-informed solutions through training and consulting services with the Hopeworks Training Team. These businesses help generate over 100 jobs a year, and lead to high-wage, permanent opportunities for young adults in a growing tech industry.

Hopeworks’ unique combination has led to extraordinary results, with over 85% of young adults earning high-wage jobs at the end of their work experience with Hopeworks, and a 12-month retention rate of almost 90% at those jobs. Young adults entering Hopeworks are typically earning an average of \$400 per year and after going through the training program, they have the opportunity to make a livable and comfortable wage, earning over \$42,000 annually.

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