

Julie Cayo, Interim CEO  
Employ Milwaukee  
2342 North 27th Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53210  
Phone: (414) 270-1700  
Fax: (414) 225-2375  
Website: <http://www.employmilwaukee.org>



Cavalier Johnson, Mayor, City Milwaukee  
**Chief Elected Official**

Carla Cross, **Chair**

## EMPLOY THE MILWAUKEE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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**Youth Committee**  
**Wednesday, May 7, 2025**  
**1:30 pm-3:00 pm**  
Via Zoom Technology  
**APPROVED MINUTES**

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**Members:** Jolene Cooley, Michael Harris, Karen Sotak, Sharlen Moore, Bevin Christie, Chee Thao, La Toya Sykes, Deshea Agee, Julie Cayo

**Guests:** N/A

**Employ Milwaukee Staff:** Romell Greer, Suzanne Reinstein, Oscar Delgado Kodi Harding, Wylbur Holloway, Brenda King

***Michael Harris called the meeting to order at 1:31 pm.***

**1. Youth Committee**

**a. Approval of Minutes from February 12, 2025, Youth Committee meeting**

*Sharlen Moore motioned for the approval of the meeting minutes from February 12, 2025, and was seconded by Jolene Cooley; the minutes were approved unanimously.*

*Micheal Harris welcomed all new committee members and asked for introductions.*

**2. Agenda Item 2: General Updates**

**Youth Resources and Information**

We have identified two sets of resources that we think the group might find interesting.

The first resource comes from the Department of Labor, which conducted a study through its Youth Systems Building Academy. They created a compendium of accomplishments that contains a wealth of valuable information, which I would like to share with all of you. We will send out the PowerPoint presentation after the meeting, allowing you to click on the links.

The second resource focuses on youth employment and its role as a foundation for mental health and well-being. As many of you are aware, we engage in various work-based learning initiatives, including "earn and learn" programs and Camp Rise, which we will discuss later. Additionally, we have high school programming through WIOA.

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### ***New DOL Grant Update***

I'm Wilbur Holloway, manager of reentry services at Employ Milwaukee. I want to share details about a grant we received from the Department of Labor, called Growth Opportunities.

We were awarded a \$2,000,000 grant to serve youth aged 15 to 18 who are at high risk of violence. This 42-month grant includes six months of planning, 24 months of implementation, and 12 months of follow-up. Our partners include the Office of Community Wellness and Safety, the Office of African American Affairs, and Milwaukee County's Department of Health and Human Services.

The program, called the Work Skills Academy, will provide 160 youth with work experience, mentoring, leadership development, and conflict resolution skills.

We've submitted a contract modification to the Department of Labor and are awaiting their approval before we begin our planning phase.

### **3: Youth Program Reports:**

**\*\*Camp Rise\*\*** Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Romell Greer, and I am the director of the Camp Rise program at Employ Milwaukee. I wanted to share some key updates about Camp Rise. The camp starts on June 23rd, and we are currently accepting applications. After one week, we have received 611 applications and will close the portal likely on Friday due to capacity limits. We will refer applicants to sister organizations and camps, including the YMCA, for additional opportunities. We are well-prepared, with 33 out of 35 counselors already hired and training to start. Of the 147 eligible returning campers, 103 have completed their applications. Some families have indicated their children may participate in summer school or other activities, so we aren't certain how many will return this year. Additionally, 99 campers who completed Camp Rise are eligible for the Earn and Learn program, and we appreciate Cody for his support with these families. We are also planning exciting field trips, including a first aid and CPR session with Aurora and a movie day at Marcus Theatre. We're looking forward to a great summer with Camp Rise!

**\*\*Earn & Learn\*\*** Good afternoon, I am Kodi Harding, project coordinator for the Earn and Learn program and here are some brief updates:

1. Application Status: Employer applications are now closed, but youth applications will remain open until the end of this week. We received about 1,500 new participant applications, significantly below last year's total of over 3,000.
2. Camp Referrals: Currently, around 60% of camp rise referrals are on track to complete their applications for the 2025 earn-and-learn program. Most of these referrals come from kids aging out of camp, and they are primarily placed with Milwaukee Recreation for a positive first work experience.
3. Worksite Applications: We've received 122 worksite applications, with 72 approved for summer positions totaling over 1,000 job slots. Including unapproved worksites, we could have over 1,300 available positions.
4. Financial Education: We continue to provide financial education to all learn participants, partnering with Educators Credit Union and Bank on Greater Milwaukee for account-opening opportunities at orientations.
5. Diversified Work Sites: Our approved work sites for 2025 include a mix of public, community, service industry, small businesses, faith-based organizations, and educational programs. We are prioritizing small business involvement this year.
6. Funding and Job Slots: We are targeting 635 job slots this year, compared to 622 last year. This number reflects the full 140 hours over seven weeks that kids could work. We anticipate some attrition, as not all kids will complete their full hours, which could open positions for others. Our completion rate was around 90% to 95%, with many kids working slightly fewer hours than expected.

**\*\*YouthBuild\*\*** Oscar Delgado with Youth Build 2023 and our upcoming Youth Build 2025 updates. We are currently in our second cohort, having slightly reduced enrollment by two participants. Our measurable skill gains and the number of credentials earned have both exceeded expectations.

Although placements are challenging at this stage, we expect more placements to occur toward the end of the cohort. This group has engaged in some exciting activities. For example, they attended the Green Bay Draft Day with NASA as part of our construction plus module, in partnership with WRTP. They enjoyed directing traffic and helping with parking, and we are working on obtaining photos from the event. Additionally, the youth participated in the Sky Breathing Meditation program at Journey House, where they learned stress management techniques. Many reported significant enjoyment and have begun applying these skills in their classes. It's encouraging to see their positive experiences!

**\*\*Brighter Futures\*\*** Romell Greer provided an update on the Brighter Futures program, which we collaborate on with the Boys and Girls Club. First, I am pleased to announce that the grant for the program has been renewed for 2026, a fantastic development for the Brighter Futures initiative! Currently, we are on track in every area. However, one aspect where we are lagging is social and emotional learning. This learning occurs every quarter, and by our next meeting, we anticipate that these numbers will have nearly doubled, if not tripled. Additionally, we expect to see an increase in our work experience numbers, as many participants have applied to join the earn-and-learn program. Overall, we are off to a strong start with Brighter Futures, and we plan to continue building momentum into next year as we prepare to integrate all components of the program.

**\*\*WIOA Title 1B In-School Youth Program\*\*** I'm Susie Reinstein, a program manager in Milwaukee, overseeing youth, adult, and dislocated worker programs. This program runs from July 1 to June 30, and we are on track to meet our enrollment goals. Enrollment for in-school youth is lower due to a recent waiver allowing occupational training, which expires on June 30, 2026. We've also implemented a waitlist for both youth and adult training. As we approach the end of March, we are managing our training dollars carefully. Training for both programs is currently on hold to stay within budget. We will assess our allocations and spending in biweekly meetings to prepare for the new program year starting July 1. Currently, we're not reporting any credentials since the scorecard focuses on occupational training, excluding high school diplomas. We plan to work with Uncomm to define the credentials we will track. In-school youth placements typically rise in the summer when students are more available to work. The state systematically checks employment data against unemployment insurance for individuals who exit our programs, and enhancements to this process are forthcoming. We are exceeding the requirement to spend at least 20% of our budget on paid work experience. Recently, we shortened these experiences from six months to three months to help more youth gain valuable experience and support them in finding unsubsidized employment.

**\*\*WIOA Title 1B Out-of-School Youth Program\*\*** The out-of-school youth program is structured similarly to the in-school program. Currently, we have a waitlist for all youth training and work experience placements, which I previously mentioned, with a three-month time limit applicable to both in-school and out-of-school youth. At this point, training enrollments do not meet expectations based on the data we have generated. The waitlist was implemented on March 20th, so we do not anticipate an increase in training enrollments at this time. However, I want to assure you that we are on track with our spending. We have allocated 35% of our budget to the training component, and we are currently exceeding that allocation. We will continue to review the data and financials to determine when any updates can be made.

#### **4: Agenda Item: Committee Member Updates:**

Micheal Harris shared MPS has CNA opportunities for young people and graduating high schoolers. LaToya Sykes shared that her organization will be working in the US Women's Open May 29<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup>, are inviting anyone to sign up to be a volunteer.

LaToya Sykes motioned for adjournment.

*The meeting adjourned at 2:29 pm CST.*

**The next Youth Committee meeting is scheduled for August 6, 2025, at 1:30 p.m. -3:00 p.m.**

**The next Board of Directors meeting is September 10, 2025, at 8:30 a.m.-10:00 a.m.**