

**NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES**  
**Institute for Youth, Education, and Families**

*Young, Out of School, and Out of Work: City Responses to Disconnected Youth*

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*Moderator: **Clifford M. Johnson**, Executive Director,  
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*Speakers:*

**The Honorable John T. Yuits** – Mayor, City of Brockton, Mass.

**Oscar Martinez** – CEO, Work Force-1, Corpus Christi, Tex.

*OPERATOR:* Good afternoon. My name is Lori and I will be your conference facilitator today. At this time I would like to welcome everyone to the monthly audio conference series sponsored by the National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education, and Families. All lines have been placed on mute to prevent any background noise. If you should need assistance during the call please press star then zero and the operator will come back on line to assist you. Thank you. Mr. Johnson, you may begin your conference.

*JOHNSON:* Good morning and good afternoon to all of you depending on where in the country you are. My name is Clifford Johnson. I am the executive director of NLC's Institute for Youth Education and Families which, as some of you may know is a special entity within the National League of Cities that was created back in 2000 to help municipal leaders across the country address the needs of children, youth and families within their own communities. Our Institute is working now in 5 core program areas that include youth development and leadership, early childhood education, the safety of children and youth, and family economic security. We have a staff of about 15 people here at NLC and a wide range of publications, tools, cross city networks and technical assistance projects that are available to municipal leaders, mayors and other city council people and other city officials across the country. If you would like more information about the Institute and its work you can go to [www.NLC.org/iyef](http://www.NLC.org/iyef) and that internet address will take you directly to our page on the National League of Cities website.

The topic for today's audioconference is "Young, Out of School, and Out of Work: City Responses to Disconnected Youth." The topic is timely for several reasons. One is that the Institute is just now launching a new program to help municipal leaders create partnerships, policies and programs that can reconnect youth to schools, work and to community. The program offerings in this new program are quite varied. They include a new municipal network on disconnected youth, audio conferences and publications. We will have a leadership academy for local elected officials in 2004 that will provide additional learning opportunities for city leaders as well as down the road site visits to specific communities that are doing a particularly good of interesting job addressing the

needs of disconnected youth. We also currently have a new request for proposals that is available and will be open for proposals or applications until the end of January which is focused on high school options and alternatives in order to ensure that young people can complete their high school education.

So, it is timely for all of those reasons but it is also timely because new research this fall has underscored the reasons for concern as well as the reasons for hope around the needs of young people who are out of school, out of work and unconnected to the larger community. For example, a recent paper by Michael Walls and Tia Martinez at Stanford University concluded that of today's 4 million 14 year olds, at least 200,000-300,000 of those young people will reach the age of 25 without having successfully transitioned to independent adulthood and the between 20-25% of those young people will drop out of school prior to getting their high school diploma and at the same time there is some good news and some silver lining. There is some evidence that clearly indicates that many of these young people do remain motivated to complete their education and that overall, by age 25, 90% of those young adults will have received whether a diploma or its equivalent certificate as a result of their efforts to go back to school and that there is plenty of evidence out there to suggest that it is possible to reconnect youth to school work and community if the cities come together to try and do that.

Today we are fortunate to be joined by municipal leaders from two cities that are doing just that and working hard to reconnect out of school and unemployed youth to education and employment opportunities in their communities. I would like to welcome them both now to the call. First, we are joined by Mayor John Yunits who is the mayor of Brockton, Massachusetts, good afternoon Mayor; and we are also joined by Oscar Martinez who is the Chief Executive Officer of an organization called Work Force 1 which manages the federally funded employment and training programs in Corpus Christi, Texas and the surrounding regions. Good morning Oscar. We are excited to be able to showcase what both Brockton and Corpus Christi are doing. They have pretty different approaches. I think all of you on the call listening in will be interested to hear how they are tackling it but I want to start first by getting a sense of what the picture looks like for young people who are out of school and out of work in both communities and to start with Mayor Yunits to get a quick sense of how this looks when you see this in Brockton.

*YUNITS:* Well Cliff, Brockton was an old industrial city and there was always a nice gradual transition regardless of your range of education into some type of stable employment category whether you graduated from high school or not. Unfortunately all of those manufacturers and all of those businesses disappeared. Massachusetts and particularly our region is becoming a service economy. We have a very unique population in Brockton. Of our 18,000 school age youth, probably as many as 40% are either 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants and they come from unique nations, Haiti, Laos and many of the African nations where as the socioeconomic and educational challenges are compounded by the fact that their parents often times come from very little education. So if we are going to keep our kids competitive then we have to keep them focused on the importance of education and we have to provide them with a number of very significant

job training programs.

*JOHNSON:* And Mayor, what is your sense of what proportion of kids are currently dropping out of the Brockton schools without having gotten a diploma?

*YUNITS:* I can only give you an estimate because we have a significant transitional rate but we are figuring close to 6% drop out annually which significantly impacts their future in this kind of economy; our youth unemployment rate can approach double digits really quickly even though our city unemployment rate would be less than 5%.

*JOHNSON:* And overall, Brockton is a city of what size Mayor?

*YUNITS:* 100,000

*JOHNSON:* So, that is what many of us would call a medium sized city. Not one of the huge ones but not a small town either. Oscar, what does this look like in Corpus Christi? What do you see when you look out at the youth population and particularly this subset of disconnected youth?

*MARTINEZ:* Well, the City of Corpus Christi is a community of about 285,000 individuals and in looking at the youth population we are particularly concerned because there seems to be a tremendous dropout rate for the youth in our community. Now, although the opinions regarding what that dropout rate really is varies because if you look at what the official drop out rate that is going to be reported by the school district of the Texas Education Agency it looks like about 5%, however when you look at the student population that begins in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and follow that to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade for some reason, the numbers finishing are only about 54% of what started so there is a concern about what is happening to that particular population. Are they dropping out? Are they not finishing within the 4 years? Are they moving out of the community? And so forth.

Similar to the issues that the Mayor mentioned in Brockton, we have not only a dropout rate issue that we need to tend to but a growing segment of our population is minority, particularly Hispanic and again the education economic opportunities and the challenges for those particular segments of our population is a concern because if you look at the dropout rates for those particular parts of our population they are much higher than it is for the Anglo population and then their earning potential is also much lower than the Anglo population. That is a particular segment of our population that is growing and that one faces specific challenges. We have to be in tune to that now and take specific steps in terms of making them a viable contributor to our economy.

*JOHNSON:* I am glad Oscar that you mentioned this analysis of looking at numbers of kids entering high school in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and then looking to see how many graduate 4 years later. There are so many different definitions of dropout rates and so many different ways to make the problem look better or look worse. Many folks believe that one of the best ways to look at that is just that examination of just how many kids did you have in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and how many graduating seniors do you have and then you can start to

think of how much of that has to do with mobility in and out of the city and losing kids who are falling by the wayside in those 4 years. So, it is a very helpful comment.

Let me come to the question of where the motivation at the city level, at the community level comes for focusing on these issues. For example, Mayor, you have any number of issues that you could be worried about. You just had a big snow storm and a couple of floods, you can worry about the roads and the sewers and sorts of other things, so has there been a particular event or set of events that has gotten your attention and caused you to focus on disconnected youth or how have you come to these issues in terms of your own involvement?

*YUNITS:* You are so right Cliff. Snowstorms and potholes are a much more pressing concern to the average citizen than disconnected youth and disconnected youth do not have necessarily a voice in the public eye and they sure do not come from families that vote so the constituency is one that is ignored unless there are some reasons to motivate those youth or crime takes over the community and that is probably what expedited our transition into this community. We were confronted with a number of youth headed off to prisons before high school graduation and we had a very violent climate here about 10 years ago and I think that is what caused us to get focused on the issues. We were losing our kids. You can be as cold as you want to be but when you go to a wake and you are holding somebody's mother who lost a child and if that does not make you sensitive to the issue then nothing will and I think that is what we all felt. We felt we had to reach out and save these kids.

I know I was personally involved in initiating the Boys and Girls Club here in our city back in 1990 and I saw the difference it made to those kids when they could see light at the end of the tunnel so it was easy for me to want to pick up this charge. I think I was also blessed by having a number of superior caregivers and a variety of different organizations here in the city that wanted to join this team, but what really made it unique is the school officials, the police department, and particularly the District Attorney's office that wanted to get into the prevention and not the incarceration so it really helped us to deal with this issue.

*JOHNSON:* Oscar, does any of that sound familiar from a Corpus Christi perspective?

*MARTINEZ:* Yes it does and I would like to extend my compliments to the mayor for really stepping out of the silo of the typical municipal role in terms of utility rates, roads and infrastructure, public safety and so forth and looking at the community in a holistic way to identify the importance and value of a community in that resource that is sometimes overlooked and that is the human resource.

Similar to the approach taken by Mayor Yunits is that here in Corpus Christi, one of the things that brought this issue to a focal point is that in one of the city addresses put on by our Mayor, he went outside the typical silo of municipal administration and spoke to the issue of education and the importance of education and the dropout issue. Those comments really drew attention to the issue and brought various organizations, other community leaders, educators, government officials, community based organization leaders to the table to begin looking at this and it just demonstrated the significance and

the importance when a single community leader such as a mayor or as in Texas a county judge or somebody of that stature steps outside their typical silo of responsibility and looks at the community as a whole. It really has energized this community to focus on that particular issue.

*JOHNSON:* It is funny. Mayors typically by profession are not self-effacing types but we often have the sense through our work at the Institute that many mayors and city council people really underestimate their capacity for focusing public attention and rallying the community around specific issues and the example you just gave there in Corpus Christi is a great one.

*MARTINEZ:* And if I could just add Cliff that it is my belief that that role is so critical to every community because paid professionals, educators or like myself who work in workforce development and educational environments and so forth, we are charged with the responsibility everyday but often times we are enamored in the bureaucracy of the system but whenever a government leader stands up and brings attention to the issue it is naturally going to grow attention and focus and makes us more resolved in our desire to meet that particular issue that has been identified. I really think that the initial inertia that is going to be created for resolving this particular issue with youth comes from those governing leaders who identified it as a problem and then leave the approach, the strategies and the implementation of such strategies to the paid professionals but the inertia is really strong that is generated by governing leaders.

*YUNITS:* Without getting too bold but I want to point out that mayors also have a very selfish interest in this too because the quality of life of our youth on the street corner is reflective of the quality of life of everyone in that neighborhood and ultimately the quality of life in the community. If the quality of life is visibly deteriorating because we are not reaching those kids, then middle class disappears from your city and if you have not got a middle class then you have a city that is beginning to die and therefore we have that selfish interest. We want to help these kids not just to help these kids but to help the city as a whole.

Again I repeat that it is just so critically important to recognize that these poor kids are not born with the same opportunities that the suburban kids are. They are not [just] educationally challenged, they are certainly economically challenged, so the effort is not marginal. The effort is extreme to get these kids to turn around and that is why it has to come to the top. If it does not come to the top you will not have the subgroups focused. You have to press and pressure all of your caregivers to get this done and if you do not have that kind of support group like we have in this city it will not happen.

*MARTINEZ:* I could not agree more with the Mayor's comments and I appreciate the efforts that he is making.

*JOHNSON:* Well, Mayor, tell us a little bit about how you and the broader community in Brockton has gone about this tackling this challenge, about your youth effort and the Brockton RISE initiative.

*YUNITS:* We had a number of efforts here in the city but we never had a coordination of efforts. We had no coordination of our inventories or how to get the recipients of those potential assets to the right places. We had a lot of people running around doing to right things not knowing what the other support groups were doing and so about 5 years ago what we decided to do was get everybody together in the same room. We had a number of focus groups on that issue and what developed was the Brockton Blueprints Coalition which was a group starting with the Mayors Office, the police department, the school system and the District Attorney's Office and then almost all of our social service agencies sharing information, sharing our data, working together to try and accomplish the same goals.

Ultimately what that amounted to was the Brockton's Promise which was modeled after the America's Promise and now everybody works together. We meet monthly. Our strategies are together, there is no question in my mind. I think we are the smallest city in the nation to receive a Youth Opportunity Grant. We received that grant because everybody worked on that grant together. It was a huge collaboration of effort and it also helps you getting the highest and best use out of your assets, particularly at a time like that when cutbacks are in conversations. So, that was the focus. We saw the need. We wanted to identify what we had and get the highest and best use out of those assets. We wanted to deliver the message to the kids that needed it the most as quick as we could and we wanted to be prepared for these eventual cuts so that we were sustainable.

*JOHNSON:* And within that Promise framework am I right in thinking that there are some things connected to marketable skills and opportunities to learn?

*YUNITS:* Absolutely. That is how the Workforce Investment Board gets into this; how we run programs, in the schools and at the schools for job training. We have a mentoring program that we do at the Chamber of Commerce where kids will actually get in and for the first time in their lives have to dress up and be on time for work. All of this developing marketable skills basically grew out of this because we realized that if these kids could not get a job after school they were not going to be motivated to stay in school.

Our afterschool programs have just worked wonders for these students. We test very well in the state. We graduated 95% of our seniors last year and in Massachusetts as you are in Texas, you are required to pass a state wide achievement test to graduate so that was a significant improvement and something that no one expected out city to do. It would not have happened if we did not have this collaboration of efforts because we received almost \$14 million in grants for afterschool programming last year and a lot of those grants were collaborated on by this team.

*JOHNSON:* So, if I am a young person in Brockton and have dropped out of school and am hanging out on the street or whatever, how have my options changed for me as a result of what you have been putting in place in Brockton? What is different now for me then would have been for my older brother 5 years ago?

*YUNITS:* First of all we have the educational opportunity centers where kids can come in, be evaluated, be referred to technical training schools, to community colleges, sent back for GED programs, but basically they sit down in this office and they figure out what is the best route for these kids to go through and in addition to that we have a career center that does the same. We have run programs at the community college that took some of these kids and trained them for clean up sites and a number of little programs like that one but I think the most importantly they can start to access databases and of course you know you always have the human side of things, we have numerous outreach workers out working with these students out of the center.

*JOHNSON:* That is great. How do you as mayor and how does your staff stay connected to this?

*YUNITS:* Well, on the afterschool end, we also have a Mayor's Taskforce on after school programming which I am involved in. I am also chairman of the school committee which keeps me very involved in that issue but most importantly I have a fellow who works for me for slave labor who sits in everyone of these committees and attends everyone of these meetings and is constantly updating me on progress and issues where our funding might be stressed in the future and that serves to keeps me very involved.

*JOHNSON:* And you have a reporting structure where they report back into the Blueprints commission and that is sort of the umbrella to try and keep you on track right?

*YUNITS:* Right, and as we move forward and we start to develop better databases that we all fall under the Brockton Promise umbrella which will be the agency we use to share information with anybody who is involved in providing out of school youth services and so on and so forth.

*JOHNSON:* One of the things that seems so clear in this example and in a number of other across the country is that because young people who are out of work and out of school are not directly connected most likely to a specific agency or a specific delivery system at the local level that there really needs to be this coordinated effort. You need lots of partners and both the kind of sharing of data and strategy but also the operational links to make it work. It seems like you have that structure in place in Brockton both at the policy and the data and the research level but then also on the ground.

*YUNITS:* Right and I think you will find too that one of the things that we learned when we sat down for the coalition at the beginning was that the department of youth services, department of social services, the police department, the school department, we might have 5 social workers working with the same house hold and none of them knowing the other was even there. We now have employed, thanks to a tremendous system, the Mass Care System which gives us information on trends which is very important to us and helps us focus that information when we need it best.

*JOHNSON:* So, Oscar, if we turn to Corpus Christi, you have a similar umbrella through the coalition that operates under Youth Opportunities United, is that correct?

*MARTINEZ:* Yes, Youth Opportunities United has a storied past and hopefully has a better future. As early as 1993, what this group did was do some data collection similar to what was done in Brockton and we are continuing to do that and as a matter of fact we want to expand that data collection to better understand the issues facing the youth population in this community. To go beyond the City of Corpus Christi and expand to our 12 county region because we feel as if this issue is not just directed to an urban area but a regional issue that we need to come to grips with. Some of the things that we realized was that since 1993, drug arrests of children that were 10-14 year olds actually increased 103%. Family violence increased by 221%, child abuse increase 121% and the proportion of those families in poverty with children in the house hold increased to 22% and so that was really a very clear identification of some issues that needed to be resolved.

Youth Opportunities United really got its initial support from the local Kennedy Foundation with some funding to pull together some key partners comprised of the City of Corpus Christi, the county, the United Way, the local Chamber of Commerce and most recently, my organization Work Force-1. We have pulled together and the greatest contribution that we have given to the initiative is just take a very strong initiative to get this started but we are faced with an issue or challenge regarding sustainability and we have just provided the funding and the assurance that the initiative will continue because most of the funding from this initiative came from a juvenile justice grant which allowed us to address those issues in our community and not only that but allowed us to really focus on some priority risk factors such as family management problems, economic preservation, the attitudes surrounding parental involvement and then early initiation to resolve problem behavior in our youth.

Those initiatives were going forward and we had a good collaborative effort working but the sustainability was a question, so Work Force 1 took the initiative to bring that initiative under its wing and we are committing to funding it in terms of sustainability and we are very pleased to be able to say that since the initiative really started in 1999 we have brought in about \$14 million of grant funding to support things that are going forward and to create new initiative as well. So, we are really pleased with the progress we have made so far, but we have a long way to go.

*JOHNSON:* Those are some impressive accomplishments. Let me ask you this question I asked the mayor a few minutes ago which is, if I am a young person in corpus Christi on the streets out of work and out of school, how is the world starting to look different in Corpus Christi or how are my opportunities different then they would have been however many years back?

*MARTINEZ:* There are several things that come to mind. The first thing is that within the scope of youth services provided under our work force development board in this region we have really focused on and even identified youth centers to provide specific services to the youth population. One of the initiatives under the Workforce Investment

Act and the funding for work force development for all segments of our population was to create the one stop concept which means that anybody can go into a one stop center and receive a full array of services. What became very apparent is that a youth as young as 14 is often times lost in an environment like a one stop center where they are trying to receive services with adults and so we have an initiative to create one stop services but specifically for youth so that a youth can enter a center without the intimidation factor and receive a full array of services whether or not it is employment, work experience, within a confine facility that is targeted directly for the youth population.

Also we have a unique trend in our community to develop charter schools in the City of Corpus Christi area and the county area there have been 4 charter schools which are set up under the Texas Education Agency but specifically designed to provide services to youth who have not succeeded in a traditional education environment so that they have an opportunity to receive services and get a GED or diploma but outside of the regular confines of what is provided a the traditional school environment.

Also, through the Youth Opportunity United, there is an issue called Communities in Schools that has been receiving funding because their approach is to provide educational services directed toward the youth but treating the family of that youth holistically and to determine what are the barriers to that youth within the household so that they can remove those barriers and remove them for the school.

Another thing that we are very pleased with is the funding that Youth Opportunities United group has been able to acquire for something called Career Pathways that within the curriculum there is a funding for the development of a system by which within one of our high schools here there will be career academies set up so that when a student enters the 9<sup>th</sup> grade they are selecting the particular career pathways they would like to follow, health industry, manufacturing in the technical fields, marketing. They are selecting a career pathway and regardless of which pathway they select, it is going to lead to first of all and most importantly graduation. All of the curriculum will be tailored and structured around a particular career pathway, selected to help them make education more helpful for them. In addition to that the student will be able to have access to businesses in the community which are partnering in the high school so that students can function as interns or take field trips to a business to learn the relevancy of what they are learning in the classroom to job application. We are really excited about the Career Pathways program in the high school and we are hoping to extend it to other high schools not just within the district but within our region.

*JOHNSON:* The career academy model is an exciting one and one that we have been looking at in the context of our work here at the Institute about alternative high schools so now as we are out looking for cities that are interested in pursuing different options and approaches to organizing high schools, that is defiantly one of the things we have been looking at. With all of this going on Oscar, how do you in Corpus Christi keep the Mayor engaged and maintain those links to city government?

*MARTINEZ:* Well one of the things that we do is we give quarterly updates on the status of our workforce systems, our training and education systems, specifically for youth as well as other important segment of our system. We do quarterly presentation to the city

council and to the Mayor bringing to them initiatives, the latest most recent data regarding risk factors, demographic factors, characteristics of our population and what exactly is this community doing to resolve the particular issues now and then looking into the future. That really engages the Mayor and the city council on the issues that are effecting the community.

*JOHNSON:* And you do not have to drag them kicking and screaming to get them to these quarterly briefings?

*MARTINEZ:* No, actually we are very pleased in that when Work Force-1 initiated this reporting structure to the Mayor and the city council, they actually insisted and put us on their agenda on a quarterly basis so that every quarter we are set to go give them the most recent progress on the projects and the challenges we are facing and how we hope to work with other groups to resolve those particular issues. It has worked very well thus far.

*JOHNSON:* We are often aware in our work at the Institute that the downside of showcasing efforts like Brockton and corpus Christi where you have a lot in place and so much exciting to think about and talk about is that for newcomers to the issue and in communities where folks are at square one, it can sound pretty overwhelming to listen to the kind of litany of efforts and the multi-faceted nature of the efforts that you have in place. Mayor, can you reflect a little bit on how you got started?

*YUNITS:* Yeah, and just to go back to something Oscar just said when he said that we still have a long way to go, we certainly do as well. I think first of all anybody who is just in the beginning stages of this has to look at the success as the process always evolving. In fact if you want to maintain your sanity when you tackle this kind of task, you must imagine something **happy** because it is a process and a very grueling process, however it is doable.

Just to put it into perspective, even though we have had some great success, this all began as I said when we came together for the assets and services that we had and then we had to come up with the methodology for focusing on the distribution of those assets and then delivery of those assets and even then we were not really to a point where we felt satisfied to where we knew we were in the right place so the United Way recently completed an overall needs assessment for our area and now we do a number of things. We do youth summits, which is a great way of getting the students empowered and hearing it form their vantage point about what they think will work and what will not. We do that annually and we actually implement their suggestions and deliver them to the Brockton's Promise for a focal point of our discussion and right now we are just reviewing our strategic planning efforts with the Blueprints Coalition which is a process that will continue for the next 3-6 months.

So, it is daunting at first. If you set unrealistic goals and unrealistic timelines, I think you can get extremely frustrated but you will see once people start communicating and coordinating it is something that builds its own momentum. People do get engaged, people do feel that they can make a difference and all of your task force members feel empowered to make a difference and feel better about what they do. I loved Oscar's

suggestion about the quarterly meetings with the city council because one of the problems we have is keeping the community focused and that sounds like an outstanding way of doing it because you present your task and your goals to the council on a regular basis so the community has to see it and hear it. I think we will try and implement something like that ourselves so thanks for that suggestion Oscar and by the way for those who are listening, this is always one of the best ways to move forward is to look at what other communities are doing. We constantly learn from history and success in other cities and we are always happy to share ours.

*JOHNSON:* As a note to our listeners, I am glad Mayor that you mentioned the youth summit strategies that you have been using and we have both an action kit on promoting youth participation and a more detailed white paper on organizing youth summits. As you point, out ideas from cities across the country that other folks can learn from in terms of using that as a tool for their planning and organizing projects to get started.

*YUNITS:* One other thing that you should mention before you shift there Cliff is the clergy. If you can motivate your churches and get your churches involved, they are a great source and not just in terms of volunteers but also in focusing services back to their members.

*JOHNSON:* Oscar, do you have ideas to add to this mix in terms of folks who are getting started and reflections of the early stages of this work in Corpus Christi?

*MARTINEZ:* Cliff, I think one of the most important things and it has been the experience here and it seems to have been the experience in Brockton is that one of the first things you need to do is agree on the data. There needs to be some research done. Make sure that the priority factors are delineated first before you embark on this initiative because once there is clarity and understanding and agreement on the data, that really is your foundation.

The other thing is, and it has been demonstrated by Mayor Yunits and certainly I think it is something that has been demonstrated by the Mayor here in Corpus Christi, is to inform the community leaders, particularly the government leaders as to what the issues are and allow them to take the lead on identifying and focusing their desire to see initiatives undertaken to correct the problems that may exist in our community affecting our youth.

The third is for paid professionals such as myself and others to step up at the plate and be accountable for making progress towards the initiatives that have been undertaken. One of the things, and I appreciate the comments about the quarterly meetings, one of the things that I make a point of stating in every one of those sessions is that we are accountable. The paid professional staff are accountable for implementing and making progress towards the initiatives undertaken and we want to demonstrate that. We are not going to shirk on the responsibility that we have and we want to be held accountable for progress to be made. I think that is an important factor that each individual that is contributing towards where the rubber meets the road, step up and be accountable for the initiative being under taken.

The final thing is for anybody who is involved whether it is a government leader or paid professional staff to be prepared for some of the pain that may come along with partnership. Partnership is extremely important to what we are trying to do in terms of effecting or creating a better environment for our youth. We all want to service the youth better and to do it the best way possible requires partnership. I know that is nothing new to a lot of areas in our country that partnership is critical to anything that we do but before we go in we all have to understand that it is going to be painful and we are not always going to be able to have our way in the end. We have to be able to agree to achieve a consensus and contribute our resources whether or not it is time, money, whatever it may be to accomplish the common goal. I would be the first to say that partnership is essential to this initiative but anybody undertaking this initiative has got to be ready for the pain associated with that and do not give up when it gets a little painful.

*JOHNSON:* Sounds like to voice of experience.

*YUNITS:* It is the nature of the institution that there will be turf building and there will be egos that have to be soothed and so you have to be patient in forming these partnerships and particularly at a time with dwindling resources.

*JOHNSON:* Do either of you have thoughts on the business community as a critical partner in this mix particularly for the employment focus aspects of the work you are doing and how hard is it to get business leaders and employers engaged? I mean this is not a population that warms their hearts when they are out looking for workers.

*YUNITS:* The good news is that we have had success in getting the businesses engaged to a certain extent and they have become repeat performers and are coming back every year and are taking some of our students in as interns. The bad news is that it is very hard to find those partners. Once you get them, they seem to stick with you. They love to be participating on a regular basis and a lot of the kids have gone on to actually work for those employers afterwards but it is truly a difficult sell and you have to get your Chamber of Commerce on board in that regard.

*MARTINEZ:* Corpus Christi, I am really pleased to say that it was employers that pushed a lot of these initiatives because they realized the difficulty they were going to be facing regarding the ability of any employer to hire a qualified workforce. They realized that, they understood that with the dropout volume being what it is, with the changing economy that every community is having to contend with going from either manufacturing to a service oriented community or even trying to retain a workforce that is still interested in performing in a manufacturing industry because the reality is that many people do not see as their future working in a factory or as a welder or as a maintenance technicians. For our youth today that is many times not a viable career path although employers were the first ones to tell us, these are good jobs. They make no bones about it; they can be difficult jobs. You are outside sometimes in bad weather but they are jobs that require high skills in terms of math and science and they are concerned about the dwindling resource that they have to draw upon to fill positions. In reality their existing

workforce is aging and starting to retire so how are they going to fill these vacancies, so they came to us with these issues and pushed these issues and have assisted us. There is a cohort of business leaders that has been very vocal and very supportive of the initiatives we are undertaking.

What we need to do is also expand our access to the business communities and further to get into the other areas or other sectors of our economy and make sure that we are addressing their needs as well but the initiative came very strongly from the business community. What we do need to do now as I mentioned is to engage others in the business community and continue to work with them because it serves no purpose to call a meeting of business leaders or business owners or business organizations tell them that we are going to do something walk away and not follow up. We need to communicate with them and one of the ways that we found most effective to do that is as Mayor Yunits mentioned is to work specifically with the chambers of commerce and the economic development corporations because they have direct access to those employers. It is much easier to go to 3 or 4 chambers and economic development organizations and have them transfer that information to the employers that they work with everyday. It is a good leveraging technique to work with those organizations.

*YUNITS:* One of the options that we use too and I think everybody could use it, the Workforce Investment Board. If that board is comprised of engaged employers they are going to take a very active interest in participating in this program and that will help guarantee you some success. In fact the director of our regional transit authority remarked at one of these meetings that these mechanics can make up to \$30 per hour and that was enough to spike interest in a lot of youth in the city about going to school to learn how to be a diesel mechanic. If they are engaged they give you the **practical** and the kids are listening.

*MARTINEZ:* If I may add that one of the things that we are doing through the Workforce Development Board to engage the community more is that we developed a business services unit within our workforce centers. It has one job and that is go out and meet with business everyday to learn their workforce needs and issues because unless we understand we are not going to appropriately train and prepare our young workforce for the future. We have to understand what their needs are. There are three levels of service that we are trying reach.

The first is the employer has an immediate need that has to be met. They may have a vacancy, they may need to have their current workforce trained or their skills upgraded and that is a daily interaction with our business services unit that is within our workforce center. They are meeting that need on a daily basis.

Then there is a level two service that employers may have and that is they may need some advocacy. In other words, employers have needs that they need to communicate and need to be supported with, for example the school district. An employer may have a particular concern that students who are coming out of school are not being educated along with the competencies that they need to have a strong workforce at their place of work and so those advocacy issues as they bubble up and as that business services unit identifies those services those level two needs are communicated to the

development board so that we can work with appropriate community partners whether it is the school district or a community college, a chamber, whoever it may be to connect those with more broad issues that employers have and that encourages them to participate in our system.

The third level of service, and we have not gotten there yet but we hope to, is whenever we are going to be in a position to service the business community effectively enough in which we can go out and engage them in initiatives. What can they contribute to the youth initiative that they are trying to accomplish? Can they develop internships, can they help us fund them? Can they start a mentoring program? What can they contribute back to our community to support the needs of our youth? So, that is something that seems to be working really well and is drawing a lot of attention from our business community here recently.

*YUNITS:* Oscar, when you mentioned the career pathway, everyone in this room was writing diligently and that is one of the ideas that we are going to steal from you but that would seem to me too to be a tremendous way of keeping the business world in line with the kids because obviously you have to adjust that based on corporate needs.

*MARTINEZ:* Absolutely Mayor, and we are really excited that some business partners have already stepped up and are willing to create internships for those students who select a pathway that is in alignment with their particular business so that they can be participating in that and then supplement that with our normal youth program that we have in which we provide work experience slots for youth. We are going to reserve a certain number of slots for Career Pathways so that if there is a student who may be economically disadvantaged and are not able to obtain an internship provided by a business then perhaps we can supplement that with youth slots.

*JOHNSON:* We have just a couple of minutes left on the call and I know I would be remiss if I did not pause and ask each of you to comment for at least a minute about how you pay for all of this. I know that in both instances you have had some success with federal grants that have helped for some of your financing but I am wondering whether there has been city contributions to what is going on and what the mix is and how you keep this going. Mayor, do you have some thoughts on the financing piece?

*YUNITS:* Certainly federal and state grants are the critical ones but we do have a city that is very committed to this in a number of different ways. So the education funding and even the city council funds over \$100,000 a year to the after school programs in addition to what they fund through the school system, but mostly it is that collaboration effort and seeking out grants, everything from foundation grants to federal and state grants. We have **reference** and we have also had some tremendous help from HHS which really helps tie us into available funding.

*JOHNSON:* So building those relationships with state agencies and state policy makers is a key piece. Oscar, some comments as well? Some of the Corpus Christi funding got started not by the workforce but juvenile justice funding from the federal government,

correct?

*MARTINEZ:* Correct and as the mayor said, federal grants, state grants are extremely important to the initiative but one thing that I feel very strongly about also in these times of dwindling resources, acquiring outside funds to support ongoing or new initiatives is extremely important but getting back to the partnership aspect, I truly believe that if we are able to appropriately integrate resources from various organizations that have similar goals, if we are able to reduce or eliminate redundant overhead and focus on the task to be accomplished, although the funds may reside in one or more organizations, to the extent you can to blend those funds to accomplish a single goal that is going to maximize the availability of resources in your community.

*YUNITS:* And Oscar said it earlier, but accountability. If you can show through your data that your programs are working then you go to the top of the list when it comes to getting funding.

*JOHNSON:* That is a great closing note to end on here. That has been a recurring theme on lots of work with children, youth and families. Presumably the accountability standards are on potholes and highways too, but in this area being able to show that you are making a difference is incredibly important. I want to thank both of you, Mayor Yunits and Oscar Martinez for joining us for this call today. I have learned a lot and I am sure our listeners as well and I thank you both for taking time out of your busy days to do this.

*YUNITS:* We appreciate you too and we appreciate the National League of Cities.

*MARTINEZ:* Thank you for the opportunity and thank you mayor for telling us what is going on in Brockton because we will emulate some of the things you are doing as well.

*JOHNSON:* Well, I hope the Institute can continue to foster that kind of exchange. We will continue this monthly audio conference series in 2004, then next one will be on January 29<sup>th</sup> and we will focus on early childhood issues and city campaigns around early childhood success so we hope the listeners with us today can join us for that call as well. Happy Holidays to all of you and thank you for joining us. Goodbye.

*OPERATOR:* This concludes today's conference. You may now disconnect.