

Introduction

Career development and occupational choice, for most people, are a lifelong process of engaging the work world through choosing among the many employment opportunities made available to them. Each individual undertaking this process is influenced by many factors, including the context in which they live, their personal aptitudes and educational attainment. Because of the centrality of work in most people's lives, the impact that employment has in one's life's outcomes and the impact that employment trends have upon the local economy, it is important to understand the factors that are operating in individuals and societal contexts to respond appropriately in developing implementation strategies that can assist in keeping the economy and employment arena vital.

The goals of this report are to promote a fuller understanding of the nuisances of area youth and young adult's career choices and of the factors within the rural Central Pennsylvania context that influence and interact with their occupational decision-making process. Building upon the findings of this report provides for area schools, agencies and organizations a means to explore ways to facilitate appropriate strategies to develop initiatives that will help strengthen the area's workforce. The report's first two sections describe the findings of research projects conducted with area youth and young adults and with industry clusters top managers, human resource director and employees. Following these sections is a detailed review of the identified major industry clusters of the region. The next section provides a literature review that describes current resources defining issues related to the retention of young adults in rural areas. Lastly, the area's census data provides an overview of the demographics of the eleven county region's trends in relationship to national circumstances. The postscript of the report reflects back on the projects outcomes and highlights distinctive findings that may be used as building blocks for strategies to support change in the area.

The contents of the report are designed to increase the understanding of the complexity of the issues involved in retaining and attracting young adults to the eleven counties of Central Pennsylvania. The rural nature of the counties and the wide divergence of its secondary and post secondary educational institutions create a unique context that for some youth binds them to the area but for others motivates them to leave. Recognizing that no one strategy will fit all is important in seeking solutions that can assist the key stakeholders in the issue – youth, family and community – to find strategies that support youth and young adults to make career choice decisions that are appropriate for their life's situation.

Of equal importance, the report is seeking to increase the understanding of the role that the major industry clusters play in the local economy and in the development of a sustainable workforce. Building upon the report's findings provides a means to recognize and identify strategies industry, educational

institutions and economic/workforce development agencies can implement to sustain and grow local employment opportunities.

To maintain and develop a viable local workforce that is capable of adapting to the transitioning demands of employment, the report's major findings need to be viewed as interdependent and reciprocal. Since the youth of an area are its future, it is critical to identify what are the issues that the context in which they are developing is providing in terms of their future career choices in and outside of Central of Pennsylvania. The issues that motivate them to leave frequently are the issues that their families and communities are finding difficult to deal with in their own lives. Simply trying to broaden young adults' perspective of the area's career opportunities will not create a context that is highly supportive of them remaining or returning to the area after college graduation. Youth more than established adults are willing to seek opportunities that they perceive will reward them where even these opportunities are available – in Central Pennsylvania or elsewhere.