

## At Dot gathering, kids stress value of summer job funding



***Ashlee Smith of the Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation's Youth Force (left) presents an award to state Sen. Sonia Chang-Díaz during an event held Monday, June 15, 2009, at Project Hope in Roxbury. Chang-Díaz sponsored a budget amendment that restored \$4 million in youth summer job funding. (Sandra Larson photo)***

Representatives from more than a dozen community organizations gathered Monday to thank political and business leaders for their support in funding summer jobs for local teens, and to spur more action to help young people still seeking employment.

About 125 teens, family members and youth group leaders filled a community room in the Project Hope building on Dudley Street at Monday's "community action." The event was organized and hosted by the Youth Force group of the Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation (DBEDC) and Get off the Corner Hanging Around (GOTCHA), a collaborative youth-employment effort.

"Congratulations to the Youth Force and their allies for securing funding for the creation of the after-school [and year-round] jobs fund," said DBEDC board member Daryl Wright, who also commended GOTCHA for providing about 22 summer jobs.

"Giving young people opportunities for jobs is not just about making our community safe," said Wright. "People who are well-educated and who know how to work are the types of people who bring businesses into the community and provide for a more prosperous neighborhood, city and commonwealth."

Led by a number of young speakers, the tightly planned event featured a slate of special guests receiving appreciation awards, including Monalisa Smith, vice president at Citizens Bank; Michael Christopher, legislative aide to state Rep. Martin Walsh; Jessica Avila of the Suffolk County District Attorney's Office's Safe Neighborhoods Initiative; state Sen. Sonia Chang-Díaz; and Conny Doty, director of the Boston Mayor's Office of Jobs and Community Service.

"I have to tell you how important your voices are," said Doty, who was honored for helping to create a "nationally celebrated youth jobs program" in Boston. "I've been doing this job for 13 years, and there's been plenty of times I've seen the summer jobs money go down. And every time you've gone up to the State House ... a lot of adults hear you."

Chang-Díaz was praised for sponsoring an amendment to the state Senate budget that restored \$4 million in statewide youth-at-risk summer job funding, which helps teenagers from low-income families find summer employment.

"It really was a fight to get this money restored," said Chang-Díaz. "I just want you to know you have a lot of allies [in the Legislature], and it's because we heard so loudly from you, and because we see the value that youth jobs bring to the community day in and day out."



***(From left): Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation Executive Director Jeanne DuBois joins Michael Christopher of state Rep. Martin Walsh's office, Jessica Avila of the Suffolk County District Attorney's Office, Conny Doty of the Mayor's Office of Jobs and Community Service, and state Sen. Sonia Chang-Díaz. Along with Citizens Bank Vice President Monalisa Smith (not pictured), the four received awards honoring their efforts to increase youth summer jobs funding. (Sandra Larson photo)***

Besides celebration, the event was meant to generate action. All attendees were asked to fill out cards indicating how they would help fight for youth jobs.

Award recipients were not allowed to simply smile and sit down. Each was asked a pointed question: "Will you continue to work with us for more year-round jobs for teens?"

A flip chart listed actions the Youth Force will take to keep working for more jobs, including contacting state legislators and meeting with local banks to increase the year-round after-school jobs fund.

The \$10,000 that Citizens Bank contributed to the fund is a start, explained Brittany Morgan, one of the teen facilitators of the Youth Force's Action and Research for Teen Employment committee. But the goal is to raise \$100,000 to fund 40 new year-round jobs.

At the podium and later in small-group breakout sessions, participants told personal stories.

"I spent two years jobless when I could have been doing something," said one young man, recalling the frustration of being denied the chance to work as a teen.

Makeila Layne, 17, a Madison Park Technical Vocational High School junior, told a happier tale. She has been working for the DBEDC since she was 13, starting with summer camp work and now as a youth organizer. She said the jobs have taught her not only leadership skills, which she demonstrated as a leader of one of the breakout sessions, but also financial responsibility.

"I have a bank account," she said. "I know how to save."

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