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Washtenaw County Community Day connects hard-hit residents with services

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Tiffany Gore remembers being on the other side of the desk. Unemployed and trying to obtain government assistance, Gore never felt she got the undivided attention of her caseworker, never felt like a priority.

"I had a science degree from the University of Michigan, and here I was, not able to find work," recalled Gore, who had earned her degree as a hygienist from the U-M School of Dentistry before the economy turned south.



Gore felt like she needed an advocate as she navigated the unemployment system. She was assigned a caseworker who wouldn't listen. When Gore came across a job opportunity with the county's Department of Human Services, she took it.

"Now I try to be the caseworker that I wish I would've had," Gore said from the DHS tent Saturday at [Washtenaw County Community Day](#).

With unemployment at upwards of 8 percent and unemployment insurance expiring for about 6,000 county residents monthly, more people are relying on the web of county and nonprofit services to get by, Gore said.

The Department of Human Services helps county residents obtain food, medical and child aid. Between the 30 organizations on site a number of services were offered at affordable costs to low-income or disabled county residents, from weatherization programs (Washtenaw County's Employment Training and Community Services), day care and education (Head Start), transit options (the [AATA](#) and [Ride Connect](#), an upstart effort that connects county residents without AATA to the next-best-available option) and legal assistance (Legal Services of South Central Michigan). Most of the services offered are available on a sliding price scale, depending on earnings and family size.

There were also resources geared specifically for county youth, like the **Corner Health Center**, at 47 N. Huron St. in Ypsilanti. Corner Health offers a wide range of medical assistance to county residents ages 12-21 and their children, from nutrition advice to health insurance to affordable doctor's visits, prescription drugs, and prenatal care.

When Jack Bidlack did a poll of area youth a few years ago, he soon learned that their number one concern was finding jobs. Not school, not where to go to college, but jobs.

“Problem is, jobs aren’t always readily available on this side of the county,” said Bidlack, director of the [Business Side of Youth](#). The B-Side is an extension of the Eastern Michigan Office of Academic Service-Learning and meets in 10-week sections at the EMU College of Business.

“We decided that instead of teaching kids to look for jobs, we’d teach them to create their own.”

The Business Side of Youth offers free entrepreneurial education with a focus on bringing products to market. “We want people to think big, but we can’t focus on their dream idea - the idea is we want to get them making money.”

Students who put the work in and finish the B-Side’s 10-week courses come away with completed business plans and a little bit of seed money, just enough to try out an idea and learn a lesson or two, Bidlack said. Students who show special dedication can get a much bigger startup loan.

The program is open to 13- to 20-year-olds in the county, but Bidlack said that he’d welcome “any young person with the drive to make things happen.”

This summer the "B-Side of Art," the arts-focused, career-building portion of the program, placed its youth with local organizations in journalism, advertising, video production and Web development.

The next 10-week entrepreneurship course starts on Oct. 2 at the **Eastern Michigan University College of Business**.

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