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## What Shall I Be?

The more I delve into apprenticeship program development, the more I wonder what would have been my own career trajectory if I'd had the opportunity to take part in Youth Apprenticeship (YA) while I was in high school. Would I have babysat (probably – I love kids)...spent even a second as fry girl at Burger King, a job that left me with a scent I'll never forget...patrolled the grounds of The Dwight D. Eisenhower Lock in Massena, NY, as a security guard tasked with stopping potential stowaways with dreams of exotic Great Lakes destinations, in the dead of winter?

I may still have gone to Clarkson for a degree in Mechanical Engineering, returned to school 20 years later for a master's in Education, become an Engineering and Computer teacher. Director of Apprenticeship at MACNY and Chief Operating Officer at Partners for Education and Business (PEB) might still have become my current job titles. But what would have happened had I benefitted from a work-based learning program, like YA or Pre-Apprenticeship (PA)? These programs, on the rise nationally, are designed for high school students, and incorporate the key elements of the standard apprenticeship model: paid workplace experience and related technical instruction. Participants experience jobs and gain industry-specific skills in a real work environment. The trend would accelerate if we could resolve the challenge of access to quality programs; there's also a lack of understanding about what constitutes a quality youth apprenticeship program.

In workforce terms, a program is deemed a quality program when it demonstrates the following:

- Structured training and measurable competencies that result in careers with potential salaries above the ALICE (Assets Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) threshold, (currently 40% in Central NY);

- Equitable access allowing learners of all levels to participate;
- Results in a portable credential, such as college credit or an industry recognized certification;
- Skills and competencies that are transferable to multiple industry sectors; and
- Transparent program metrics that are available to all stakeholders.

These defining principles guide the partners in industry, education, and communities as they create high-level programs that utilize the metrics, data, and participant feedback to continuously improve the program.

As we explore the development of Youth Apprenticeship programs for MACNY and for our membership, we turn to programs with well-defined best practices as our model, such as the Finger Lakes Youth Apprenticeship Program (FLYAP), a partnership between Rochester Technology and Manufacturing Association and Monroe Community College. On a national level, we are working with Jobs for the Future (JFF), who provides technical assistance and incentive funding to companies to help shoulder the burden of limited resources, especially after COVID, and useful information about quality youth programs.

The journey to robust youth apprenticeship is one in which we should all participate, as recruiting for future employees can start in high school. Had I been approached before I ventured into fast food, I'm sure that I would have jumped at the opportunity.

For more information about registered apprenticeship, contact Laury Ferguson at [lferguson@macny.org](mailto:lferguson@macny.org).