

**Governor's Council on Women and Girls**  
**Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity & Workforce Equity**  
**MEETING MINUTES**  
**May 13, 2025, 3:00pm**  
**Virtual Meeting – TEAMs**

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**I. Introductions**

Laura Baker, Chief Administrative Officer with the Office of Workforce Strategy, started the meeting and welcomed all the participants.

**II. Presentation: Career ConneCT Success Story: Supporting Refugee Population through Experiential Learning, Caterina Passoni, Executive Director, Havenly**

Caterina Passoni, presented on Havenly, a nonprofit with community cafe on 25 Temple Street in New Haven, CT, with the mission of building the community power of refugee and immigrant women through job training, education and organizing. Caterina stated that one in two refugee women in the United States are unemployed, particularly due to barriers such as language, financial literacy, gaps in work experience, education equivalency, and lack of social networks. Havenly recently launched a six-month paid fellowship combining job training, education, and wraparound supports. With funding from CareerConneCT, the fellowship provides \$15/hour wages for both work and educational programming, which includes classes in English, financial literacy, digital literacy, food safety, and job readiness training. The Havenly Fellowship also offers supportive services such as bus passes, parking passes, and childcare stipends, making participation feasible for refugee mothers.

Since its founding, Havenly has served 125 refugee and immigrant women—87 of whom were supported through CareerConneCT funding—and indirectly impacted over 500 family members, given the average large household sizes. The average post-graduation wage is \$18.43/hour, and the program has helped launch seven small businesses. Many graduates go on to pursue careers both within and beyond the food industry, with some entering entrepreneurship or fields aligned with their past professional experience. One such graduate, Deborah from the Democratic Republic of Congo, launched her own business after completing the program and a local business incubator.

### **III. Video: Career ConneCT Success Story: Gisella**

Tiffany Branch, Regional Program Manager of the WE RISE Together Program at Community Resources, shared a video of Gisella, a woman from Bridgeport, CT, who had been worked with Ashilah Atkins, Case Manager at Career Resources, and her success with the Strive Program. This program is a two-week training that helps participants build their resume, gain confidence, and practice mock interviews with the goal of re-integration into the workforce. Gisella is now studying for a new career in the medical field at Housatonic Community College.

### **IV. Presentation: Career ConneCT Success Story: Supporting We Rise Participants, Tiffany Branch, WE RISE Together, Regional Program Manager, Community Resources, Inc.**

Tiffany Branch presented on the Workforce, Education and Reintegration Services for Employment Programs (WE RISE Together) Program at Community Resources. The program brings together re-entry centers across the state and the work investment boards (WIBs) to create a partnership focusing on expanding employment opportunities for “justice-involved” individuals and people returning from incarceration. WE RISE Together seeks to help remove barriers for the re-entry population, such as childcare, domestic violence, joblessness homelessness, displacement, and poverty. Eligibility extends to individuals 18 years and older with any form of justice involvement, including parole, probation, misdemeanors, felonies, or COVID-related impacts, with no restriction on the time since incarceration.

Referrals come through various channels, including the CareerConneCT portal, probation and parole officers, and word-of-mouth. Participants complete an intake process and a basic skills assessment to determine readiness for educational pathways. Those requiring foundational skills are directed to basic education, while others are encouraged to pursue certifications or college-level training. Of the 900 participants enrolled, 459 individuals have completed the program. While this figure is slightly below the original target of 493 completers, the discrepancy is due to the enrollment of an additional 307 participants beyond the initial goal, which temporarily lowered the completion percentage to 53%. In terms of job placement, the program successfully placed 374 participants, surpassing the 75% benchmark with an 81% placement rate, thanks to enrolling 19 more individuals than planned.

### **V. Announcements**

The next CoWaG Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity and Workforce Equity meeting is August 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025.

## **VI. Adjournment**

Laura Baker adjourned the meeting at 3:56pm.