

Quarterly Career Services Committee Minutes - 2/1/24

In attendance: Bud Delphin, MassHire Holyoke, Linda Candage, Veterans Affairs, Anne Kandilis, Springfield Works, Drew Kott, MHA, Madeline Martinez, Way Finders, Cindy Ray, MassHire Franklin Hampshire, Jasmin Rojas, Way Finders; Pamela Schwartz, WMNEH, Elizabeth Veillette, CHD, Pamela Wojtkowski, MassHire Berkshire

Cliff Effect Pilot Update

Anne Kandilis of Springfield Works provided us with an update on the implementation of the cliff effect pilot to support workers as they move up the income scale so they don't have to lose income overall ("go over the cliff"). The program was designed to make payments via the EITC but instead was passed into law designating DTA payments as the payment mechanism, which is problematic because DTA payments are included in means testing for other benefits - canceling out the very mission!). They are working to make the necessary change. Starting with 15 people in the pilot, which will hopefully be a foundation for expansion.

Secure Jobs Update

Jasmin Rojas of Way Finder provided an update on the program, reminding all that this program serves ALL four counties of western MA and that eligibility has expanded to include people who have APPLIED for RAFT or EA shelter (not just those who have been found eligible). There are currently roughly 160 families in the program.

Holyoke Community College Update

Jeff Hayden of HCC provided an update on the broad array of training programs underway or about to be underway, e.g., for medical interpreters, line cooks, bar tenders, medical assistants, CNAs, etc. HCC also established a tech hub in downtown Holyoke to provide literacy training; working with the W. MA Alliance for Digital Equity; working in partnership with statewide group on developing apprenticeships, e.g., in early childhood education, health care, pharmacy technician. For more info, contact Jeff at 413-522-2587 or jhayden@hcc.edu. See more here as well: <https://www.hcc.edu/courses-and-programs/workforce-development/free-job-training-programs>

Also from HCC: Save the Date: On Thursday, April 4th, 2024, we will be hosting the 2nd Annual CORI Expungement and Sealing Event and CORI-Friendly Job Fair. The event will take place from 12:30-4:30pm in the Peoplesbank room in the Kittredge Center at HCC

MassHire Berkshire County

Great news on receiving a big grant from the National Health Emergency Dislocated Worker Group - \$1m over 2 years to address the opioid crisis - slots for 50 customers who have been impacted by the opioid crisis, including a family member of an individual in recovery. It includes compensation of different kinds. Will be partnering with Berkshire Community College to provide recovery coach certification and funding for different trainings that will support people entering the human services and recover coach field. This is a big deal for Berkshire County - congratulations!

Workforce Investment Opportunity Act (WIOA) – reminder that low income under and unemployed individuals mostly are eligible to receive free career counseling and access to a variety of funded training opportunities (via all MassHires).

Discussion of impact of family migrant homelessness crisis on workforce development

MassHires statewide (and in our region) have been called upon to focus on employment for migrant families experiencing homelessness who have just arrived in this country. This is a very tall order considering language barriers (employers are resistant to hiring without language access) and other employment barriers. \$2 million has been allocated to MassHires statewide to support the work with this population.

In Hampden County, there are roughly migrant 400 families. In Berkshire County, roughly 50 families; Hadley, roughly 20-25 and in Greenfield 45. In Hadley, there is no service provider, only the National Guard, which makes connecting with households especially challenging.

The challenges range from language barriers to transportation to child care. Finding employment is extremely difficult (a challenge that not even money alone can solve).

Veterans employment services

Linda Candage provided an update on the employment support she is providing to veterans (via the VA workforce support); also providing support with housing needs when possible. She has worked with 100 referrals since the position began in June, 2023; currently serving 14 veterans.

Mental Health Association

Drew Kott shared that MHA just opened a new medical respite program with 8 beds (4 filled so far). Drew provides employment support for all individuals in MHA programs, including hiring at MHA (always hiring, no minimum experience required, only HS diploma or equivalent). 2/6 and 2/20, MHA will be conducting a hiring event with on-the-spot interviews. More info here: <https://www.hcc.edu/courses-and-programs/workforce-development/free-job-training-programs/jump-start>

Greenfield Community College Update

<https://engage.gcc.mass.edu/seniors/cyber-seniors/> offering help for older adults who have tech challenges.

Affordable Connective Program (ACP) update

The ACP was established in 2021, and as of January 2024, 22 million households are enrolled and receiving the ACP monthly benefit, including service discount up to \$30/month and device discount up to \$100 for a qualifying device. This program is available to people enrolled in government programs, e.g., Medicaid, SNAP, WIC, and are eligible for ACP if income is 200% or less than the federal poverty guidelines. In MA, as of Dec, there are 353,586 enrolled households.

Without additional funding from Congress, the program will run out of funds by April 2024. The FCC issues its "[wind-down guidance](#)" [here](#).

FY25 budget and policy updates

The Western MA Network to End Homelessness just finalized its [FY25 budget priorities](#) on housing and homelessness. The Network is convening county-based meetings with legislators and Network partners to advocate for these priorities (responding to Gov. Healey's proposed budget just released a couple of weeks ago. [See here](#) for details on her proposal.

The Housing Committee held a legislative hearing on the Affordable Homes Act on Jan. 18. Pamela traveled to Boston with Neighbor to Neighbor where hundreds gathered at the State House to express their support for action on this bill. [Read more about the hearing, the bill, and the Network's testimony here.](#)

Next quarterly meeting date: Thursday, May 2, 2 pm - 3 pm