

STARK TUSCARAWAS WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD

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Congress of the United States - U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources
Jobs and Opportunity: Legislative Options to Address the Jobs Gap
May 9, 2018

Good morning Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Davis, and members of the Subcommittee on Human Resources. My name is Jennifer Meek Eells, and I am the Executive Director for the Stark Tuscarawas Workforce Development Board. My workforce area is located in northeastern Ohio, with OhioMeansJobs (American Job) Centers located in New Philadelphia and Canton – home of the Pro Football Hall of Fame. I have spent 30 years working in public assistance and public workforce, including the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs. My job as executive director is to be an expert in the local labor market and in-demand jobs, to develop relationships with employers and business organizations in the community, and as well with community colleges and training providers. I know Canton and the region's labor market and economy and what types of training people need where a job is available on the other end. As a matter of fact, this week, the week of May 7th-11th is In-Demand Jobs Week across the state of Ohio. My local workforce area is holding a Job Fair in New Philadelphia on Friday, with 90 employers scheduled to recruit for open positions their companies have right now. We need a skilled and job-ready workforce to keep these businesses going strong in our current economy.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today about the “Jobs Gap”, what you’ve defined as the difference between what employers need and the number of workers currently in the labor force. I believe that what the state of Ohio, my local Workforce Board and my local County Job and Family Services (TANF) agencies are doing will address this gap. Much of what I understand this committee has discussed over the past months is that people are being left on the sidelines. On July 1st of 2016, Governor Kasich and the General Assembly implemented the Comprehensive Case Management and Employment Program through the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. This intensive case management program utilizes both TANF and WIOA funding to provide an array of services to TANF cash assistance recipients who are work-eligible and under the age of 24 years old, as well as WIOA-eligible individuals under the age of 24. The program activities and performance outcomes are based primarily on the WIOA Title I Youth Program. Intensive case management combined with specific workforce services is providing solid opportunities for those disadvantaged job seekers who were once left on the sidelines in Ohio. What the Governor and state legislature recognized in creating this new case management program was that we needed to find a better way to more effectively use federal and state resources to help more low-income Ohioans get a job and succeed at work.

Our OhioMeansJobs workforce centers have the core principles of one stop service delivery with co-location and access to partner organizations including those required by WIOA as well as other community-based organizations that promote workforce training and employment programs. The Workforce Board is business-led and acts as a broker between employers in the

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community and job seekers. My Workforce Board is a magnet for bringing together partners in the local community to provide not only training, but access to supportive services individuals may need. Workforce Boards can't do it alone, we need our TANF partner agencies because they are experts in human services aspect of getting people job ready – the only way we are going to be able to address this jobs gap is if we leverage the strengths of both our human services and workforce system – leverage our existing resources and expertise. WIOA has the foundational principles, that if executed, can be an important part of a localized approach to economic growth.

Through this intensive case management program, we have found that the TANF work participation rate and WIOA performance measures actually undermine the local workforce board's ability to partner – we're trying to accommodate two separate systems – TANF agencies in Ohio are very focused on meeting their prescribed participation rate – they don't necessarily have the same goals as my Workforce Board does because their jobs are to meet the rate – whereas my job is to get people skilled and into employment. If the programs had similar or the same outcome-based performance measures, that would go a long way in promoting partnership with TANF being complementary to the workforce system, as opposed to just another separate program. As I mentioned, Ohio's case management program foundation centers around WIOA's allowable workforce program elements as well as WIOA's performance measures. These activities include:

- Comprehensive guidance and counseling
- Dropout recovery services
- Education and workforce preparation activities
- Entrepreneurial skills training
- Financial literacy education
- Career counseling with labor market and employment information
- Leadership development opportunities
- Mentoring
- Occupational skills training
- Tutoring or study skills training
- Preparation for post-secondary education and training
- Paid and unpaid work experiences, including summer employment opportunities, pre-apprenticeship programs, internships, job shadowing and on-the-job training
- Supportive services, including access to drug and alcohol abuse counseling, health care, transportation, child care, housing, uniforms and work-related tools, educational testing, and reasonable accommodations for youth with disabilities

We are able to use TANF and WIOA together in spite of the government regulations being different and that their oversight comes from two separate federal agencies, the Department of Labor and Health and Human Services. But it has been difficult and required a lot of effort to execute. The state of Ohio painstakingly created a service matrix to bridge the activities under WIOA to the participation allowances under TANF, and it has helped the case managers better

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identify how these two federal programs can align. Much concern over the past almost two years now is how can we make all this work together without missing our measures or having an audit finding. What would make our ability to bring people in from the sidelines more effectively is to make it easier for agencies and these funding streams to partner. Program alignment around allowable activities and performance metrics would provide our case managers with the opportunity to meet people where they are, and assist them in moving forward toward a job.

I want to underscore this point about case management. Person-centered case management is important and we need flexibility to customize activities to meet people where they're at. That engagement, that relationship is key and what helps us be successful. Let me share how a relationship with a case manager assisted Emilee W.

Emilee's grandfather had raised her since she was four years old, when her parents signed over legal custody to him. She was living with her grandfather and was working part time at a local nursing home. Emilee came to the OhioMeansJobs (American Job) Center in Stark County looking for a possible source of funding for training. She had earned her STNA certification while in high school and had worked as a State Tested Nurse Assistant since receiving it, making very low wages. As she became older, she felt that it wasn't the right fit for her. She had always loved working on trucks with her brother and getting her hands dirty.

Due to a variety of barriers and her low income, Emilee qualified for the Comprehensive Case Management and Employment Program and developed a plan with her case manager to become a welder. She enrolled at Akron Testing Lab and Welding in August 2016. Emilee excelled as a student and had a great relationship with her case manager Megan who encouraged her throughout her training and helped her with her resume.

She completed training in November 2016 and immediately found employment at BJE Fabricators in Canton as a welder at \$15 an hour. Emilee is very proud of her work as a welder. As of May 2018, she now has a child, but continues to work and was given a raise to \$16 an hour since she welds, fabricates and is the quality control manager. She also referred a female friend to OhioMeansJobs Stark County who is now enrolled at the same welding school. At times Emilee has had to work over 40 hours per week, but she doesn't mind because she loves her new career.

Jennifer M. thought that a career in early childhood would be just the same thing as babysitting. She quickly learned that there was a lot more to it than she thought.

Due to a variety of barriers and her low-income, Jennifer qualified for the Comprehensive Case Management Employment Program, and enrolled in a 9-month long Childhood Development Associate Certificate (CDA) program offered through OhioMeansJobs Stark County and the Early Childhood Resource Center. Jennifer is taking classes at the Early Childhood Resource Center in addition to class time two days a week observing and helping in an actual child care center.

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CDA students in this program go through 120 hours of training on topics such as child development, first aid and safety, and developmentally appropriate learning environments. They observe and work in a day care setting for another 480 hours.

CDA students are taught that children learn through play, and they work on play examples during their sessions. They concentrate on directing learning during play, by pointing out colors, shapes or directions. Jennifer felt the instructors made the session so simple to understand.

“One idea that I will use at work and with my daughter is the Flip It technique. When my daughter started eating her crayon, I would say crayons are for coloring and then show her how on a piece of paper,” says Jennifer.

For many early educators, the CDA is a foundation of a lifelong career. Jennifer is just one step away from being awarded her CDA as her review was scheduled for April 26, 2018. The child care center director where she currently does her student teaching has every intention on offering her full-time employment as soon as she attains her CDA certificate. Jennifer plans to use her CDA certification as a stepping stone to continue her education at Walsh University or Stark State College.

This collaborative program, with the support of case management, is helping TANF work-eligible candidates secure a CDA, establish college credit for that credential, and then secure an in-demand job as early care and education providers in child care centers in Stark and Tuscarawas Counties. It is not just about having a work-eligible TANF recipient participate at a worksite for 20 or 30 hours per week. It is about a blend of work experience and training that results in employment.

I can have all the resources in the world but my case managers need to be able to connect and help people set goals, think about the future and set small steps that show them they can be successful and there is a path forward. Unlike many other anti-poverty programs, the case management program we’ve built in Ohio engages participants in meaningful employment and training activities that can help them build lifelong, sustainable careers. It focuses on people, not programs, and gives caseworkers the flexibility to offer more constructive services that build on participants’ strengths, increases their skills and meets their unique needs.

And the bottom line with that is, it’s a win-win. We are helping individuals in our community be successful and get back on their feet, but we can then also provide a skilled and ready workforce to our local employers to help them expand their businesses and grow our local economy.

Thank you.