

The 2013-2015 budget allocation from the State Board allowed the continuation of four projects across the state. Project contractors advanced their efforts targeting specific sectors that offer a variety of employment options for the registered students. Project results continue to improve as relationships with the colleges and employers mature into effective partnerships.

Challenges still remain as students deal with committed course loads, family, and economic realities. As a result, far too many cases of these issues force students to drop out. However we are starting to have in place several design models that offer guidelines for targeted wrap around services from the WDCs, and earlier identification of problems from the schools and business hosts. These models are picking away at the number of drop outs by clearly defining project expectations, potential challenges, resources, and good employment options for completers.

Special recognition should be granted to the effort at South Central WDC. There the WDC contracted with a highly capable regional not for profit – People to People. They applied a broad approach utilizing a full menu of tools, resources and forward thinking that has improved the program, the end results, and the student’s career potentials.

Project Summaries:

- **Spokane Area WDC**

The Opportunity Partnership Program funding enabled the further development of a successful model for engaging students with employers. More importantly, it resulted in student engagement with employers earlier in their college careers to experience the actual work done in their fields of study. This usually reinforced their career choice and occasionally, caused them to re-direct their efforts. Student-employer engagement resulted in improved student retention and course completion rates, along with increased job placement, and higher starting wage upon graduation.

Employers are embracing the opportunity to participate in the program. They clearly state the need for employees to meet current demand and to replace retiring workers. They were eager to engage with college students and instructors to help bring relevance into the classroom. Several employers now actively teach alongside instructors in college classrooms as the result of their participation in the program.

In addition to serving OPP students, the Spokane project expanded the mentorship model through other public and private funds to serve approximately 190 additional students and

engage 37 new employers. The model has been implemented in over 20 different programs of study at local colleges. Several programs of study integrated the model into their curriculum and made participation mandatory. This brought the total served by this comprehensive model to over 260 students and 50 employers in school year 2014-2015.

It is now common for first year students to receive offers of part-time employment while attending school, and for soon to graduate students to receive offers of full time employment upon graduation. Almost 100% of program completers received offers of full time employment.

The WDC has leveraged enough public and private funds to support one full time Mentorship/Internship Specialist. However, the WDC notes that there is enough demand to support at least 5 additional staff performing this function to more effectively support the expanded project activities.

Participant feedback was exceptionally positive. Project staff held Skype meetings with Human Resource professionals from Google and Adidas during which students learned about labor market demand, potential career ladders, hiring practices, and professional expectations.

- **Southwest Washington WDC**

Lower Columbia College and WorkSource Vancouver spent a large percentage of their time outreaching to local businesses to directly connect participants for employment and training opportunities. In a coordinated effort, WDC staff spent a lot of time providing continuing education and support service offerings for OPP participants. OPP staff members at both WorkSource and LCC continued to actively provide participants with mentorship/internship matching, job development curriculum and available workshop schedules. In addition participants were expected to continue with their school studies related to their approved OPP pathways.

- WorkSource Vancouver

All participants were encouraged to attend the regular Career Link events. Career Link is a three-day course designed to take the place of the WDC's Job Hunter Series (resume writing, interviewing, skills & abilities, goal setting, soft skills, etc.). The Career Link series gets students prepared for meeting their hosts and can really help them understand the expectations after graduation from the OPP program and college.

Informational sessions were then held with a group of regional businesses supporting direct discussions with employers to experience employment options and expectations. Employers included: PeaceHealth, ResCare Workforce Services, ITPro/IBM and Elite Care.

Students learned about phlebotomy, medical office IT programming, medical billing, coding programming, and accounting processes.

- Lower Columbia College

The WDC Project Manager and Opportunity Grant Coordinator at LCC worked in partnership to support both the OPP and OPG participants. Students attended training sessions titled "How to Interview" that included topics such as typical interview questions, interview tips from HR, how to research an employer, great answers for difficult questions, and questions to ask the interviewers. This training preceded the LCC Career & Networking Fair (held April 30) where students were able to network with potential employers, participate in mock interviews, and had one-on-one resume reviews with HR representatives from the region.

Industry partners included Millennium Bulk Terminals, Rebound Vancouver, Cowlitz County, and others to experience employment in manufacturing, business management, human services, healthcare, government, transportation & logistics, public administration, and social services.

Additionally, all the students successfully completed the **National Career Readiness Certification (NCRC) assessments** in May. Many of the students tested at Silver and Gold levels. These certificates will be added to students' portfolios.

The primary challenge that continues to plague the project are the participant schedules. Students are not always available to participate in scheduled events with the other cohort participants. In an effort to address this, our WorkSource OPP Provider and LCC OPP Providers are coming together for the next contract year to offer a joint calendar of events and also to share a virtual platform known as Canvas to oversee participant engagement. This effort will maximize workshops and other activities available to participants and will be available in advance so that participants can plan their work/life schedule accordingly.

Additionally, WorkSource, is located offsite of Clark college and has challenges with not having an on-site staff member who is based out of the college. As a result WorkSource has moved forward with plans to have an OPP Case Manager onsite at Clark College in the fall.

- **South Central WDC**

South Central moved the project from an internal staff effort to a contract with People to People. People to People is a vital community non-profit that serves the region with a variety of programs. They are a very successful subcontractor of the WDC and the immediate success of the Partnership project is evident.

Yakima Valley Community College (YVCC) was very helpful in supporting this new effort by providing a list each school quarter of students currently receiving Opportunity Grant funding. People to People worked to recruit YVCC OPP Allied Health and B-TECH students to explain in detail the benefits of being matched with an industry host who works in the student's field of study. Class presentations, phone calls and word of mouth referrals from students in the cohort proved to be the most successful when outreaching to and engaging students. Attempts were made to contact all the OPP students listed on the YVCC furnished reports. However, many students declined stating there wasn't the time to meet with a business host due to their busy school workload, clinical, part-time employment, and family schedules.

20 business hosts were sought to match the student's current academic path. People to People sought out professionals that were single parents during their training or while working as this target group to make good guidance matches. In addition, students were referred to various community resources such as energy assistance programs, holiday gift baskets, and local food banks when students shared a concern about unmet family and household needs. Additional referrals were made to employment and training programs such as BFET, WIA, Community Jobs, Job Connections and Career Development to assist students with overcoming barriers. These support services were offered in an effort to meet needs such as transportation, childcare, housing costs, etc. Students co-enrolled with WIA and Commerce programs also received additional opportunities for on-going intensive case management and the ability to gain paid and non-paid work experience to build their resumes and enhance employability upon graduation from YVCC.

Family issues continue to be a problem as some students asked to postpone meeting with mentors, stating being overwhelmed with classes, work, and clinical schedules. There were several instances where students didn't follow through with host meetings and job experience set-ups with Memorial Hospital. The students who did not follow through often made poor first impressions and displeased the business host because they also have busy schedules. This "work ready" capacity will be a focus for any future efforts.

However, three NAC students who dropped from YVCC and the mentor program moved to full-time employment, and one Medical Billing and Coding student left YVCC enrolling with Heritage University to pursue a business degree. There were four students who graduated from YVCC after OPP enrollment and three of the four have found employment. The student who has not found employment has been co-enrolled with WIA and Community Jobs programs to help the student build her resume, gain positive work reference and receive job placement assistance. One NAC student left the program early has accepted full-time employment with an assisted living center.

- **North West WDC**

Throughout this program year, the NWWDC, the Experience Work Project (EWP) and the Skagit Valley College teams further developed the process to recruit, match and place students with employers with current and future needs. This along with the emphasis on increasing the number and types of business and industry hosts has led to the inclusion of students in a much broader range of Skagit Valley College career programs. The end result was a program that operated at a higher level of efficiency and effectiveness.

This expansion of industry options worked so well because in the past many students would not have had an opportunity to participate in work experiences in their fields of interest. Additionally, the College enabled the use of study hall labs granting computer access for those students who did not have a computer available at home. As a result there was a significant increase in the number of participating employers and students in the EWP program, including Opportunity Grant students as well as those receiving support from the Basic Food Employment and Training (BFET) program and the WorkFirst program.

The Partnership program serves a broad range of students across the College's Opportunity Grant program. Most students participating in the program were low-income, high risk, while others were more educated and of higher income. Additionally, we found that this year showed a notable increase in students returning for training later in life due to changes in the local economy affecting many occupations and workers. This wide group of potential participants offered a series of communications and placement challenges.

This year saw a major focus on improved communication among team members, students and employers that increased the efficiency of partner activities and fostered a deeper appreciation of roles and responsibilities. Bi-weekly and monthly meetings among partners greatly increased the flow of shared information. Additionally partnership coordinators were in contact with students from the time they meet them in classroom orientation to the post experience follow up conversation that happens after every placement. Program staff also stayed in contact with employers from the first introductory meeting to the time when feedback is given to both the student and the employer. This consistent and ongoing communication has led more students and employers to understand the process and develop a vested interest in their role within the program.

One of the greater challenges was been making placements from within the medical industry. There tends to be restrictive regulations requiring extensive applications, background checks and copies of immunization records even for job shadows. In addition, the capacity of host

sites in this rural region has become overwhelmed with the number of students, many from other programs like Cascade Job Corps, seeking placement. As a result, the EWP team increased the number of medical employers to pursue for student placement as not all clinics have the same level of restrictions.

Employers in all fields continue to express concerns about liability insurance coverage for students and confidentiality issues. Although in most cases these concerns have been successfully addressed, there have been some isolated instances where we have had to end the conversation with the employer regarding the EWP program.

As usual, there was the challenge in getting enough students to place in internships. Many students who initially signed up for the program were simultaneously enrolled in multiple support programs, had rigorous academic schedules and were employed in part-time jobs. These factors made their placement very challenging and caused a significant number of students to either request to be put on hold or drop from the program. As a result, the NW Team decided to host additional class presentations throughout the year. The result was a fresh new infusion of interested and available students who could be placed in job shadows and internships. Another challenge was finding the most effective communication channel for students as some responded better to emails while others to phone calls. The lack of response from some students caused the placement process to be delayed by an average of two weeks. This made it difficult to have a good flow of students for placement. As a solution to this regular problem, the Skagit Valley College Grants Team agreed to have the EWP and NWC team include them on all student email communications so that they could make follow up calls to those students who remained unresponsive.

Opportunity Partnership 2013-2015						
WDC	Enrolled	entered the program	completed	employed	drop out	Business hosts
Northwest	93	71	71	2	0	52
Spokane Area	34	34	33	6	1	27
South Central	22	19	15	5	4	20
South West Washington	<u>38</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>22</u>
Totals	187	152	143	15	9	121