

**WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD, INC.
OF
MAHONING AND COLUMBIANA COUNTIES**

Individuals with Disabilities Committee Meeting
October 14, 2021
9:00am
OhioMeansJobs Center Mahoning County

Committee Members Present: Shirley Bowald, Ed Emerick, Brian Eskridge, Susie Kooser, Erich Offenburg, Marcy Patton, and Troy Rhoades
Committee Members Absent: Joe Caruso, Rick Fryda, Matt Golladay, and Brenda Heidinger
Adjunct Members: Jack Hile, Ashlee Iannucci, Carol Ramsay-Loomis, and Jennifer Strank
Board Staff: Mary Ann Kochalko and Sharlene Senediak

Mr. Eskridge, Committee Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:05am after verification of a quorum, and introductions took place.

Approval of April 8, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Motion: To approve the April 8, 2021 meeting minutes as prepared.
Motion made by: Marcy Patton
Seconded by: Shirley Bowald
Discussion: None
Motion approved.

Approval of 2022 Meeting Schedule

Motion: To approve the 2022 meeting schedule as prepared.
Motion made by: Troy Rhoades
Seconded by: Ed Emerick
Discussion: None
Motion approved.

Committee Membership Updates

Erich Offenburg, Executive Director of the Columbiana Area Chamber of Commerce, is an Area 17 WDB member and would like to join the committee.

Motion: To appoint Erich Offenburg as a committee member.
Motion made by: Troy Rhoades
Seconded by: Shirley Bowald
Discussion: None
Motion approved.

Discussion: COVID's Impact on the Workforce and Strategies to Overcome Barriers

Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) offers free, ongoing trainings related to the Americans with Disabilities Act Title I, which are eligible for CEUs for HR managers. A recent training discussed COVID-19 and accommodations in the workplace. Aside from the crisis of the pandemic, there is also a crisis in the workforce. Employers are finding it extremely difficult to fill their positions, with many needing to decrease their operations. Discussion to identify resources that may address employers' need for individuals to return to work was held.

Some employers may be more open to being a "second-chance" employer, which considers ex-offenders and those in recovery for employment. Through the opioid grant, the business services team has shared information, such as the Ohio Chamber of Commerce Working Partners information, which provides

training to help employers gain a better understanding about individuals in recovery. The OMJ website also has resource section for “recently restored” individuals. ITAs and OJTs can also help their employability.

Employers have also shown more willingness to make changes and hire individuals with disabilities, however, hiring individuals with disabilities requires support, and positions in behavioral health are also going unfilled. Many individuals are changing career fields. Other reasons for jobs going unfilled in the area can be attributed to the aging population and early retirements, limited daycare options, the opioid epidemic, and individuals adjusting their lifestyles until it becomes safer to work. Overall, the area has been experiencing a decrease in population which will continue to contribute to the shrinking labor force.

Businesses have also closed their brick and mortar locations, allowing employees to work from home permanently. This would be a good opportunity for individuals with disabilities, however, most of these positions are full-time and still require support. Assessments for individuals with disabilities are completed and if appropriate, they can be placed in competitive integrated employment.

The suggestion was made for the committee to prepare recommendations for local and regional leaders regarding what is needed to address the workforce issues in the area. Businesses and economic development entities also have influence to make an impact with government leaders. Factors such as immigration policy and housing were discussed.

Windmills training offered through OOD is also available free to employer to educate them about the opportunities and benefits that can be gained through hiring individuals with disabilities. Information about the Windmills training can be distributed through the WDB, chamber events, or other business-related functions. Testimonials and success stories from employers and participants can also be shared. Individuals with disabilities is a valuable population that can be recruited to fill positions.

Youngstown OOD – NDEAM Virtual Hiring Event October 21st

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). OOD is hosting a virtual hiring event locally. Employers include: AVI, Giant Eagle, Panera, PNC, Synchrony, and Meijer. Qualified candidates will be scheduled for virtual interviews.

DOL Opioid Grant Update

Opioid Grant 3, which can serve dislocated workers and long-term unemployed in Mahoning and Columbiana counties, was extended and is now scheduled to end on March 31, 2022. The grant can assist individuals impacted by the opioid epidemic by providing services, training funds for occupations in recovery services, and to encourage employers to become recovery-friendly workplaces. 97 individuals were served under the grant, with 60 provided with tuition assistance for job training. New quarter data will be available later this month. The majority of training funded was in nursing.

RETAIN Grant Update

Ohio was one of five states selected to participate in Phase II of the RETAIN grant. \$18.8 million will be awarded to expand the RETAIN project into the Cincinnati and Toledo areas. The return-to-work/stay-at-work strategy for employed individuals who were injured off-the job will remain the same as Phase 1 – a liaison will work with employers on adaptations that can allow injured workers remain employed. The area is expected to serve 424 enrollees over the course of the project, which will run through March 2025. A 3-day virtual training is scheduled with all 5 states in November.

Member Updates

No additional member updates at this time.

Other Business/Next Steps

Guest Invite Ideas – Guest ideas continue to be requested, and suggestions can be forwarded to Brian for consideration. Guest ideas can be previous participants or representatives from other agencies.

Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned at 10:40am.