

**WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD**  
**Priority Populations Committee Meeting Minutes**  
**October 12, 2017 @ 3:00pm**  
**SC Works Clemson Comprehensive Center, Large Conference Room**

**Members Present**

Lisa Gillespie, Chair                      Edgar Brown                      Pam Cobb                      Chris Sparrow

**Members Absent:**

Billy Gibson                      Pat Pruitt                      Susan Stockton

**Staff Present:**

Windy Graham                      Jennifer Kelly

**Guests Present:**

Karen Hamrick                      Sherry Harris                      Zach Nickerson

**I. Welcome and Introductions**

Chair Lisa Gillespie officially called the meeting to order at 3:01pm welcoming everyone in attendance and announced the meeting being recorded for processing of minutes. Introductions were made of everyone in attendance.

**II. Approval of 8/10/17 Meeting Minutes**

The minutes from the 8/10/17 meeting were emailed to committee members and included in the meeting packet. Chair Gillespie called for corrections/amendments to the minutes or a motion to approve.

**ACTION TAKEN: Edgar Brown made a motion to approve the minutes, seconded by Chris Sparrow. The motion carried unanimously.**

**III. Veterans Affairs, Pickens County**

Chair Gillespie introduced the guest speaker, Sherry Harris, Veterans Affairs Officer for Pickens County.

Ms. Harris shared her background. She served 16 years in the Army during Desert Storm and 9/11, and retired from Clemson University after 31 ½ years. Her initial goal was to serve 25 years in the Army; however, physical concerns contributed to her leaving military service to pursue other careers. Ms. Harris stated she received assistance through Susan Stockton, SC Works Veterans Representative, in achieving a new career with Veterans Affairs.

Veteran Affairs services all types of individuals, including World War II, Vietnam, Korea, Gulf War, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans. The number of Veterans served will probably not go down in the near future as evidenced by current world affairs. Vietnam Veterans seem to be the primary

audience at Veteran Affairs at this time, due to their age and the complications associated with Agent Orange. The second audience is Gulf War Veterans due to the effects of the war on them.

One of the services provided is to assist Veterans with disability compensation. If a Veteran has had an injury, Veterans Affairs representatives will help them throughout the entire process to file a claim for disability. The VA office will try to help them gather the evidence, including medical records from other states, to submit their claim. The goal for the claim is to experience no hiccups.

Some Veterans that come in may be financially struggling. The VA office will make referrals to SC Works if appropriate and will assist the Veteran with filing paperwork for a non-service related pension. The pension will supplement their income. Widows that come in needing assistance may also qualify for a pension.

Veterans may also inquire about healthcare because they don't have insurance. A returning war veteran will automatically be eligible for health care; otherwise Veterans may need to meet income requirements.

The VA also sees a lot of Veterans coming in wanting their ID card. In 2015, Obama passed a law that will issue identification to Veterans showing that they honorably served. At this time, the cards don't exist, but in December, the VA will begin taking applications in order to issue the cards. Ms. Harris stated that details regarding how this card may be used have not been made clear. However, Veterans may show the card in order to get discounts at various retail and dining establishments.

Ms. Graham asked if the ID card may be used in place of the DD-214 form. Ms. Harris stated she does not know if that is the direction the purpose of the card is moving in, details are still vague. It will largely depend on the information presented on the card.

Ms. Graham stated that one benefit a Veteran can receive in Anderson County was license plate tag identifying Veteran status. The limit was two, but has recently been modified to five. Ms. Harris added that some other benefits include tax exemption on their homes and two vehicles.

Ms. Gillespie requested more information on the non-service related pension. Ms. Harris replied that employment can affect the amount of the pension, either decreasing it or taking it away completely. The pension is intended to be for those in a hardship. For example, the disability compensation process can be lengthy, but the pension can offset the financial gap. The VA encourages Veterans to return to work if possible. The pension does not have a time length. Ms. Harris passed out handouts to the group on disability compensation.

For Veterans, particularly Marines, that served at Camp Lejeune during the period of 1957-1987, they are now taking applications for disability compensation. Veterans that served there were exposed to contaminated water from a dry cleaner that had runoff into the water supply, which has now caused health issues for those individuals.

#### **IV. WorkLink's Data**

Chair Gillespie asked Ms. Graham to give an overview of the WorkLink data given in the committee packet. Ms. Graham referred the committee to the WIOA Targeted Population Summary seen on page 2-5 of the committee packet. Ms. Graham stated that this was a summary for the program

year-to-date (July 1, 2017 to September 30, 2017), and shows the individuals served through the WIOA program in Anderson, Oconee, and Pickens County. The data is divided based on various demographics and priority populations, such as those with a disability, race and age. This data also includes Veterans, Transitioning Veterans, and Disabled Veterans, as well as those that are public assistance and low-income individuals.

Ms. Graham also stated that the Community Profile, released by the Labor Market Information Department of SC Department of Employment and Workforce on September 14, 2017, could be found in the packet beginning on page 6. This report explains the characteristics of our region and the unemployment rate. Ms. Graham clarified that when she speaks on the Unemployment Rate and the labor force, this group of individuals are those that are between the ages of 18-64, and not institutionalized. Those that are institutionalized are excluded from the number because they are not available for work.

The report further breaks down the job openings available in the WorkLink region, as well as customer characteristics, commuting patterns. Ms. Graham stated that within the industry data, such as on page 12, the Administrative, Support and Waste Management field looks large because it includes the temporary employees of staffing agencies used at manufacturing companies.

Mr. Brown asked if there was any way to know how many immigrants both registered and not registered are in our area. The work visas only allow workers to work in one area for two years at a time up to ten years. Ms. Graham stated she would ask about this.

Ms. Graham pointed out the commuting patterns and the list of largest employers in the WorkLink area. Ms. Graham clarified that the list of employers is not necessarily ranked by largest to smallest, but listed alphabetically in the packet. However, Anderson Area Medical Center is indeed the largest employer in the WorkLink region at this time. Mr. Sparrow asked what the Upstate Affiliate Organization was. Ms. Graham stated that it was probably the Upstate Staffing Agency.

Ms. Graham reviewed the educational institutions and stated that we have sent individuals to all but one of the schools listed in the packet. She reviewed the four industry clusters and the occupations approved by the Board. She also stated that we review the OJT opportunities in the WorkLink region and will not place anyone on an OJT that did not meet the self-sufficiency wages as set forth by our Board at \$12.32 per hour. Ms. Kelly clarified that the wage is already in effect, but the trainee can start at a lower wage as long as it ends at the \$12.32 per hour by the end of the contract. The goal is to have the person self-sufficient at the end of the training period.

## **V. Other Business**

### *Success Story*

Ms. Graham asked Karen Hamrick, Center Manager, to share a success story with the committee. Mr. Bryce Ware was a participant of Ms. Hamrick's in the Adult WIOA program while she was still a Career Coach. Mr. Ware came into the program in 2016 having worked in the police department,

but wanted to go into the medical field. Mr. Ware has multiple health issues, such as a trach and spina bifida. Mr. Ware is able to drive. Through Career Coaching appointments, he decided on medical billing and coding which would allow him to work from home or in an office. He completed the training and received a certificate, and is waiting to take the national exam. In the meantime, Alyssa Simmons, his new Career Coach, starting working with him and a Business Consultant, and he found a job at Excel Physical Therapists in Clemson. He began work just a couple of weeks ago in their financial services department. This is his first 40 hour per week job. Ms. Hamrick stated that Mr. Ware has been an inspiration, never missing an appointment, and making high grades in his medical and billing classes. She stated that she is proud of him and his successes.

#### *Upcoming Workshop*

Ms. Graham shared a Disability Benefits & Employment Workshop flyer with the group. The event will be at the Anderson SC Works Center in Anderson on Wednesday, November 8 from 1:30-3:30pm. She stated that there were extra flyers available or she could send it to the group via email for distribution. This workshop is being hosted in conjunction with AbleSC and P&A. Those that are just starting their SSI and SSDI, this may benefit them on how work and their disability benefits effect each other. Ms. Graham stated that she has already had several partners conduct an accessibility walk-through to insure those with disabilities would have access to the facility, especially during the workshop.

Ms. Cobb asked whether the workshop was intended to assess the person and then help them get training and find a job. Ms. Graham stated that the purpose of the workshop is to explain SSI and SSDI benefits to those that may be receiving those benefits. Mr. Sparrow added that a big barrier for people receiving SSI and SSDI that they are worried that if they start working and something happens where they are no longer working, that their benefits will be interrupted and have no income coming in. The workshop is aimed at educating people as to what it looks like if they start working and the counselling they can receive. Through AbleSC they have access to Benefits Counselors that will writes up a full report of what the person is receiving as far as benefits and their work history. They then discuss with the participant going forward how much they can earn before they start to lose their benefits. They also encourage individuals to look at Ticket-to-Work. Ms. Graham tagged on in addition to this, Janice Chastain, an SC Works Workforce Consultant, will be speaking at the workshop.

#### *Disability & Employment Awareness Month*

Ms. Graham shared posters in English and Spanish for the Disability & Employment Awareness Month, which is currently taking place in the month of October. Ms. Graham stated that she could send those electronically to any who are interested in posting these or can be printed out via the Department of Labor's ODEP website.

#### *2016 Statistics*

Ms. Graham provided a handout for 2016 Employment Stats by Disability Status for Anderson, Oconee, and Pickens Counties from the American Community Services Fast Facts found at the

Bureau of Labor Statistics website. Ms. Graham stated that the total number of residents in Anderson County is 116,464, and of those, 85,573 makes up the labor force. These are individuals that are not institutionalized and fall between the ages of 16-64. Those that are employed with a disability equal 7,049, and those employed without a disability is 73,519.

Ms. Graham stated that on the second page that the data is broken down more specifically. Those in the disability category fall into one of the following categories: hearing difficulty, vision difficulty, cognitive difficulty, ambulatory difficulty, self-care difficulty, and independent living difficulty. Ms. Graham added that she stapled national disability statistic facts for Labor Force and Unemployment rate for 2017 into the committee folder. Ms. Graham stated that she looked up this data as a result of a presentation she attended the day before. The speaker reported a fact in his presentation that the unemployment rate is so low that we now are fully employed, but he personally disagreed with this statement because the unemployment rate does not include those with disabilities. Ms. Graham referred back to the handout and stated that the unemployment rate for those with disabilities is higher than those without disabilities.

Chair Gillespie said that she was researching similar statistics for the Vocational Rehabilitation Open House that they hosted yesterday in Anderson. One of the things she discovered in regards to ambulatory disabilities is this group is usually 60+ year olds that have physical wear and tear on their bodies, such as with hips and knee replacements. Many of these individuals have worked for many years in manufacturing and as a result of standing on hard surfaces this has caused issues for them and they can no longer work in these types of facilities. Ms. Gillespie stated that if you take the unemployment rate and double it, which will usually be the unemployment rate for those with disabilities. The reason those with Disabilities are not captured is because they are in a group called the U6 unemployment rate. This group is usually the individuals that just give up on finding employment. Ms. Gillespie gave the example of a young lady who spoke at their Open House; she had tried to find work for eight years before being employed. Ms. Gillespie stated that there is a large group of people out there that do want to work, and they are trying to promote awareness on behalf of this group of people.

Ms. Cobb asked if the issue for some individuals receiving disability benefits to find employment is because of the typical 8 hour work shifts required in the manufacturing industry. Ms. Cobb stated that she conducts a lot of the hiring for her company and is willing to look at some part-time for new hires coming in.

Ms. Gillespie responded that one big concern is about disability benefits being stopped, specifically those that need the medical insurance. Making part-time work available would be great opportunities for some of these individuals. Ms. Cobb stated that she is willing to set up four hour slots for someone to work as long as there is someone that can come in to work the next four shift. Ms. Gillespie stated that the workshop is to help elevate the fear of the working and losing benefits. Ms. Harris added that a Veteran that has a disability benefit would not lose it; however, any financial pensions would be reduced or dissolved when they begin working and reach a certain point. Ms. Gillespie stated that benefits counsellors can assist with determining how much an individual can

make without having to pay back dollar for dollar. Mr. Sparrow added that those on SSI and SSDI can work as much as they want without their benefits being affected within the 9 month grace period. Outside of this grace period they will also have a reduction in their check. Those that are interested should come to the workshop because sometimes that have worked and have not taken that into account when calculating their grace period.

Mr. Sparrow also asked Ms. Cobb if her company has made it known to the general public that they are willing to hire individuals with disabilities, do the job postings of the company talk about accommodations and encourage those with disabilities to apply. Ms. Cobb responded that those things are standard hiring practices for her company. Ms. Cobb stated that one primary concern for her is the cost of medical insurance going through the roof. Those that are receiving disability benefits may help her company with health insurance costs because they wish to maintain their current health insurance along with other disability benefits. She further explained that the jobs she has available are easy manual labor jobs, and some slight modifications to the work floor could easily accommodate those with disabilities.

Mr. Sparrow continued by asking if the management has buy-in to hiring those with disabilities, are they aware of the benefits? Some of those things Management should consider would be the turnover right is lower and retention is a lot higher for this group of individuals, absenteeism is a lot lower as well. There are benefits that businesses can take advantage of for hiring those with disabilities. Ms. Cobb didn't think many employers have considered the benefits. She is continuing to work with her employer to consider this option. Ms. Cobb stated that there is also a stay-at-home group of moms that may want to work part-time as well, and these two groups together may be a good avenue to explore for her company hiring for four hour shifts.

Mr. Sparrow stated that at a presentation earlier in the day, the Greenville Chamber of Commerce discussed ex-offenders. The labor pool has shrunk to the point where companies have to investigate other hiring practices, and the ex-offender pool is one of those opportunities where employers may relax their hiring criteria. Ms. Cobb added that if 20 background checks are sent in, maybe only three will pass it. Ms. Graham stated that the ex-offender count for July through September is 22% for the WIOA program. Ms. Cobb asked if it was broken down any further by type of offense; Ms. Graham stated that it's only an aggregate number. Ms. Cobb responded that she is mostly seeing drug offenses. The current hiring practice is not to hire anyone with a felony in the last seven years. Ms. Gillespie stated that Vocational Rehabilitation sees those with backgrounds as well, but there is usually issues like addiction and other things that go along with the background. In 2009 when the economy crashed, many employers put in hiring stipulations for those with a background, but it may be time to take those stipulations out. Ms. Cobb agreed, stating that some of her best employees have been homeless, living in their car because of drug offenses. They have been hired by her company because they have passed outside of the seven year window, and have been dedicated employees because they have been on the other side and appreciate having a job.

Ms. Harris added that a Veteran who is drawing a disability benefit becomes incarcerated for more than 60 days, then their disability stops or is reduced.

*Next Meeting*

Ms. Graham stated that the next meeting is January 11, 2017 at 3pm at the Clemson SC Works Center.

**VI. Adjourn**

Chair Gillespie called to adjourn the meeting at 4:06pm. Chris Sparrow seconded. Meeting adjourned.

*Respectfully submitted by: Jennifer Kelly*