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2015
**EXCELLENCE IN
INNOVATION**
Awards Program

recognizes

Wilson County Social Services

for development and implementation of the

Ticket to Work Job Fair

Team Members:

**Mary Mallory, Becky Stottlemyre,
and Dale Sauls**

LGFCU Excellence in Innovation Award Project Evaluation

Project Number	IGC-2
Title of Program	Ticket to Work Job Fair
Program Category	Intergovernmental Collaboration
Submission Date	6/5/2015 9:17:00 AM
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Implementation Date	5/14/2014
FLSA Designation	Both (if applicable to a team)
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Description of Productivity Improvement

Wilson County Department of Social Services responded to employer feedback and made significant changes to our 14th annual Greater Wilson Area Job Fair. Many employers have experienced difficulties finding qualified job seekers to fill vacant positions. A typical job fair usually results in an overwhelming number of job seekers, who may or may not be work-ready. Instead of translating to a successful model of the job seeker finding employment and the employer being satisfied that jobs are being filled with qualified applicants, there was frustration on the part of the serious job seeker and on the employer. The overwhelming crush of people made it difficult to sort through and find the qualified applicants. The "Ticket to Work" Job Fair matched qualified job seekers with employers who had jobs to fill. The "Ticket to Work" Job Fair benefits those seeking employment and employers, utilizing a pre-qualification process to ensure that job seekers had the minimum qualifications of a high school diploma or GED, Career Readiness Certificate, certification through an Employment Readiness program, positive attitude, long-term job experience, a college diploma or certification.

The concept of pre-qualification met a need that employers had expressed to multiple community agencies providing employment services to those who are unemployed or underemployed. Wilson County DSS, through a collaborative process with various community stakeholders thoroughly researched this concept and believed that this would meet the needs of job seekers and employers. The Job Fair Planning Committee stakeholders were intent on achieving a positive experience for all involved. The "Ticket to Work" concept is a culture shift and requires commitment, support and buy-in from community stakeholders. Job seekers received a ticket to participate in the Job Fair, after being pre-qualified by a community partner. The planning process took time and investment from the community. Community stakeholders contributing to this process included: Veterans Residential Services, NC Vocational Rehabilitation, and Upper Coastal Plains Area Agency on Aging, NC WORKS, Diversified Opportunities, Wilson Community College and Barton College.

For those who did not meet the pre-qualification process, resources were made available to improve their employability and help them find work. The Department of Labor's NC Job link mobile unit was on site with computers and Internet access for job seekers to register for NCWORKS, complete job applications and to print and copy resumes. Community resource booths were also available to assist job seekers. Approximately 300 people attended the event, held at the Wilson County Agricultural Center in May 2014. Feedback from employers and job seekers was overwhelmingly positive.

Description of why this project was initiated

Wilson County created a targeted Job Fair opportunity based on responses from both job seekers and employers who were frustrated by the number of participants at traditional job fairs who were not work ready. A traditional job fair typically measures success by a large number of attendees and employers participating in the fair. However, we didn't have a direct correlation between large numbers of job seekers equating to large numbers of job placements. The Ticket to Work Job Fair requires pre-screening which culls the number of participants to those who meet minimum criteria and are seriously interested in employment. This is of benefit to employers and job seekers. The traditional job fair had become a churning mass of participants who inadvertently contributed to furthering stereotypes about those who are out of work; many weren't dressed appropriately, they didn't have minimum education requirements, had no work experience, and did not take job searching seriously. Greater Wilson Job Fairs before the "Ticket to Work" concept had averaged over 1,000 attendees from 2009-2012. This

became a stress on staff to man the event, finding suitable locations in the community that were affordable and fire code compliant. Employer participation dropped from a high of 50 employers to 25 during that same time period. WCDSS asked employers for input on their thoughts on the fair. One employer shared that the only reason they attended previous fairs was civic responsibility. They went on to say that the larger fairs are taxing on their staff and resources due to non serious job seekers. The ideas for the "Ticket to Work" came out of a Job Fair committee meeting. When the idea was presented to employers they were interested in how it would work and agreed to attend. Through prequalification/screening, we are able to present those who are truly work-ready and we are able to use their time and the time of the employers productively.

Quantifiable results (sustainability, cost savings, cost avoidance and/or a higher level of service).

Indication of what resources were used and what was done with any accrued time savings

The feedback we received from job seekers and employers has been overwhelmingly positive and we held another Ticket to Work Job Fair in 2015 with investment from community partners. We believe we are offering a higher level of service which is being delivered at the same cost. We had 330 participants who met the pre-screening qualifications and participated in the Ticket to Work Fair. Twenty-five employers, with a total of 212 job openings participated. Post Job Fair Employer surveys (23 out of 25 employers were completed) showed 100% like the "Ticket to Work" concept. Also, a hiring survey was sent out to all employers 3 months after the fair. Ten of twenty-five employers responded. Of the responses, 60% said that the Ticket to Work Job Fair met their hiring needs. Of the respondents, 42% made hires directly from the Job Fair with 14% reporting they were still in the hiring process with fair attendees. Most employers have shared in conversation that they do not track hires from job fairs, but base success on the job seekers that they meet and how prepared they are at the fair. Ticket to Work planning committee members are invested in this process and we have sustained widespread community involvement in the planning and implementation of this event. In terms of actual expenses, we have been able to decrease our operational budget from an excess of \$1,200 to \$250 through generous community support with regard to venue and strategic planning with input from varied community partners. There is a shared ownership among planning committee members with regard to the Ticket to Work Job Fair, evidenced by donations from community partners. It is our belief we are offering a higher level of service that meets the needs of the job-seeker, employer, and the community at-large.

Other descriptive information

The Ticket to Work Job Fair does not turn attendees away who didn't complete the pre-screening process. Staff members are available to assist with the NC Works registration process which helps determine job readiness. If the attendee is job ready, they participate in the Fair with employers. If the attendee is not job ready, there are community service providers who offer a vast array of targeted services, which include mental health/developmental disabilities/substance abuse services, GED and Adult High School Services, and Job Training services.

The Ticket to Work Job Fair requires that the employers have current positions to fill. Many employers conduct interviews on-site during the Ticket to Work Job Fair. Employer participation for this Fair has

increased, as employers have an increased confidence level that attendees will be job ready, as they are pre-screened and only qualified job seekers receive a ticket to the Job Fair. Serious job-seekers are pleased with the Ticket to Work Job Fair, as there are jobs to be offered, and there is not an overwhelming sea of attendees who are clearly not job ready. The mission of Wilson County Department of Social Services is the promotion of safety, self-determination and self-sufficiency for families, children and adults through the delivery of services in a professional and caring manner. The Ticket to Work Job Fair is an example of innovative programming that better meets the needs of all involved in a creative manner, with an emphasis on offering a specialized, higher level of service at a lower cost.