

**Central Western Maine Workforce Development Board
Operations Committee Minutes
March 13, 2024**

Approved by Operations
Committee

April 10, 2024

Board Members Present: Cathy Witherspoon, Chair; Razell Ward, Secretary; Laurie Glidden, At-Large Member; Grant Provost, Chair of Recruitment; Chris Winstead, Treasurer & Chair of Resources

Others Present: Erin Benson, Executive Director; Carrie Parker, Administrative Assistant; Patti Saarinen, EMDC Director of Workforce Services

Call to Order

Cathy Witherspoon called the meeting to order at 8:34am.

Review and Approve Last Meeting Minutes

VOTED: To approve February 14, 2024, meeting minutes.

Motion: Laurie Glidden **Second:** Razell Ward **Vote:** All present in favor

Provider Update –Patti Saarinen

Enrollments:

<u>WIOA Title</u>	<u>Planned for 3rd Qtr.</u>	<u>Actual (as of 3-11-24)</u>
Adult	109	91
Dis. Wkr.	43	45
Youth (In school)	25	13
Youth (Out of School)	105	53
QUEST	145	64

Adult and Youth enrollment numbers continue to be low although we had an uptick in Adult enrollments this past month. We are getting some referrals from MEIRS and WMCA, 2 of the community-based organizations that CWM board has contracts with.

There were some layoffs in our 5-counties; Ware Butler, Waterville: 5; Abbott in Westbrook with up to 150, but not confirmed, some people in Androscoggin; Clean Cut Cleaning in Bethel: 6 temporary; Androscoggin Bank: 1; Gagne Foods: 4; and Consolidated Communications: 12 statewide. We have sent staff to all the scheduled Rapid Response sessions.

So far this quarter, Jan 1st – Mar. 31st, we’ve had 267 referrals of which 47 were youth specific and 15 were QUEST. We had 53 new registrations of which 33 were Adult, 10 were Dislocated, 6 were QUEST, and 4 were Youth.

Many of the referrals we receive are from people who do not follow through with their appointments. To engage people quickly and avoid confusion due to multiple “hand-offs,” we have restructured our

referral process. Once people contact EMDC, they are referred directly to a workforce development specialist who will work with them from that point on. We are eliminating the virtual information sessions and replacing them with a video that people can watch if they wish (not mandatory).

QUEST Grant:

We are at 44% of our QUEST enrollments with 15 new QUEST referrals and 6 registrations so far this quarter. As stated above, many referrals qualify for both QUEST and Adult, and we try to determine which program will serve them best.

Please see Other News for a list of places staff have visited this past month; many of these have possible QUEST referrals.

Employer Projects:

Foundation/PSS/CNA Healthcare Pathway with Lewiston Adult Education; this is registered apprenticeship training. New cohort started 8/21/23. EMDC is supporting 12 students: 6 Adult, 4 QUEST, 1 DW, 1 OSY.

Update: gearing up for another round.

Lewiston Adult Education. Teller training started 12/14/23 – 4/15/24. EMDC supports 5 students: 4 Quest, 1 adult.

January 23 – Spruce Mountain CCMA. EMDC is supporting 6 people: 4 Adult, 2 Quest. All have been registered and enrolled in WIOA.

January 23 – Oxford Hills CDL training. EMDC is funding 4 people: 1 OSY, 3 Adult. Two of the adults are currently working at Schiavi's. The employer has agreed to pay for half of the tuition cost. Full tuition is \$5700.00. Schiavi will pay \$2850.00.

February 12 – Oxford Hills CDL-A Daytime class; 4 students: 3 Adult and 1 Youth. Several of these students had tuition paid in part or full by their current employers.

March 5, 2024 - Region 9 CNA training; tuition is being covered by other funding. We offered assistance with supportive services but did not receive referrals in time for enrollment.

Upcoming/In Discussion:

Certified Nursing Assistant training with Oxford Hills/Nezinscot Adult Education.

Possible construction cohort with Lewiston Adult Education. The Adult Education office and Strengthen LA have potential candidates.

Certified Nursing Assistant training with Skowhegan Adult Education.

Meeting with CMH, Lewiston Adult Education, MCCS, and MAP to explore a Surgical Tech program. There are two pathways; one is a short term, immediate solution in which the MedCerts curriculum is used to support internal candidates and facilitators; there is a proposal moving forward to CMH senior leadership team in the hopes to get something started with just a couple of trainees. The second is to work on a long-term strategy for an apprenticeship pathway.

Completed:

Pre-apprenticeship with AFL-CIO ended on 2/15/24. We enrolled 2 students who will hopefully go on to apprenticeship; 1 Adult and 1 Quest.

CDL Oxford Hills started on 10/03/23. EMDC is supporting 3 students for this training: 1 DW, 1 OSY, 1 Adult. One of the 3 is only receiving support services (his tuition was paid for by CSSP).

Update 1/10/24 – One person has successfully passed this training (Adult). The other 2 are still working on it.

Other News:

Attended the Oxford Hills Chamber of Commerce Education & Training committee first employer seminar on Mental Health in the Workplace on 3/7/24.

Staff attended Good Health is Good Business and Job Quality Academy training on 2/15/24.

Started an OJT with Tree Street Youth on 3/11/24.

Presented to Vocational Rehabilitation staff in Augusta regarding WIOA services on 2/15/24.

Met with Jeff Tardiff from Rumford Group Homes, on 2/15/24, regarding resources for people without housing.

Met with the City of Auburn and JMG to discuss helping individuals obtain employment through a possible Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) internship. They reached out to EMDC to see about financial assistance. 2/20/24

Assisted with mock interviews for students at Dirigo High School on 2/14/24.

Met with the JMG Rep and Director of Foster Tech in Farmington on how EMDC could help Youth through WIOA services on 2/16/24.

Visited Lawrence Adult Ed to get information on programs and connect with staff on 2/26/24.

Discussed Work Experience, enrollment after High School, OSY and Children's Cabinet with JMG staff at Rumford HS on 2/26/24.

Met with Community Concepts staff in the Farmington area to provide information on WIOA services on 2/29/24.

Met with the Peer Workforce Navigator Project coordinator and the Community Organizing Alliance about a youth resource fair on 3/4/24.

Chris asked Patti if she had spoken to Elizabeth at the community college about their spending and areas that may be helpful in doing that. Patti confirmed that both her and Erin had spoken with Elizabeth already. Chris stated that he believes anyone who is qualified MJRP funds as unemployed or under employed and to have this flagged in potential referrals for any wrap around supports available. Erin has had ongoing conversations around this topic and the potential for inclusion in the information sessions

that are mandatory for anyone joining these courses. Erin and a few of the EMDC staff were able to connect via a recent ZOOM session and will join future sessions.

Patti and Erin are also meeting with Sandy Goss at CMCC, who is very familiar with WIOA, to discuss the possibility of partnering with them.

Chris also mentioned the JMG summer classes that will begin shortly at all campuses that will include both day and residential programs and feels it would be a good chance for Patti and her staff to connect with the youth enrolled in those courses. He will ask JMG how best to access resources for these participants since he knows that there will be transportation needs that EMDC can assist with funding.

Cathy told Patti that she appreciates the reduction in steps that are needed in the referral process as this tends to always be a barrier for people when signing up for services. She has found that it is easier to have organizations come to staff for enrollment needs versus staff enrolling themselves due to cumbersome processes with enrollment and referral.

She also told Patti that she was very happy to read in the previous minutes all the success with the CNA and CDL programs. It is wonderful to continue to hear the success of these programs and how they are benefiting the communities and those participating. Patti stated that the short-term training courses are very popular, and they continue to be successful. Erin said that part of the success of these programs is constantly reminding people of the assistance that is provided for equipment and employment needs that other courses do not offer. She recently spoke with Jeremy Lehan to remind him that the KVCC courses are being offered free of charge, however the students will need assistance with equipment and other employment needs that we can partner to provide. Chris stated that with a lot of people losing their MJRP funding by the end of the year, building these partnerships will be vital moving forward to ensure these needs are met for success with these types of courses.

Board membership Update

Erin mentioned at the last meeting that she spoke with Doug Cyr from Irving Woodlands in Dixfield. She emailed Doug and Billy again last week regarding joining the board and has not heard back yet. She will continue to reach out and will update everyone once she has any new information.

There is a new board member joining the board meeting in April, Chris Waite. Susan Corbett from the National Digital Equity Center introduced Erin and Chris to each other. Chris owns his own company subcontracting for an ISP laying the groundwork for broadband. The conversations began because trainings that Chris needed for his employees was much longer than necessary and he was looking into shorter trainings that worked better for his employee needs. Chris also joined the Maine Connectivity Authority as well as CWMWDB.

Financial Update

Sara was not present at the meeting due to the needs she is attending to regarding continuing USDOL monitoring. Erin gave a brief statement that there are no concerns regarding the budget or any overspending at this time. Chris confirmed that the bank accounts look good as well from documents that he has seen and signed. Sara will give a full financial update at the next meeting in April.

Updates

USDOL Monitoring:

Erin shared her screen to show the USDOL monitoring report that was received. The concern around the CBO grant funding that was mentioned previously was not listed in the final report. Erin did not expect it to be reported, but wanted to mention that it was not since it was discussed in recent meetings.

There were two concerns listed in the final report, one is noncompliance with competitive procurement policies. The issue of concern is the lack of an end date within the contract for services with either Sara or EMDC. There is no routine timeframe for putting the contract for services out to bid as with auditing which goes out to bid every five years. Going out to bid doesn't mean that a new person needs to be hired, it simply puts the contract out there.

Erin gathered all the language out of the code of federal regulations for procurement and went through it with our financial manual to see what adjustments may need to be made and then it will need to be sent out for bid. This does not mean that Sara cannot be contracted for services again, the contract will need an end date for routine bidding every five years for both Sara and EMDC. This will mean performing this piece in 2025 for the WIOA grants.

The second concern was around review of the files and the contained compliance deficiencies, this is a concern with EMDC. Erin asked Kim Moore to have the participants IDs sent to her to ensure that these concerns are from current participants and not from before current staff was employed before 2022. Rebecca Bryant reviewed all PY22 files, and she did not have any concerns within them for documentation of those files. Once we receive the participant IDs, we can review those files and respond.

A response to the concerns is due by March 20th that states what steps are being taken around fixing the concerns mentioned in the report. Erin will send out the response and forward it to everyone for discussion at the next meeting.

MOU/IFA:

Erin finally got the last person to agree to the extension and she sent out an email to all non-residents of the one-stop located at the Lewiston Career Center. The board agreed to pitch in \$5,000 toward the overall costs of the one-stop center, which will leave approximately \$326.00 for each participant annually.

Erin sent an email to the required partners regarding the need for renegotiation the IFA. The email included possible meeting dates and times to start this process.

The MOU was extended to 2025 and a new IFA is needed by July 1, 2024, and are well on the way of accomplishing that goal.

NAWB Conference:

Laurie Glidden and Erin will be attending the NAWB conference in Washington DC March 23rd-26th. Erin is looking forward to Laurie's attendance and feedback to the board on the conference. Per the agenda a lot of discussion is planned around reauthorization from information that came out of the House and went to the Senate suggesting 50% of funding go to training. This will be discussed across the board and not in a chosen session so that all participants at the conference will get to hear the discussion. Due to this being an election year Erin does not expect to hear anything on this until at least 2025. Chris stated that training was prioritized due to a lot of federal funding opportunities coming out like DOE and DOL that are focusing training from one of the Biden/Harris priorities.

Erin mentioned that in her experience individuals with barriers take longer to complete training and need a lot of encouragement to keep them engaged. This work is done daily by the workforce development specialists and when it is left to the clients many times there is a significant decline in successful completion.

ARPA Proposal 2:

Erin sent out the proposal that she put together that focused on Fit First and the virtual reality project. The idea behind the proposal is that individuals will be garnered through the marketing campaign and then put through the assessment based on behavioral characteristics and provide the virtual headsets for the introduction into what employment in different areas will look like and lead them into a pathway that works for them. There is still approximately \$95,000 to assist with transportation and other needs.

Upon a request to focus more on transportation Erin met with Go Maine and partnering programs working with employers on getting employees to work using a van program that is currently in place. This program works with Enterprise and AVR on renting minivans for \$1,300 for 9 vans either associated with companies or in a specific area. The program rents a van to an employee who transports and can also use the van for personal miles free of charge.

Erin met with GoMaine and AVR to ensure that there would be no liability on the Board, which there would not be, and what the program details would be. The \$1,300 would provide the van and no mileage charges, insurance and maintenance including snow tires, but would not include fuel costs. This would provide nine vans carrying at least four employees per van for 18 months of transportation to the work site. This provides both employees with time to either purchase transportation on their own or form carpools with other employees of the company. It also gives employers the opportunity to create carpools or transportation programs on their own that would benefit employee stability in the workplace.

Erin is continuing to meet with companies throughout the week to discuss setting up this transportation program and the benefits of companies' participation. She will update more on the proposal at the next meeting. Chris mentioned Erin to reach out to Joy Gould to discuss regions that are having challenges and may be able to assist in finding drivers in those areas. She was discussing with someone about wanting to hire from the correctional facility but cannot be to transportation, this opened the discussion on utilizing individuals within the area and partnering with other businesses on employee ride sharing. Chris stated that there is currently a program in southern Maine that does transport individuals from the

correctional facility to employers and that upon their release they continue employment which has been beneficial to local businesses. For someone to drive the vans they would need to fulfill certain requirements for liability which Erin discussed and will need to be taken into consideration.

Marketing Campaign:

The marketing campaign was sent out to various organizations and some questions were sent back to us which were answered and are posted on the CWMWDB website. Proposals are due by Friday, March 15th. Erin had forgotten to put a certificate along with it and after being emailed about it she added it online yesterday and resent it to everyone.

Open Discussion/Any New Business

Chris stated that transportation piece is something that he is passionate about and has been interested in working in economic development. He asked about funding sources and Erin let him know that the funding is part of the ARPA grant. Since the DOT ran out of funding the funds are being used out of part of the \$500,000 that was set aside through ARPA for each of the three boards.

Cathy stated that Boyne hires drivers for a transportation program with the company and it is successful so far. Sugar Loaf recently received grant funding and is purchasing vehicles for a transportation program akin to Sunday Rivers. Boyne has always had a transportation program due to their hiring of international employees who need that assistance with employment as well as regional needs.

Adjourn

Cathy Witherspoon adjourned the meeting at 9:15am.

At this time CWMWDB staff left the meeting so that committee members could discuss the Executive Director evaluation that was completed during the previous months. Cathy will schedule a time with Erin to discuss the evaluation review directly at another time.

Next meeting: Wednesday, April 10, 2024, 8:30am-9:30am via ZOOM

Next full board meeting: Thursday, April 25, 2024, 8:30am-10:30am via ZOOM