

## Conference Reviews: National Association for Workforce Development Professionals & Pennsylvania Workforce Development Association

In May, Chrissie Klinger, Workforce Development Project staff, attended the National Association for Workforce Development Professionals (NAWDP) conference in San Antonio, TX and the Pennsylvania Workforce Development Association (PAWDA) conference in Hershey, PA. Both conferences shed light on how the low unemployment rate, large number of retirees, and worker shortage are creating opportunities for adults who typically have been overlooked by employers in the past. Adults with criminal records, English language learners, and individuals with low socioeconomic status are sometimes the hardest to serve in adult education. Both conferences provided promising practices to help individuals transition to short-term training or entry-level employment that could lead to jobs that pay family-sustaining wages.

Darrell “Coach D” Andrews spoke at both conferences and shared his story of growing up in poverty and watching his single mother of two work through various barriers to obtain her high school equivalency diploma, and eventually obtain self-sustaining employment in the airline industry. Her perseverance in pursuing educational opportunities created a chain reaction for generations to come. Andrews went on to obtain a college degree and currently has two children enrolled in college. Andrews emphasized the importance of multiple workforce partners (adult education, human services, employment-search services, and non-profit organizations) collaborating and strategically using resources to help individuals move out of poverty.

A reentry pre-conference session at the NAWDP conference identified four pillars of successful reentry programming: recruitment, partnerships, case management, and retention. Presenters suggested tracking more data than only what may be required during case management. For example, collecting additional data related to specific supports received by a learner or reasons for leaving a program may improve recruitment strategies, strengthen partnerships, and lead to better retention. In Pennsylvania, the [Career Pathways Student Report](#) is a great tool to capture data that may not be reported but may be helpful to overall program improvement. Helping individuals improve critical thinking skills was another area that could lead to better retention rates since adults can think through problems more systematically and learn how to plan ahead and anticipate

possible solutions and outcomes to situations before they arise. The *Reentry Resources and Best Practices for Working with Ex-Offenders* course offered by Chrissie Klinger, Certified Offender Workforce Development Specialist, includes tools and resources related to helping reentrants improve critical thinking skills. The course will be offered in August 2019 in the Lehigh Valley and again in the spring of 2020 (location to be determined).

Another session at the NAWDP conference was focused on the challenges of serving TANF and SNAP recipients in rural areas of Texas. Through collaborative partnerships with the Economic Development Corporation, local community college, Chamber of Commerce, and other non-profit organizations several different locations were established to provide a multitude of services (education, workforce preparation, resume services, etc..) to prepare individuals for the workforce. In addition to helping individuals obtain a high school equivalency credential, obtaining a WorkKeys credential was an important component of the program since many of the individuals had limited or non-existent prior work experience. Small and large employers were involved and helped identify the education and training needs for participants. Employers also provided job placement for individuals upon completion of the program.

At the PAWDA conference, Chrissie Klinger led a panel presentation titled, *Braiding Funding to Help Reentrants Succeed in the Workforce* with Tri-County OIC and Goodwill of Southern Alleghenies and their local partners. KayLynn Hamilton led a panel presentation around Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education with Delaware County Literacy Council and District 1199c Training and Upgrading Fund. All panel participants shared how they overcame struggles to provide services for their respective populations. Both panel sessions highlighted the importance of having [multiple partners at the table](#), common objectives, and everyone having "skin in the game" to help learners find success both inside and outside of the classroom. For more information on working collaboratively with partners to improve retention and outcomes, please contact KayLynn (klh267@psu.edu) or Chrissie (cok5111@psu.edu).