Responding to a Crisis: COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic is a public health and economic crisis that has impacted the world, and demands both a global and local response to mitigate. In Rural Northern California, partners in the Government, Private, and Nonprofit sectors have acted quickly to suppress the effects of the pandemic on our community health, regional economy, and local workforce. Alliance for Workforce Development is doing our part by providing crucial services, information, and resources to impacted workers and employers.

On March 19, 2020 California Governor Gavin Newsom issued a Stay at Home Order for all Californians as a measure to curb the spread of the Novel Coronavirus. While employers deemed “essential services” were permitted to remain open, the vast majority of worksites were forced to implement systems that allowed workers to work remotely, or close operations entirely. AFWD has responded by providing Rapid Response services to businesses and employees. These services consolidate information and programs from the State EDD, the Federal Department of Labor, and the Small Business Administration to provide a comprehensive emergency remediation for COVID-19 affected worksites. Using technology tools like web conferencing and web linked document sharing, we are able to safely provide employers and workers the tools and information they need to navigate temporary layoffs and furloughs.

We have updated our website, www.afwd.org, with live links to valuable services for businesses and workers impacted by COVID-19. We have increased the number of staff devoted to our website chat feature, so that customers can communicate with a live Resource Specialist regarding EDD applications, SBA business loans, and other relief programs. We are providing the public with job leads from critical sector employers who are staffing up in response to the crisis. We are utilizing social media to provide the latest information from federal, state and local agencies to our sizeable digital audience.

AFWD is committed to helping our partner businesses and workforce customers navigate this challenging time. By providing access to the resources and information our community needs we will continue to ensure that businesses and workers in Nevada, Butte, Plumas, Lassen, Modoc, and Sierra counties have access to the resources they need to weather this crisis.
College and Transfer Center

Alliance for Workforce Development, Inc. (AFWD) staff were invited to be guest speakers for the newly established Career and Transfer Center at Lassen Community College. Students and college staff were on hand to learn about the services that AFWD can provide and how the college collaborates with AFWD to assist students in training programs.

Students were able to ask questions regarding the current employment status in Lassen County and learn about upcoming events. They also learned that AFWD can act as a helpful extension to their college experience.

After obtaining an education, AFWD can help them to find employment in their field of study by sometimes assisting with On-the-Job training opportunities. Labor market information, work readiness workshops and expert advice from our Career Staff are additional services that are offered and are beneficial to students. AFWD values the partnership that it has with Lassen Community College and the combined services we can provide our community.
Every ten years the U.S Census Bureau attempts to count every person in the United States. This critical count determines how federal funds are allocated to communities, how and where infrastructure improvements are made, and even how many representatives a state has in Congress. Performing a complete census can be particularly difficult in regions like Rural Northern California, as communities are often geographically remote, and many people live in isolated homes. One formidable task has been to recruit the large number of Census Workers required to count persons and households in Rural Plumas, Lassen, Modoc and Sierra counties. According to U.S. Census press releases in late 2019, Rural Northern California census branches were behind in terms of recruiting enough Census Workers in these areas to begin the count in April.

Census Recruiters contacted Alliance for Workforce Development, Inc. (AFWD) offices in Plumas, Lassen, Modoc, and Sierra counties for assistance. AFWD Business Service staff met with Census Recruiters to assess how they could help recruit local citizens to become Census Workers. Census Recruiters prepared each AFWD office with flyers showing prospective candidates how to apply for positions online. AFWD staff also hosted Census Recruiters in their offices. The Recruiters spent several days talking with walk-in job seekers, answering questions, and helping them complete applications. AFWD staff assisted these efforts by directing job seekers to the Recruiter stations and facilitating introductions between walk-in customers and Census Recruiters.

Johnny Reynolds, 2020 Census Recruiter for Lassen and Plumas County remarked, “It has been wonderful to work with the staff at these offices in Quincy and Susanville. The exposure (to job seekers) is so amazing. With AFWD’s help we far exceeded what was expected. We were able to meet or exceed our expectations and numbers.”

The Census will provide electronic counting devices and training for newly hired Census Workers. Any U.S. Citizen over the age of 18 is eligible to apply for Census work. While training is available, candidates must be able to use a cell phone. Background clearance is required for employment, but justice involvement does not disqualify an individual to work as a Census Employee. These positions are temporary, and employees can expect 6-8 weeks of work. The positions pay well and can be done on a flexible schedule. AFWD is happy to say that several of clients who applied in our One Stop Offices in Plumas, Lassen, Sierra, and Modoc counties are now employed as Census Workers, taking part in this important American institution.
Partnership with Transitions to Effect Change

America’s Job Centers are a network of nearly 3,300 federally funded workforce development centers across the United States. Written into the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA), these networks of career centers empower individuals to gain meaningful employment, and for incarcerated individuals, getting out of prison and finding gainful employment is paramount on their mind. In fact, a 2011 study of the formally incarcerated found that employment was the single most important factor in decreasing recidivism. Mark T. Berg and Beth M. Huebner, “Reentry and the Ties that Bind: An Examination of Social Ties, Employment, and Recidivism, Justice Quarterly (28), 2011: 382-410.

The Prison to Employment Coordinator and staff in Lassen County at Alliance for Workforce Development, Inc. (AFWD) are trying to assist by bringing services to inmate prior to being released via California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation’s Transitions Program. The Transitions Program offers participants employability and money management skills to prepare for successful reentry into their communities. The curriculum is designed to teach job readiness and job search skills needed for today’s competitive job market. It includes practical and strategic information, hands on activities, individual and team exercises, role playing, and motivational information for encouragement.

Teaming up with California Correctional Center and High Desert State Prison’s Transitions Program, staff have been able to provide an overview of services that are available to them at America’s Job Centers when they get out. The response has been overwhelming. The inmates are so appreciative to know that there are people out there that are willing to help. In fact, according to one inmate, “People shouldn’t be afraid of me getting out. I’m more afraid of them than they should be of me.” Many inmates echoed this statement of uncertainty. Being removed from society, even for a short period, can detach them from taking the necessary steps that they need to take to gain employment.

Recently, staff participated in mock interviews. The inmates had gone through an extensive training prior to the interviews and wanted constructive feedback. All of them took the process seriously and did well. Staff gave them constructive feedback and tips on ways to improve.

The partnership between AFWD and the Transitions Program at the prisons has been valuable in effecting a positive change in the lives of these individuals. Helping them to be successful when they get out impacts all of us. Decreasing crime is a societal issue and we are proud to do our part.
They say Generation Z will change the workplace because they yearn for human interaction at work, they desire work/life balance, they appreciate frequent work feedback, and they view failure as an opportunity to learn.¹ It is definitely evident that Lassen AFWD Youth participant Trystin Jensen is the epiphone of “Gen-Z”.

In December, AFWD was contacted by Lassen County Department of Transportation/Public Works. They were looking for some temporary assistance in their Roads Department – no experience necessary, they were willing to train. A conversation ensued regarding Youth Internships. Trystin’s resume was one of two given to the county. He interviewed with department personnel and they immediately liked him. Trystin is a personable, empathetic young man who had never held a job before. He wants to be of service to others, and his unpaid work experience had been hands-on labor. Lassen County Roads Department was completely in favor of having Trystin work there. The job specific skills for him to learn included cleaning and organizing the shop and learning engine oil changes and shop procedures.

Trystin has been interning at Lassen County Roads since early January. He exclaimed during his first week, “I love this job!” His enthusiasm has not waned. He arrives early every work day and stays busy. He appreciates the bi-weekly evaluations. His worksite supervisor is extremely supportive and all his co-workers want to see him succeed. This continual support, exposure to the transportation industry, and Trystin’s development of soft skills will surely contribute to his future job success.

A Great Staff Addition

Hannah was referred to the Alliance for Workforce Development (AFWD) office in Susanville, hoping to get assistance with entering into fulltime work. Hannah had the aspiration to find a job where she could serve her community. Although she had no comparable work experience, she had interviewed for an Executive Assistant position with the Lassen County Chamber of Commerce. She had been underemployed, working only 25 hours per week at minimum wage as a Barista, and really needed to find a job where she could support herself and gain new skills to give her the potential to be more successful in the future. Her only other past work experience had been as a Sandwich Artist. Hannah met with a Career Center Adviser (CCA) to assess her need to participate in an On-the-Job Training (OJT). Hannah’s assessments showed that although she had the interest and aptitude for such a position, she was lacking hands-on experience. It was determined she would benefit from an OJT. Hannah strongly felt the Lassen County Chamber of Commerce would be a great place to work to help connect with the community she desired to serve.

AFWD’s Business Services Representative (BSR) contacted Lassen County Chamber of Commerce (LCCC) to let them know Hannah would be eligible to participate in an On-the-Job Training (OJT), if they decided to hire her for the position. LCCC wanted to hire Hannah, as they were impressed with her interest in serving the community and wanted to help her gain the skills she needed to become successful in the future. They acknowledged that Hannah would need extensive training to perform the duties of an Executive Assistant with the Lassen County Chamber of Commerce, as she had no prior experience with that type of work. All parties agreed it would be beneficial for Hannah to participate in an OJT.

Together with her CCA, Hannah developed a training plan that would help her to train to become a successful Executive Assistant. Several times after her training had begun, her supervisor noted her exceptional customer service skills. She related, “Hannah is a pleasure to work with, is always friendly, and has great customer services skills.” She also stated, “I have received positive feedback from others regarding her great phone and customer service skills. She is a great staff addition to the Chamber.”

Hannah successfully completed her OJT recently, and is happy to be serving the public. She is gaining useful knowledge and skills and has found a great place to work. Great work, Hannah!
The Best in the West

Having recently relocated to Lassen County, Kris found himself homeless and looking for a job. Not familiar with the area, Kris was referred to Alliance for Workforce Development, Inc.’s (AFWD) Youth Program at the Lassen Business and Career Network (BCN). Kris was introduced to a Youth Career Center Advisor (CCA). After some discussion and getting to know Kris’ situation, it was determined that AFWD could assist him in his endeavors.

Kris took career assessments to determine the type of work that he would enjoy and be engaged in at the same time. He also was assisted in obtaining an original copy of his social security card and updating his resume. As Kris got his job search under way, a Front Desk Clerk position opened up at the local SureStay Plus Hotel by Best Western in Susanville. This type of position was right up his alley, with the assessments that Kris had completed. He was given advice on going through the application process and a fresh copy of his resume. That took place on a Friday, and by Monday morning, the CCA received a call from Kris saying that he was offered a position and was starting that day!

That created his next dilemma; he needed a business suit and now. Susanville offers little to the person needing a suit, so he and his CCA brainstormed alternative avenues. Having partnered with the Lassen Family Services Clothing Closet in the past, options for selection could vary widely, but this was worth a shot. Kris and his CCA were assisted by the helpful staff at the Clothing Closet and miraculously found two suits that fit him perfectly. He was able to complete his first week of work in style. Kris is excited about his new opportunity and will be moving into an apartment with new friends by the end of the month. Way to go Kris, as your hard work pays off!
Certified Nursing Assistant Program Arrives in Lassen County

Lassen Community College, in their continuing efforts to meet the ever increasing employment demands of the healthcare sector, offered their first Geriatric Nurse Assistant program in January of this year. The 6-unit, month-long course is designed to provide students with the knowledge and skills to be qualified to take the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) Exam through the National Nurse Aide Assessment Program (NNAAP). Lassen County has a great need for CNAs at the local hospital, the skilled nursing and senior living facilities in Susanville, and the state prisons located in the county.

This new Health Occupations course was added to the state’s Eligible Training Provider List and Alliance for Workforce Development, Inc. (AFWD) was able to offer assistance to students seeking gainful employment as Certified Nursing Assistants. Six students in the course sought and were eligible for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) training services. AFWD was able to assist with required items such as textbooks, uniforms, and supplies. These clients completed their training at the end of February and were going through the application process to test for certification, when testing centers closed due to COVID-19. AFWD is following through with assisting them with the exam application process and cost so that when the centers open again, they will be ready to test and gain their certifications. AFWD will then immediately step in and help them with their job search and placement process.
From Worst to Best

Jennifer had received Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Services through Alliance for Workforce Development, Inc. (AFWD) in the past when she trained to become a Licensed Vocational Nurse (LVN) through Lassen Community College. Jennifer had been working as an LVN for nearly 10 months, when she was laid off from her position in July of 2019. This was a devastating time for her. She filed for and was determined eligible for unemployment insurance. She had been looking for work on her own for several months, without success. She had applied for several LVN positions, and was near to exhausting her unemployment insurance when she spoke with her Career Center Advisor (CCA) again in follow up. They decided she could be better served by re-enrolling in the WIOA Dislocated Worker program where individualized services could be offered.

Once Jennifer was enrolled, she met with her CCA several times to re-work her resumes and cover letters. She had been to a few interviews, but had not been selected for the positions. Her CCA worked with her to review interviewing skills and potential interview questions, and they practiced mock Interviews. Jennifer found that over time, she became more comfortable in providing her answers to potential interview questions.

When her CCA saw an opening for the Lassen County Public Health Program Coordinator position, she immediately thought of Jennifer. While the job announcement indicated they would prefer a Registered Nurse or a candidate with a Bachelor’s Degree in a related field, her CCA encouraged her to apply for the position. This was because Jennifer not only had an AA Degree as a Licensed Vocational Nurse, but she also had a Bachelor’s Degree in Advertising. Her Advertising experience gave her unique and useful skills that would be beneficial in this type of position. Jennifer applied and was notified of her upcoming interview. She met with her CCA again, and they went over more possible interview questions, this time focusing on the Public Health Program Coordinator job qualifications.

After the interview, Jennifer indicated she felt it had gone well, and had also felt more comfortable in “being herself” during her interview. Less than a week after her interview, Jennifer was offered the position. She began working at the end of February, and has expressed gratitude to her CCA for the assistance and encouragement that was provided. Jennifer has shown exceptional perseverance in changing a disappointing situation into one with such potential for growth and unlimited possibilities!
The Open Door

“When one door closes, another door opens.” - Alexander Graham Bell

Tiffany came to Lassen Alliance for Workforce Development, Inc. (AFWD) looking for direction from her recent layoff as a Customer Service Rep/Accounts Receivable Clerk with the local waste management company. She had been employed in that position for over three years. Layoffs can be an emotional, confidence-shaking roller coaster of emotions and Tiffany was feeling the gamut. She had applied and was eligible for Unemployment Insurance. But when searching for comparable work to this last job, all accounts receivable positions required formal education in the field – something she did not have. Tiffany was enrolled with AFWD as a Dislocated Worker.

Tiffany had an outstanding, steady work history of several long term jobs in administrative office work, restaurant, and retail – all involving customer service. With some help from her Career Center Advisor (CCA) in assessing her strengths and interests, Tiffany confirmed she is hardworking and responsible. She enjoys helping and serving others, is detail oriented, a great problem solver, and thrives following rules and procedures. Tiffany demonstrated great soft skills by being punctual to appointments, communicating consistently, and by her diligence in follow through. She attended the Resume Writing and Interviewing Skills workshops that were offered at the Lassen Business and Career Network.

Tiffany was encouraged to apply to an opening for an Integrated Case Worker position with Lassen County Community Social Services. It was an exact match for her Work Interest Profiler Interest Codes, and fit her skills and personality as well. When she was offered an interview for the job, AFWD prepared her by having her participate in a mock panel interview. She was offered the job the day following her interview. At the same time, she had received another offer to interview for a job to which she had applied. She declined that offer, stating that she was looking forward to the opportunities of working with Lassen County Community Social Services. Tiffany recently started working, and is off to a great start.
Lassen County

One-Stop Visitors: 12,865
Business Serviced: 130
Business Services: 802

AFWD Clients Enrolled: 788

Unemployment Rate (As of: February 2020) 5.8%