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, Inc. (AFWD) 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.
Following Her Dreams!

Tanah had come into the Plumas Business and Career Network (BCN) looking for assistance in obtaining a full time job as a Peace Officer. Tanah had used Career Services in the Computer Lab for job search and applications, but was interested in receiving individualized services assistance from a Career Center Advisor (CCA), as she had been having difficulty finding employment. Her most recent job had been working in the Plumas County District Attorney’s office. While working there, she was exposed to the Peace Officer career path, and determined it to be a good career goal. She attended the Peace Officer Standards Training and finished at the top of her class last year. Tanah was enrolled into the Adult program. There was an opening at the Sheriff’s Department for a Plumas County Deputy Sheriff I. Her CCA assisted her with the application process.

The Sheriff’s department interviewed Tanah and were very interested in hiring her, as they thought Tanah would be a good fit for their department. However, they were concerned with her lack of hands on experience in this field and felt she would need extensive training. They expressed interest in her possibly participating in an On-the-Job Training (OJT). The CCA spoke with the Business Services Representative (BSR) and asked her to reach out to the Sheriff’s Department to discuss the possibility of doing an OJT. The BCN team worked with both Tanah and the Sheriff’s office, putting together an employment plan that would provide Tanah with the skills and knowledge required to become a Plumas County Deputy Sheriff I.

Tanah recently completed her OJT. From the very beginning, they were impressed with how well she picked up on her duties. Her supervisor felt that, early on, Tanah’s eagerness to learn her position made her a great trainee. Tanah loves her job and fits in well with her co-workers.

She is so grateful for the opportunity that the OJT through Alliance for Workforce Development, Inc. has given her. She feels that she has been given an opportunity to do work she loves, while helping to keep the public safe.
Quiet Soft Opening for Newest Quincy Business

The newest business in Plumas County is one of necessity but we hope none of us visit anytime soon. Blair Mortuary & Crematory, Inc. quietly opened their doors for business in East Quincy, with none of the fanfare normally expected of a new business in town.

Larry Blair purchased the Fehrman Mortuary, in late December 2019. Larry owned and operated the Blair’s Direct Cremation & Burial Services, Inc. Mortuary in Redding, where he was a mortician for over 30 years. The Redding operation handled almost 800 clients per year. Fortunately, Plumas County numbers are less than 200 a year. “My wife and I have been visiting Plumas County for years and circumstances presented an opportune time for us to relocate,” commented Larry.

Mr. Blair came into Alliance for Workforce Development, Inc.’s (AFWD) office to see about hiring local contractors and laborers for renovation of the old Fehrman building. AFWD staff explained about posting positions for even temporary labor positions. As the conversation deepened, it was determined Mr. Blair would be looking for a full time Mortuary Assistant in the coming months.

Finding an experienced Mortuary Assistant could pose a challenge and Larry understanding the traits, skills and personality needed for this industry was perfectly willing to train the “right” person. The quest for a candidate began. Larry explained, “this is not the easiest position, as we are dealing with both grieving families and unusual days. We often need to go where the incident requires us. The candidate will learn many aspects of the business and this can turn into a long-term career for the right person.”

It is understood that being a mortuary assistant is not for every person as you are dealing in an industry not widely promoted as a career. After posting the position, AFWD staff shared this position with customers and one gentleman who was working with staff on his job search due to the ups and downs of construction industry thought this career change could be a good fit for him. An informational interview appointment was made with Mr. Blair where he thoroughly explained the position and what might occur during a normal work day. AFWD staff through discussion and assessments determined the On-the-Job training program would benefit both the potential employee and the business.

Larry Blair commented, “This is an excellent program offered by AFWD. The entire community was very welcoming and we are delighted to work with AFWD in this training program. Finding such a good candidate for a difficult position is certainly a help to our business.” Blair Mortuary & Crematory, Inc. is looking forward to growing with the community while keeping the number of clients to a minimum.
Mental Health Care Crosses All Cultures and Ages

On February 19, 2020 Plumas Rural Services, by way of a Mental Health Grant, sponsored an 8-hour certification training in Quincy, CA for Youth Mental Health First Aid USA. This was an interactive training designed to teach those attending to recognize signs that mental health problems could be developing, for this group – youth, and how to appropriately respond to crisis. As Alliance for Workforce Development, Inc. (AFWD) has programs specifically geared for working with young people, we felt it a valuable resource to attend.

Professionals from many organizations across Plumas County attended. Attendees from Plumas Unified School District, Plumas County Behavioral Health, and Court Appointed Special Advocate, were among the 30 plus participants. Also present were parents who wanted to learn more about interacting with their own children.

The program began by having us take a quiz. The results of this quiz would be reviewed personally at the end of the course. We would learn what misunderstandings or misgivings we may hold about mental health care for young ones. The training gave us tools to learn how to respond proportionally. The course began with the basics: what is mental health and what are some mental health challenges and disorders. Facts presented that mental health and disorders span across individuals and cultures was a sobering reminder that it touches all communities. Mental disorders can manifest in any type of combination, and having insight in how to respond and recognize an emergency is vital for those working with youth in any community.
Through the course, materials covered ranged from adolescent development, depression and anxiety, eating disorders and psychosis, all the way to substance abuse, self-injury, and other disruptive behaviors. By days end we had a much clearer understanding of the signs of being suicidal in a young person. Surprisingly, we learned to be blunt: do not beat around the bush. If you think a person may be thinking about hurting or killing themselves, then ask in those terms. Simple language that a young person can understand. This allows one to clearly get to the next step in assisting the individual. The end goal is to make sure the young person feels safe and the proper care is obtained.

At the end of the course, we were all surprised a bit at retaking our quizzes, and finding what areas we were misguided in, in the beginning.

When working with youth in any community, this kind of resource is priceless, as it really does cross all communities and cultures.

We thank Ryan Nielson and Nick Shirk for taking their time to educate our community members with Youth Mental Health First Aid.
Partnering with Rural Law Enforcement

Rural counties often meet with challenges trying to hire seasoned law enforcement staff. The Plumas County Sheriff’s Office (PCSO) is no exception. When Alliance for Workforce Development, Inc. (AFWD) staff reached out to PCSO to discuss the long-standing deputy openings, Sergeant Wingfield, explained they were endeavoring to ‘grow their own’ by hiring newly graduated officers from the Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) Academy. Through the conversation of various training services AFWD has available the On-the-Job training (OJT) program could assist the department with the required POST field training which is the final step for POST graduates to attain their full Deputy Sheriff status.

“By looking at newly graduated candidates for hire, we are able to train them, and working in a rural community is very different from law enforcement in a big city like Sacramento or the Bay Area,” stated Sergeant Wingfield. Working together, we developed the Job Skills Set for newly graduated officers, closely mirroring the POST training requirements and including some of the nuances of rural law enforcement.

Sergeant Wingfield broached the subject of the AFWD partnership to the new Plumas County Sheriff, Todd Johns, who was happy about the OJT program and has hopes that AFWD and PSCO will continue to work together on future OJT programs. Sergeant Wingfield relayed, “this program is a real opportunity for our small department and gives opportunities to new graduates.”

Collaborating with local business entities and government agencies has so many advantages and rewards to the local residents of Plumas County. Together we are building a skilled workforce, creating a safe and welcoming area for people to live, work and play in.
Coming Back Home to a New Career

Amanda returned to Quincy after she had moved away to go to college. She had obtained her AA degree in Early Childhood Development. After she moved back, she was unable to find self-sufficient employment in her field of study. Amanda decided she needed to shift gears to a different field. She had recently applied and interviewed for a local full time position as a Commercial Insurance Agent/Customer Service Representative for Flanigan & Leavitt Insurance Agency. After her interview, they referred her to Alliance for Workforce Development, Inc. (AFWD) to speak with a Career Center Advisor (CCA). They really liked Amanda and were interested in hiring Amanda through an On-The-Job Training (OJT), as Amanda had no experience in the Insurance industry.

The AFWD Business Service Representative (BSR) contacted one of the owners of the company. As Amanda lacked many of the necessary skills for the position, they discussed the possibility of doing the OJT. Valerie, one of the owners and the BSR found that moving forward with an OJT would allow additional training time for Amanda and assist the employer at the same time. The staff at AFWD enrolled Amanda into the Adult program and worked with both the client and Flanigan & Leavitt Insurance Company, putting together an employment plan that would provide Amanda with the skills and knowledge required to become a Commercial Insurance Agent/Customer Service Representative.

Amanda started her OJT on July 15, 2019 and ended on December 30, 2019. Her supervisor was impressed with her willingness to learn, and how quickly she picked up on the Insurance trade. They appreciated her strong work ethic and ability to multitask. They felt she has a great rapport with the clients, learning how to mail out policies and quotes, and processing changes properly. She is taking a licensing class and will take the state exam as soon as she passes the course. Her supervisor was impressed with her skills by the end of the OJT, as well as her self-motivation and ability to work with minimal supervision. This OJT has allowed Amanda to earn a sufficient wage in a career she loves. Both the employer and employee are grateful for the opportunity that had been provided to her through AFWD.
2020 Census California

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.
AFWD America’s Job Center of California
Statistics
PY 19-20 Q3

Plumas County

One-Stop Visitors:
2,636

Business Serviced:
102

Business Services:
662

AFWD
Clients Enrolled:
788

Unemployment Rate
(As of: February 2020)
11.0%