



# ARKANSAS WORKFORCE SYSTEM EVALUATION

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY - SOUTHEAST REGION

Sites Visited: Dumas, Pine Bluff - Tennessee Street, 28th Street and UAPB

The purpose of the Executive Summary is to provide a concise overview of the Southeast Region site report. This summary is intended to be shared with regional leaders so they may respond to the recommendations with action strategies for process improvements.

### Strengths



#### **Highlights of Customer Service**

**Analysis:** While quality customer service is evident in each region visited, in this region it is clearly the priority, to the extent that the Administrative Entity (SEADD) has purposely not established any numerical targets for their Centers. Meeting the needs of each customer to the best of their ability is their focus.

- ✓ A clear message and expectation of establishing a relationship based culture was evident.
- ✓ The concept of strong assessments, appropriate referrals, and meeting customer needs on the front end, good performance will result is implemented here.
- ✓ Staff feel comfortable referring friends and family for services and reported successful outcomes.



#### **Highlights of Collaboration**

**Analysis:** Staff at all levels are committed to collaborating with partner agencies to meet customer needs. While there are examples noted of collaboration between the Centers in Pine Bluff, not being co-located does impact the amount of collaboration that occurs.

- ✓ Staff from 28th Street and Tennessee Street are working collaboratively to market and administer the CRC (Career Readiness Certificate) process.
- ✓ In response to the loss of UI (Unemployment Insurance) staff at the Stuttgart Center, the WIA (Workforce Investment Act) staff in Stuttgart working with the UI staff in Pine Bluff is an excellent example of regional, cross program collaboration to meet customer needs.
- ✓ At the 28th Street location, the Resource Room Coordinators and the Adult Education provider collaborate well in marketing services and making referrals to maximize all services in the Center.



#### **Highlights of Business Services**

**Analysis:** Leaders and staff are committed to establishing a one to one relationship with employers in order to identify and best meet each individual employer's needs.

- ✓ The CRC is helping to promote the AWC (Arkansas Workforce Center) brand with employers and represents a tangible benefit for both job seekers and employers that the AWC offers.
- ✓ Staff are assigned as the "single point of contact" for employers.
- ✓ Services such as screening all applications and administering the CRC to all applicants for employers has resulted in successful placement of job seekers and qualified candidates for employers.

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

### Challenges

- There doesn't appear to be anyone "in charge" of the Centers as a whole in the region. The two centers in Pine Bluff (28<sup>th</sup> Street and Tennessee Street) are managed independently by each Center manager. While there appears to be good informal communications between the Center managers in Pine Bluff, there does not appear to be any formal process of managing the quality of services offered in the Centers for the region.

### Recommended actions:

- Create a clear organizational structure that outlines who is responsible for the provision of consistent, quality services throughout the Centers in the region. Expand beyond programmatic expectations and create Center expectations that are then clearly communicated to staff.
- Create formal mechanisms for Center manager communication between Centers in the region. This is especially important in Pine Bluff where there are three Center locations.

## SERVICE INTEGRATION AND COLLABORATION

### Challenges

- The staff in Pine Bluff are not co-located in one Comprehensive Center. While staff report that having multiple locations is a good thing for customers (so they can go to the Center that is closest to them), it is a disadvantage for customers that need multiple services from partner agencies that are not located at the Center they choose.
- System wide, it is already a challenge to move from co-locating TEA (Transitional Employment Assistance) and WIA staff to truly integrating TEA and WIA services. At the Pine Bluff location, TEA and WIA are not only not co-located, but collaboration efforts are limited.

### Recommended actions:

- Develop a schedule of regular, in person, partner meetings for all AWC staff located in Pine Bluff. Both managers and line staff would benefit from these meetings by learning more about the partners, resources, and strategies and ideas that are being used in the Centers to help meet customer needs. This is especially important for TEA and WIA staff to help move toward more integrated services.
- Conduct quarterly regional events for both DWS (Department of Workforce Services) and WIA front line staff. These events could be coordinated by the AOCs (Area Operation Chief) with agendas built based on staff input. A roundtable format would encourage discussions and the sharing of ideas and strategies. Additional partners should be invited to attend as well.
- Communication and referrals would be so much more streamlined and effective if partners were co-located in Pine Bluff. DWS state staff and the AWIB (Area Workforce Investment Board) need to work collaboratively with the LWIB (Local Workforce Investment Board) to work through the issues and find a way to get one Comprehensive Center in Pine Bluff.
- Since physical co-location in Pine Bluff will be a process that will take time, one interim solution may be for DWS staff to provide services at the 28<sup>th</sup> Street location and vice versa so customers that are receiving services at both locations don't have to travel.
- Train select AWC staff to be CRC proctors so customers can complete both components of the CRC process at the AWC.

**CUSTOMER SATISFACTION****Challenges**

- There was a theme throughout this site visit that if there are no complaints, everything is working well. There is a strong desire to solve/address any problem/complaint locally so it doesn't get the attention of Little Rock. While it is preferable to solve things locally, the challenge is to move beyond a "happiness/no complaints" approach to customer satisfaction to one that measures whether customers are receiving value added services that have helped them achieve their training and/or employment goals.

**Recommended actions:**

- The Dumas location has a good start on measuring customer satisfaction. As part of the ongoing process, the office manager needs to be sure to build in a feedback mechanism, both for responding to customers about their comments, and for sharing the information with staff.
- Pine Bluff managers talked about replicating the Dumas process at their location. It is recommended that they work with the Dumas staff to learn from them about what is working well with the process, what they have improved upon, and what they would do differently during implementation of the process.

**PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT****Challenges**

- While it is important to provide excellent customer service and meet the needs of each customer as best they can, there does need to be some balance between that being the sole focus, and working to meet programmatically established goals that potentially can have a fiscal impact if they are not met.

**Recommended actions:**

- Programs should share performance goals and related progress so partners understand each others' goals and can more strategically focus their collaborative efforts to help achieve them, while still providing excellent customer service. A performance goals sheet (across programs) would be helpful in this effort.
- Develop a regional profile that captures the performance goals of all center programs and additional system performance goals for the local area.

**AWC BRAND****Challenges**

- Staff reported that they are trying to market the Tennessee Street location as an AWC, but the customers are still confused until it is referenced as the UI office. This is further complicated by the fact that this location has no AWC external signage.
- In Pine Bluff, there was a theme of "us and them" evident related to the AWC brand. Although not necessarily reinforced by staff, the 28<sup>th</sup> Street location is seen as the AWC while the Tennessee Street location is seen as DWS/UI. Even with external signage at the Tennessee Street location, it will be very difficult to overcome this divisional thinking until Pine Bluff co-locates in one center.
- At the UAPB location, there is some frustration and confusion on the part of UI customers. They see the AWC sign and assume they can file for UI at this location. The staff are unable to help them with this service and need to send them to the Tennessee Street location.

**AWC BRAND - CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3****Recommended actions:**

- The Tennessee Street location needs an external sign indicating that it is an AWC.
- Marketing efforts need to be consistent between the locations in Pine Bluff. Business cards need to clearly display the AWC brand to help discourage the “us and them” thought process.
- Staff need to continue working on marketing the AWC brand and services in the community. Build on the successes to date, such as the progress being made with the CRCs.
- The issue of not being able to file UI claims at locations that clearly display the AWC brand is confusing to customers. This needs further discussion as to how this can be resolved. Potential options include cross training staff (such as in Stuttgart), or co-locating UI staff at these locations certain days of the week.

**BUSINESS SERVICES/SERVICES TO EMPLOYERS****Challenges**

- In the Dumas office, there appears to be some growing pains of a new center and staff working together for the first time. There is some tension with staff over their joint responsibilities in working with employers.
- In Pine Bluff, TEA staff are all responsible for doing job development, including employers linked with the Work Experience program. Staff reported that they do not have a lot of time to devote to developing relationships with employers.

**Recommended Actions:**

- It is critical to clearly define roles and responsibilities of Business Services staff and the process to be used when contacting employers (including materials presented) and tracking these contacts. With so many people doing outreach to employers, it’s imperative that these employer contacts are tracked so employers aren’t “over contacted.”
- Schedule regular meetings with Business Service staff to communicate and strategize about the most effective and efficient way to work with the employer community.
- Clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and expectations for staff that work with employers are needed in the Dumas Center. A collaborative discussion with all staff involved is needed to create a more effective and efficient team effort.
- Consider re-aligning the responsibilities of one TEA case manager to be a full time, dedicated work experience/job developer. That person’s caseload could be disseminated across the other seven TEA case managers.

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