

# Little Rock Region Site Report

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## Introduction

In February 2011, the Kaiser Group, Inc. was hired by the Arkansas Workforce Investment Board and the Arkansas Department of Workforce Services to conduct an evaluation of the workforce investment system in Arkansas. The evaluation was designed to be a process review rather than a data or compliance review.

There were three primary components to the project:

- Regional site visits and Regional Site Reports
- A Workforce System Report
- A Workforce System Certification Process Review

This Site Report for the Little Rock Region is intended to be used in conjunction with the Workforce System Report and the Workforce System Certification Process Review.

It is the hope of the Kaiser Group, Inc. that this report will be used as part of an active planning and continuous improvement process that will help further define and more completely implement the vision for the Arkansas Workforce System. We encourage the readers of this report to discuss these findings, pick and prioritize topical areas, and work together to improve services and outcomes for the customers of the Arkansas Workforce Centers.

The Kaiser Group, Inc. would like to thank all of the staff in the Little Rock Region for their assistance in arranging and participating in the interviews and focus group that were part of the research in this project.

## Overview

In the Little Rock Local Workforce Investment Area (LWIA), the Little Rock Workforce Investment Board (LRWIB) is the Administrative Entity. Arbor Education and Training is the LWIA Title One Provider and the LWIA One Stop Operator.

Partner programs at the Area Workforce Center (AWC) in Little Rock include: Unemployment Insurance (UI), Transitional Employment Assistance (TEA) and Work Pays, Rehabilitation Services, Workforce Investment Act (WIA), Veteran Services, Central Arkansas Development Council, Job Corp, Benefit bank, Work Opportunity Tax Credit, Federal Bonding, and Department of Workforce Services (DWS) Career Readiness Certificate.

In this region, visits were made to the Comprehensive Center in Little Rock. A total of eighteen interviews were conducted and included the LWIB Director, the Area Operations Chief (AOC), DWS Office Managers, WIA managers/supervisors, TEA supervisor, Business Services Representative, WIA case managers, TEA case managers, and Partner Agency Staff. In addition, one focus group was held at the Little Rock Center with both Center and Partner Agency staff. The site visits occurred April 11-13, 2011.

# Organizational Structure

## Findings

The current AWC in Little Rock is a great example of interagency collaboration and commitment by partners to improving customer service. All of the primary workforce development programs are co-located in a modern, professional environment and have a working collaborative in place that is solution focused and working to maximize resources. Just several years ago, these services were scattered around the city and less able to combine resources to respond to the barriers and needs low income and unemployed residents have to face as they work to improve their lives.

Arbor Education and Training is the WIA provider and the designated One Stop Operator. Jo Keegan is the designated One Stop Manager. Arbor has chosen to manage the Center based on a collaborative leadership model. It is best described as a quad leadership team made up of WIA, DWS, LRWIB and Central Arkansas Development Council (CADC) staff. While this does not meet the certification design of a sole One Stop Operator, it may meet the intent, and seems to be working here. For the One Stop Operator to functionally supervise DWS in such a large center where WIA serves a small minority of the overall customer count and UI customers make up over 50% of the AWC customer would be a challenge (see Appendix A, 2010 AWC Customer Activity Count). With over 90,000 customer visits in 2010, this is a high volume center with many challenges.

The interviews and focus group presented a picture of a consensus leadership group, with pretty clearly defined roles and a positive history of collaboration. If there is an issue to resolve, the leadership team's experience to date is to actively problem solve with a customer centered focus. Effective working relationships have been established which is a tribute to the leaders in each of the partner organizations. If there is an issue they cannot resolve (no evidence of one yet), there is an agreement that they would turn to WJ Monagle (LRWIB) or Jeanette Williams (AOC) for resolution. This is an example of the adaptation of the Certification Criteria to meet local needs. The next generation of Certification standards may need to acknowledge this leadership option more clearly, as some variation of this was present in many of the seven regions visited.

The Certification process, the response to it, and the Business Plan were developed by a small group of leaders. It is not an active quality improvement process embraced by staff. However, the principles and philosophical intent of the standards appear, to a large degree, in place and operating well. The value in the Certification process appears to be that it provided a framework or set of standards to build on. However, it is not a dynamic ongoing process at this point.

It was suggested by one of the leaders interviewed that the next version of the Certification process have levels of actual progress, or allow for quality to be identified beyond a check list.

The WIA legislation calls for an independent LWIB that selects the One Stop Operator. With so much of the workforce system in the hands of DWS, there is a natural tension in the system. The current arrangement is working well and has carried the Little Rock AWC through a difficult startup period, and into a productive community resource.

## **Challenges**

The challenge going forward is to sustain the positive relationships in place, deepen the collaborative model with improved outcomes, and do a better job of communicating between partners.

Some of the organizational challenges the Little Rock AWC faces will be sustaining the resources needed to keep the facility, technology, and staffing up to the demands of the tremendous number of people served each month. In addition, the co-managed collaborative approach to site leadership is vulnerable when there is leadership turnover, since it operates on trust and relationships.

## **Recommendations**

- The collaborative leadership model appears to be working well for the managers involved, however, there is some confusion on the part of staff members in partner agencies as to who is in charge. While this does not seem to be a significant negative factor, a proactive response to clarify roles and responsibilities would have value. Providing a narrative with the organizational chart available (See Appendix B) and distributing it to all staff is one option to consider.
- The Certification Process and Business Plan were primarily onetime events more than active process improvement tools. There would be value in the Workforce Center Partners Council working from an active business planning process. The initial focus could be more effective coordination of employer/business services. Pilot the process on improving collaboration in these important areas. The original “AWC at Little Rock Business and Continuous Improvement Plan” done with the Certification is a step in the right direction, however, it needs broader partner ownership and quarterly updates.

# Service Integration and Collaboration

## Findings

The Certification Criteria calls for AWCs to operate as a “single business” model and provide a no wrong door seamless set of services to customers. The “single business” model does not totally fit in Little Rock as they have organized as a collaborative team. Agency identities have been suppressed in favor of the AWC brand, but there still is interest in keeping some independence for the LWIB separate from the State of Arkansas. This was evident in several regions visited and it fits WIA legislation which calls for an independent, private sector local board to provide strategic oversight to WIA and One Stop Workforce Centers. The Little Rock LWIB seems to have found a productive balance between collaboration and independence. In their “AWC at Little Rock Business and Continuous Improvement Plan”, they refer to multiple investors with a unified mission. They have a dynamic start to that goal.

The Little Rock AWC has made great strides toward service integration and partner collaboration since it moved into the large new Center. There is a clear and focused team feeling to the customer service flow. It starts with an excellent front desk receptionist who actively greets and directs customers. Staff interviewed were universal in their praise of how this important “gatekeeper/customer service function” is handled.

The organizational structure at the Little Rock AWC and the collaboration process used by these key players (LWIB Director, DWS Regional AOC, One Stop Operator and DWS Managers) needs some refinement, but could help guide other regions. There may be value in discussing this model at one of the DWS quarterly management meetings. This would push Little Rock to tighten up the model and have value to other regions.

The AWC brand is promoted over agency identity, and all services from all partners are presented as a menu of services to meet customer needs. Referral processes are developed and individual hand offs of customers to appropriate staff and programs is supported and encouraged.

The One Stop Manager has developed a PowerPoint overview of all services for staff and customers. This PowerPoint is valued by staff, and has helped them better understand all of the services available in the Center. It would be useful to survey customers to see if the overview is effective in expanding their understanding of all Center services. There is value in listening directly to the voice of the customer in the efforts to continuously improve the service design model.

The wide range of partners and services available onsite is customer friendly and resource effective. For example, Central Arkansas Development Council (CADC) accounts for 12% of customer visits at the AWC and offers a wide range of supportive services vital to re-employment for low income workers (such as food distribution, economic literacy, free tax preparation, and public transportation assistance).

Monthly management partner meetings are held and minutes are taken. It is important for the distribution of these minutes to all AWC staff be more timely and consistent to ensure all staff, not just managers, are aware and up to date on AWC operations.

Efforts are made to cross train staff. Most of these efforts are staff initiated and come from day to day peer networking as staff work together to meet customer needs. The Little Rock AWC is truly a community Center and the partnership has greatly increased access to needed services in a One Stop, customer friendly, professional environment. The range of partners, extended hours that activities take place, and focus on meeting customer needs, all reflect the vision for AWCs in Arkansas.

## **Challenges**

Communications is a constant challenge, with competing staff and customer priorities, and with needs always shifting. Maintaining awareness of changing resources and services is a challenge. Making a commitment to well organized and well run staff and partner meetings is difficult. Posting partner meeting minutes shortly after each meeting or emailing them to all staff was planned, but is not being done timely or consistently.

Customer flow and long waiting lines work against the collaborative service model at peak times and especially during quarter change for UI. The team has worked to mitigate the impact, but it is still a problem. The image of the AWC as more than the “Unemployment Office” is hard to change when you walk into long lines of UI claimants at the front door. Being 50% of the AWC customer base, unemployment customer service is a major challenge.

The TEA program is still in the process of being fully integrated into DWS and into the AWCs. The full integration of TEA and Work Pays into the workforce system is an evolving issue for DWS as a state agency. It also needs attention at the Little Rock AWC and others around the state. Stated during some interviews is that “TEA is not fully understood or accepted.” It is worth noting that most TEA staff interviewed here and at other sites, see the transfer of TEA to DWS and the inclusion of this program into the AWCs as a very positive move because it offers more resources to customers.

With such a large Center there is regular staff turnover which makes cross training an ongoing challenge. Each agency has their own training approach and cross training focus. The majority of cross training is informal daily networking between staff to meet customers’ needs.



## Recommendations

- An internal, time limited, workgroup of partner staff could be organized to problem solve all aspects of the unemployment customer flow challenge. It could focus on scheduling and using online resources to reduce peak volume, making sure unemployment customers are seen as dislocated workers in need of more than a check (such as a pathway to employment), and other creative approaches to a collaborative service design.
- Cross training needs a more formal structured approach and purpose to supplement the informal peer process currently in place. The role of the DWS “Workforce Specialist” and the goals of interagency cross training need to be better defined and more systematically addressed. Solicit staff input from all partners to structure this training around agreed upon priorities (such as AJL).

# Customer Satisfaction

## Findings

In both the interviews conducted and in the focus group, it was clear the leadership expectations for quality customer service and meeting customer needs with all services available have gotten through to staff. Staff members from all partners identified the value to their customers of the collaborative service model and the range of resources in the AWC in Little Rock.

It is evident that there is pride in the quality of service provided at the Little Rock AWC. However, it is also clear that there is no systematic or meaningful process to collect, benchmark, report, or use customer feedback from job seekers or employers on either an individual program level or collectively as an AWC.

Suggestion boxes draw in some complaints and feedback and they are read and responded to, but these are minimal. 800 numbers and online options for feedback exist for some programs, but it does not produce meaningful data for ongoing system improvement. This is a missed opportunity for recognizing center strengths and creating a meaningful quality improvement process.

## Challenges

Dedicating leadership and staff time to setting up a meaningful customer satisfaction process is challenging, but it is an investment that can pay dividends in improving processes and services that affect customer outcomes.

There is currently no systematic process in place to assess how satisfied internal customers (staff) are with their work environment, service delivery design, training, etc.

## Recommendations

- Establish a systematic customer satisfaction process that gathers, reports and uses job seeker and employer feedback to improve services.
- Conduct an annual climate survey to give staff a chance to provide feedback as internal AWC customers. Models of climate surveys used in Workforce Centers can be provided upon request.



# Performance Management

## Findings

There is a positive feeling in the Center that partners are adding value to the community and helping people find employment. The number of people served in 2010 was over 7,500 service contacts per month. But how is success actually defined and measured?

It was clear that performance management is very top down and programmatically focused. DWS managers may be aware of performance for other DWS programs (i.e. UI, ES) and occasionally WIA or TEA managers were aware of each other's goals and performance, but not often. Most staff were somewhat aware of performance goals for their programs. Staff had little or no awareness or understanding of partner goals or performance.

The Certification Criteria, in the Measuring Success section, has a Core Standard that says "the plan describes quantified and measurable goals for the Center as a whole." It also has an Excellence Standard that "the plan identifies how partners will assist each other in meeting the individual performance standards of each organization and funding source." Neither of these are in place in Little Rock. It would benefit the partners to work together to create these Center goals.

The majority of staff and managers interviewed felt there would be a benefit to knowing and understanding what performance goals partners had to meet. They also expressed the belief that they were missing opportunities to help each other perform better.

## Challenges

Since partners have different program years, different databases, and different goals and targeted outcomes, it will take some centralized state level planning to help regions develop a meaningful performance profile for AWCs.

There is also a tendency to accept informal, anecdotal information as measuring success. This word of mouth feedback of success is important, but does not effectively help manage a workforce system or prioritize limited resources. Part of the challenge for Little Rock is to look broadly at the community impact of the Center and find ways to capture that impact.



## **Recommendations**

- Partner agencies need to discuss partner performance goals and outcomes once a quarter at their partner meeting and develop a simple way to report critical measures and outcomes to all AWC staff.
- Partners are encouraged to develop a Little Rock AWC Annual Report that documents their impact as a community resource rather than reporting on individual programmatic achievements. This report can then be shared with the community at large to demonstrate the positive impacts the AWC has had.

# The AWC Brand

## Findings

Internally at the AWC in Little Rock, the long slow process of reshaping an identity is clearly underway. Staff embraces the vision of using the brand/logo and marketing all partners as the AWC. The separation of agencies within the Center and old habits still sometimes “silo” the identity, but it is a work in progress moving forward. As long as the Leadership Team continues to align on the use of the AWC brand and staff continue to see the benefits of marketing the services of the AWC this way, it will continue to move forward.

The external identity in the community is a more difficult process. Internally, all the pieces are in place; marketing materials, common message to the community, and common nametags in the center to name a few. Yet it will take time for job seekers and employers to “see” the difference between the Unemployment Office and the Arkansas Workforce Center.

The Business Plan has a marketing strategy and much of it has been accomplished. Outreach efforts are ongoing. The best way to recreate the image is through positive experiences at the Center. With over 90,000 customer visits in 2010, the word is getting out.

The commitment to build a statewide AWC brand identity with consistent standards drawn from multiple partners with a united vision for Workforce services comes directly from state DWS leadership. That vision is acknowledged in the field by workers and respected as a meaningful project. The day to day operations tend to pull people away from the AWC Vision so it needs constant tending to grow.

DWS, at the state level, is launching a marketing effort for the AWC brand that could provide a platform to expand awareness.

The link from DWS’s “Your Local Connection” website for Little Rock goes to the Little Rock Workforce Investment Board website. No AWC brand is evident; the LRWIB’s brand/logo is displayed instead. There are links for both Job Seekers and Employer Services. However, the Job Seekers link takes you to a page titled “WIA Adult Services” which is confusing since it does describe some AWC services.

 **Challenges**

As money is tight and getting tighter, finding and coordinating marketing dollars from partner agencies will be a challenge.

Reaching employer customers is a significant challenge since the AWC has limited resources devoted to outside sales and marketing.

The Little Rock AWC website does not display the AWC brand. There are no interactive links that comprehensively describe the services available at this AWC. There is a link to Arkansas Job Link, however it was not active when this review occurred.

 **Recommendations**

- The partners would benefit from an AWC marketing director. It could be a staff person of a partner agency reassigned with a broader purpose. As a multi-million dollar business with multiple investors, the AWC needs to work on public relations and image.
- A specific marketing plan for employers, followed by all and led by the WIA One stop Operator is needed to meet demand.
- Update the Little Rock AWC website with the AWC brand prominently displayed. Expand the information available on the website to comprehensively describe all of the partners and services (for both job seekers and employers) available at this Center.

# Business Services/Services to Employers

## Findings

While there is some coordination among staff who have responsibility for contacting or working with employers, there is not a true Business Services team in place at the Little Rock Center.

All staff market the AWC and share leads when appropriate. Partners are collaborating on job fairs, onsite recruitments, and other employer focused events and projects. All main partners utilize Arkansas Job Link (AJL) as a common data base/customer contact system.

## Challenges

Communications between staff who serve employers needs to increase. The spirit and willingness is there, but a systematic process is missing. The AWC brand awareness is still low with employers based on staff experience. It will take a collaborative effort to make a difference. AJL is not regularly used by all partners which limits its effectiveness and impact.

## Recommendations

- Form a Center wide Business Services team with all staff who actively provide outreach services to employers. Designate a team lead with authority to supervise efforts and direct resources for all team members.
- Require all staff who provide outreach services to employers to use AJL as the system for tracking all employer accounts.
- There are many national models for Workforce Center's collaborative Business Services teams. Some are united under one agency; others are partner collaborations with a designated leader. See Appendix C for a Business Services Process Checklist.

# Customer Flow, Facilities, and Resource Rooms

## Findings

The Little Rock Center has over 7,500 service contacts per month.

The customer flow is good, front desk staff and partnerships help move customers through to the correct service as quickly as possible.

When asked about Center strengths, responses included:

- number of people served,
- a seamless One Stop model with a wide range of resources,
- ability to complete assessments (TABE) and the CRC on site,
- a spirit of cooperation, collaboration, and professionalism,
- all staff work as one to serve the customer,
- a better pool of customers for employers,
- great front desk staff utilizing the Workforce Specialist concept,
- flexibility and adaptability,
- physical environment that is inviting and motivational, and
- communication and teamwork.

## Challenges

There is not enough parking for all AWC customers. At times customers don't access services or keep appointments because they can't find a place to park.

The Resource Room is split into two "sides". The left side is for job search and placement, and the right side is for UI customers. This concept could cause issues (i.e. "that's not my area" or "you need to go to the other side of the room for that service.") This type of separation along programmatic lines may not be necessary and may unintentionally be contributing to the "us vs. them" programmatic mentality that One Stop Centers are attempting to avoid.

At times staff were a bit slow in responding to people that needed help. Staff may need to be more proactive in offering assistance to customers who need help. Computers were not always set up and ready (i.e. icons on the home page and easily accessible) each morning.



## **Recommendations**

- Onsite child care would enhance the customer's experience, as would onsite staff from DHS for TEA eligibility, Food Stamps, Medicaid, and Child Support. These enhanced supportive services would be very helpful for many AWC customers.
- Discuss options for resolving the parking issues.
- Form local, time limited workgroup to discuss options for resolving the UI wait times. Options may include "combing the line", calling some UI customers in for group services, communicating more with those in line giving them program information, and discussing general needs and AWC services that can meet those needs.

## Little Rock Basic Facility Review

Facility Feature	Yes	No
Located on public transportation (n/a if not available)	X	
Common Reception Point	X	
Space for group services <i>There are a number of training rooms/classrooms and conference rooms available for group services.</i>	X	
Private space for personal discussion	X	
Space for itinerant or part-time services	X	
Space to expand to add new partners	X	
Clearly posts hours of operation	X	
Expanded hours when warranted	X	
Adequate general parking and handicap parking <i>Front lot inadequate for customers, some customers leave because they cannot find a parking space.</i>		X
Visible and prominent external signage	X	
Clean exterior, free of trash and weeds	X	
Clear and professional internal signage <i>Signage indicating programs and services is excellent</i>	X	
Staff wear name tags	X	
Staff use common logo for stationery and cards	X	
Site has been ADA reviewed (reference checklist cited on page 10)	X	
Has adequate computers available for use by general public <i>Resource room is large and has many (60) computers</i>	X	
Restrooms are clean and adequately supplied	X	
Menu of services is displayed	X	
Vision and mission are displayed <i>Display mission and vision throughout the Center for both internal staff and customers.</i>		X
Information about center performance is displayed or readily accessible		X



## Little Rock Basic Resource Center Review

Resource Center Feature	Yes	No
Resource area is the focal point of the center and draws customers in <i>This is a large open room in the upfront area that does draw customers in.</i>	X	
Self-help materials are readily available <i>No desk aids on computer programs or services, no self-help login information. Need more visible resource information available on the desktops of the computers.</i>		X
Materials are available in alternative formats for the disabled or non-English speaking	X	
Staff are stationed in the resource area and readily available to customers <i>Resource room is well staffed with a rotation of DWS, ES, UI, WIA, AARP Volunteers that is working well.</i>	X	
Resources are available for employers as well as job seekers	X	
Information is available in a wide array of media, including video, audio, books, periodicals, and software <i>No TV or videos are being used in the Resource Room. Periodicals and hard-copy information are not readily available. Software could be updated and more organized on computers.</i>		X
The area has appropriate signage to guide customers to resources	X	
The area includes capacity for customers to photocopy, print, telephone, fax, and access the internet	X	
There are materials appropriate for youth to use in career exploration, postsecondary selection, and financial aid assistance <i>Could not locate any specific youth information.</i>		X
Labor market information is easily understandable and accessible	X	
There are tools for customers to self-assess their skills and develop resumes	X	

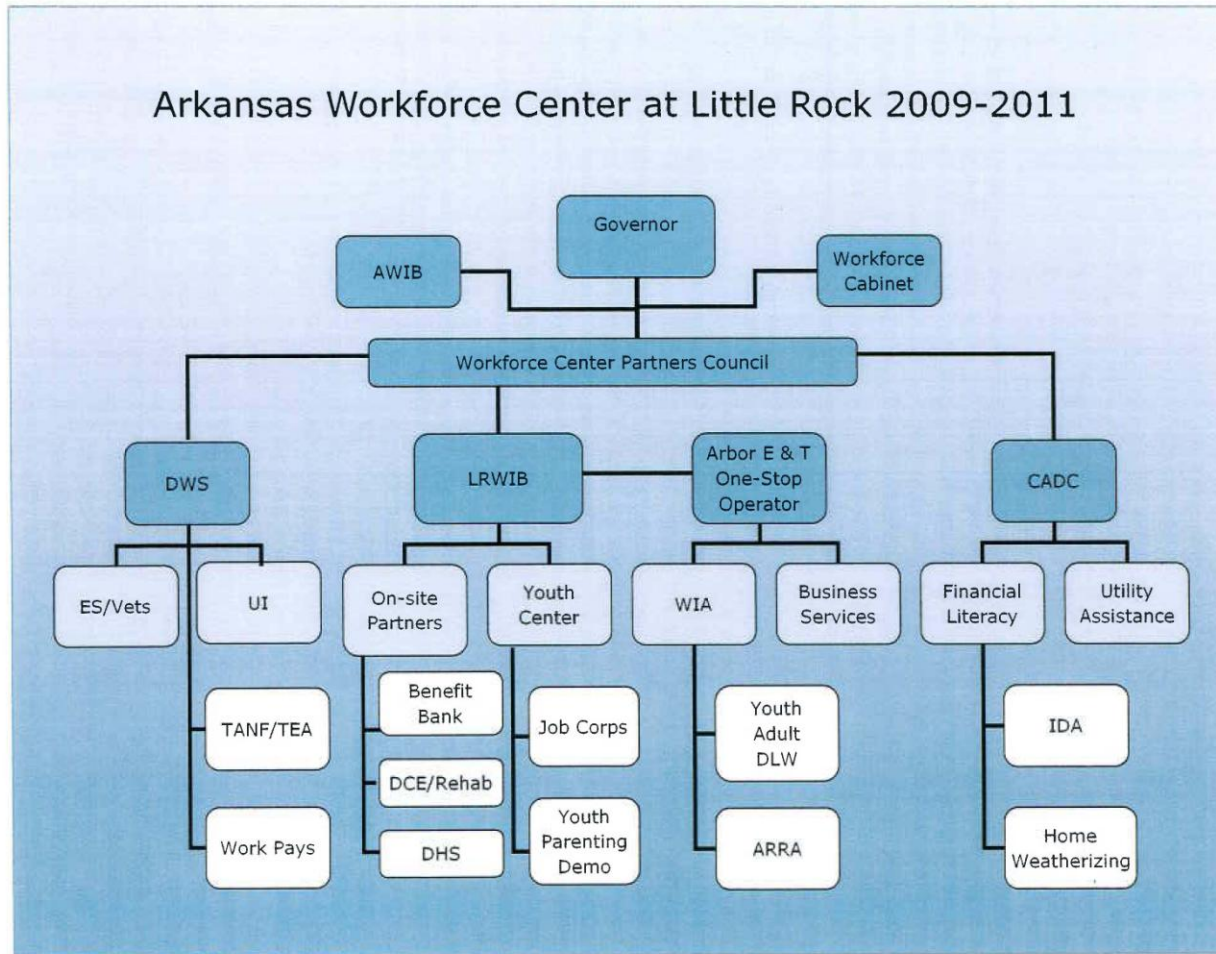
# Appendix

# Appendix A – 2010 AWC Customer Activity Count

## 2010 Arkansas Workforce Center Customer Activity

Partner	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Grand Total
Resource Lab	1207	495	822	623	640	761	685	642	680	644	624	601	
General walk in's at WIA Reception	378	329	365	171	315	199	142	147	189	270	229	130	
WIA Office	196	202	185	222	186	149	109	57	95	110	110	280	
CADC	948	1119	1724	1606	1130	784	1274	751	1065	121	109	110	
UI	4624	3279	4763	4828	3493	3471	7082	4245	4541	2520	1404	2142	
TANF	819	1457	687	898	898	870	1155	771	911	1036	696	663	
ES	720	555	914	1027	1027	794	706	371	604	1177	761	894	
	8892	7436	9460	9375	7689	7028	11153	6984	8085	5878	3933	4820	90733

# Appendix B – Little Rock Organizational Chart



# Appendix C – Keys to Success for Business Services Team

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## Business Services Process Checklist Business Services Team

- Standardized Core Business Processes: Clear guidelines on policy and procedures for job orders, referrals, use of subsidy programs and training money, forms and paperwork required, performance goals, etc.
  - All team members using common forms, database, marketing materials, etc.
- Development of a Single Interagency Marketing Plan
  - All partners are collaborating to:
    - Promote their common brand name,
    - Maximize the marketing budget,
    - Clarify roles and responsibilities and targeted outcomes,
    - Establish dates, timelines and targets, and
    - Gather ongoing data for analysis and process improvement.
- Establishment of Common Performance Standards
  - Clear process and outcome benchmarks to meet funding source and organizational goals and objectives. Possible goals may include:
    - New employers contacted,
    - Job orders and placements,
    - Wage at placement,
    - Retention,
    - Resource and referral services provided,
    - OJT or customized training developed,
    - Job fairs on onsite recruitments offered,
    - New service needs identified, and
    - Customer satisfaction results.