

## Podcast 4

### Barbara Gibson, Shirley Carlson, Marty Holliday

**Barbara Gibson:** This is Barbara Gibson and I want to welcome you to *Voices from the Field*, part of our podcast series on workforce development. In this podcast, we will explore the role of adult education in the regional workforce development system and learn about how one regional adult education program and workforce board are working together. Today we welcome Shirley Carlson, Regional Program Manager-Mount Rogers Region Three Adult Education and Marty Holliday, Executive Director of the New River Mount Rogers Workforce Development Board. Thank you both for being with us today to share ways your organizations are collaborating to build a stronger regional workforce system. We'll start with Shirley and ask her to please describe the work that you are doing currently in workforce education within the region.

**Shirley Carlson:** Currently in our region we are partnering with Virginia Highlands Community College offering CDL classes and phlebotomy classes. Our students are dually-enrolled in adult education while also enrolled in these two classes. These are non-credit classes, but, however, we also have with Virginia Highlands Community College a machinist class where our students actually have just graduated. Our students have just graduated from that program and they received 23 college credits. And again dually-enrolled, and they are ready to go out and find jobs. We have another program that is with Wytheville Community College. We are partnering with Goodwill in healthcare careers and we have had several cohorts in the last two years. This has been a very successful program, and my goal for our program is to continue these dual enrollments.

Also what we are doing with the one-stop in Wytheville. We have increased the number of our education classes from two to four nights per week. We provide career readiness certification preparation on Fridays, and that seems to be a need for our students, and we are happy to offer that. And these are currently ongoing, and we are looking forward to offering more programs in the future.

**Barbara Gibson:** It sounds as if you all are doing a lot of very innovative and interesting collaborative projects across your region. And I'd like to know from Marty, what do you see as the role of adult education programs in your regional workforce system? And then the second part to that question is what are the opportunities for future collaborative work?

**Marty Holliday:** Well, the workforce system is made up of a variety of partners and each of them, you know obviously is coming into different types of funding streams, but I think at the federal level, the intent was that each one of these programs have a slight overlap, but they each function serving a different population within the community so that we're not duplicating the kinds of services that we offer. So in our region we feel that adult education is the organization that specializes in raising the basic skill level of our working adults. Now these might be people that don't have a GED, and therefore they need that level of education to get a GED so that they can move on to the next. But it can also be people that already have a GED or graduated from high school, but lack the basic skills to be ready to take on more rigorous training programs, to

become up-skilled, to allow them to get better jobs. And it could be just small, for some people it may be their math skills aren't where they need to be. For somebody else it might be their writing or their reading skills aren't where they need to be. You know, it's not that everybody is missing everything, but we see adult ed as the specialist in that place. And all programs, rather than trying to fill in that blank and do it themselves, should turn to adult ed to take on that role for us.

And as far as opportunities for future collaborative work, I think that we always need to look at our workforce. Where do we have those individuals that not only need a higher level of occupational skills training, but also need that combined basic skill upgrade, and to do those kinds of programs where Shirley is already collaborating with the community college system, you know. And WIOA funding, you know, where can our funding plug in and support individuals that might participate in those programs? So again, those co-enrollments where folks are eligible for more than one funding source, and funding sources again can do different things- it's not just the organizations, it's those funding sources are allowed to do different activities. So one program might pick up some supportive service and childcare, and another program might pick up the tuition, and another program might pick up something else. And I think that throughout the system, this is really what we're intended to do. This is what the federal government wants us to do. This is what the state wants us to do. And quite truthfully with a, you know, a little bit of a decrease in everybody's funding, you know, this is where we need to be really creative and find ways to support individuals as we begin to support them.

**Barbara Gibson:** How have the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (or WIOA) requirements changed the way the workforce board and adult education programs work together?

**Shirley Carlson:** I'm pleased with the requirements that have changed with WIOA. I came in a few years ago before 2014. And to see this change was really what was needed because I was standing back and looking at the whole picture and wondering how everyone could work together, and it actually happened, and I feel like that now we are working more as a unit. We do need to serve this population of people who are in that place where something has not been completed in the past, that we can begin now and continue to help them. Let them know that we are here to help them. Not just with adult education, but with all of the agencies who are a part of the workforce board. This is an opportunity for Virginia to change how we reach out to people.

**Marty Holliday:** And, from my perspective, what I think, as a Workforce Board Director, and I've been in this organization since 2001, what I really think that WIOA changed was to give everybody those common measures. Quite frankly, the WIA programs were the ones that were totally focused on not only getting people in the program, getting them training, but getting them jobs. And we were the only ones focused on that end result of whatever it was you were doing or spending your money on, it was to get people jobs. And jobs with sustainable family wages. And so we just always felt like we were in that little pot all by ourselves and our partners weren't working towards that goal, and now everybody's got the same measure. We're all working towards getting people into the programs, ensuring that they get the training that they need,

whether it's occupational skills training or basic skills training or both, and ensuring that, at the end of the day, that we're doing the right kind of training that will actually get them employment into those family-sustaining wage occupations. So I agree with Shirley. I think the whole change in the law has really gotten us in the same boat together, and we're all rowing in the same direction now. And I think we're still learning a little bit of that, but I think that that's the plus side of what WIOA has brought.

**Barbara Gibson:** What future changes do you envision? You've been working at this, all of us in one way or another have been working at this for about four years now. And it sounds as if in your region some pretty exciting things have happened over that period of time, but what changes do you think will be occurring in the future?

**Shirley Carlson:** I would like to see for adult education in our region to become more acquainted with the businesses and what their needs are and to - perhaps if the employers are willing- to have our program to come onsite and to help do some basic education or computer skills; whatever is necessary to do the jobs that they are needed to do. I think this, maybe other programs already do this, but I would like to see that occur in order to help those who are already employed.

**Marty Holliday:** From the workforce board perspective I feel like the potential for change that's moving is really already beginning to happen in the region and that is the workforce programs and education programs are becoming more business-focused. You know when you look at all the passed laws, they were very focused on the individual, but not necessarily focused on how that played out into community economic development and community development. I mean when you look at workforce development in its large scope, it truly is community development. You know, you have businesses here or potentially businesses that want to come here, and do we truly have a workforce for those businesses to help them grow and expand and to have created a pipeline into occupations that are important to our region? And I think in the past we were just very focused on that individual, which was great. Don't get me wrong; we should never lose sight of the individual that we're serving, but I don't know that we always did them a good service, because we didn't always train them in things that were going to allow them to get real good-paying jobs.

And I think now we're allowing ourselves to look at those businesses and the community and doing it as a group. Certainly here in our region we do a lot as groups; we take business tours, have businesses come in and speak to us, but really staying focused on what are the businesses needing in their workers, and how can we help the individuals that we serve fill that need and allow them to begin a walk on a long-term career pathway.

**Barbara Gibson:** It sounds as if you all are focusing pretty heavily on integration of your services, and not only integration of the services, but also integration of the various partners who are providing those services or who are in need of the services that you're providing. Under WIOA, at least for the adult education part of WIOA, integrated education training or IET and co-enrollment have been major focus areas. IET has been defined by the Center for Law and Policy or CLASP as: adult education and literacy, workforce preparation, and workforce

training, each of sufficient intensity and quality, and based on the most rigorous research available, especially with respect to improving reading, writing, mathematics, and English proficiency of eligible individuals that occur simultaneously and use occupationally relevant instructional materials and are organized to function cooperatively with a single set of learning outcomes. IET represents a wide spectrum of services to build foundational employability and occupational skills. Now that's a very long and complicated definition, but it's a fairly complicated process to implement good, strong, effective IET programs. How will IET and co-enrollment programs improve workforce development in your region?

**Shirley Carlson:** It will improve education and training, will help to educate and help those students at our population to prepare for work, but there are also the progresses that we have already made are wonderful. However, I would like to see some more growth in covering with other agencies services in childcare and transportation, because these are the barriers that the adult population has had for many, many years. This would help change, I think the number of people who are able to earn their credentials to be more work-ready, and I'm hoping that those things change so that we can take those barriers away.

**Marty Holliday:** Well, on the workforce side we've been very interested in the integrated education and training of the adult learner, mostly because of how the adult learner perceives education. Very few of them come back because "Gee I just want to go back and I've got time and I want to take some classes", and you know that's not the motivator for most adults that return. They're returning because they have to, and in many cases, time is of the essence, and so to do the basic skills upgrade using just generalized program, I think is a time waster for adults, and I think that they perceive it that way, so the integrated education component, where what they're reading about, what they're writing about, and even how the math integrates in is all built around their occupational career pathway development is, in my mind- makes it relevant, allows the adult learner to have something to hang it onto inside their head, you know. I can understand why you're asking me to study this right now because I can see its relevancy, and I think as adults- when we come back, relevancy is important.

So very interested in- Virginia has had the PluggedIn Virginia programs, which I found to be very intriguing, and they were the right way to go about those programs because you were building everything on. In our strategic plan, we mentioned integrated education and training because we see its value for a very specific population and allowing them to upgrade their basic skills at the same time as getting their occupational skills training again, and keeping it relevant and keeping it within a certain time constraint, so we're very supportive of those programs as they become developed. The key is always managing what occupational skills are we going to do it around, where are the jobs, and, you know you're still working with the interest of people. Just because there might be an opening for a lot of welding jobs doesn't mean I got a lot of people that want to do it, that that's their interest and that's their aptitude, so there's always that kind of mix of match. We have a very large area; I may need welders at one end, and I may have people at the other end that want to be welders, but the distance between them is pretty great, so it's always that matching of space. But we are very supportive of the integrated education and training programs; we see their value, and we want them to continue in our region and actually want to have more of them as opportunity allows.

**Barbara Gibson:** It does have the effect or can have the effect of transforming how we provide education and training; especially for lower skills levels, adults who often fall through the cracks in traditional workforce training programs and even traditional education programs, so I think that is one way that there can be transformative change in workforce systems across the state as more IET programs are implemented.

From your experience, what advice can you give adult education programs and workforce boards and centers in other regions as they work together?

**Shirley Carlson:** What I have learned, I am continuing to learn this, that it's very important to communicate with the workforce board and develop an understanding of how all the members contribute. For me as a program manager the better communication helps me to decide on how I can develop the components that we offer to better serve the population. As Marty has already said, we are a component that actually is a foundation for a lot of people who are in need of skills, so I would say that the communication between adult education and the workforce development board is essential in making progress.

**Marty Holliday:** For the workforce board's perspective, number one, I hope all workforce boards out there are in good communication and talking and have great relationships with their adult education providers. We have two in our footprint, so we spend I think a ton trying to figure out what they're doing, where their programs are, to ensure that when we have individuals being served under our title programs, that we know where they can go and how we can help them, but also to be sure that we're sharing and communicating information.

We frequently have labor market information, we have programs that we're doing with businesses, and are we inviting our adult education providers along to hear what the businesses are telling us. Are we supporting and giving them labor market information so in their programs they are at least looking at what's being needed in the region as far as a workforce. I think that again as Shirley says, it's really all about communication.

Each one of them has information that the other one needs and could utilize to make better decisions for their own programs. But in our- in Virginia- the Workforce boards are the convener of the workforce system, and so it's important to us that we have everybody at the table, giving everybody an opportunity to talk and to share information, and ensuring that all programs know about all the other programs, because quite truthfully if, again, if we're doing this the way we should, and it's this continuum, it shouldn't be duplication of services, so everybody knows what everyone else can do and how they're offering their programs. We can begin to move all of our individuals that we're serving through the appropriate stream so that they can get all the services that they need, and they are entitled to in order to really get back to work or to get a better job, so they can support their families. Because economic vitality is what's going to keep communities alive, and you know it's our job to make sure that that's what's going on in our regions.

**Barbara Gibson:** Do you want-either of you have anything else that you'd like to add?

**Marty Holliday:** We thank you for the opportunity today.

**Barbara Gibson:** Well thank you for joining us and sharing your perspectives and your experiences with us. I think it will be very helpful to many programs that are working together to try to improve the services and improve the workforce development system within the regions that they serve, and your experiences and sharing those really do help to broaden their perspectives, their knowledge, and actually their skills level in providing these services collaboratively, rather than trying to work individually to provide the services through the whole workforce system. Thank you so much for joining us today, and good luck with your continued collaboration.

**Shirley Carlson:** Thank you.

**Marty Holliday:** Thank you very much.