**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webcast**

**Voices of Experience**

**State: Utah**

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Elizabeth Carver: Our challenges, I would imagine, are similar to a lot of other states. I think in the beginning it was just how do we quickly adjust and adapt to what's happening.

Getting out guidance around policy in a very quick manner and making decisions on those very quickly but doing it in a world where we didn't know how long it was going to last and then we sort of evolved and some of the challenges were more about how do we shift to delivering services in a virtual world, which I feel like Utah was really well positioned for because we already did a lot of things virtually, but just sort of adapting some of those given the environment we were in and being able to just make all the adjustments that needed to be made in a very short period of time.

The one that people probably don't think about is recertifying American One Stops, American Job Centers. And so our state board had to do that and of course, they weren't traveling and we knew that we needed to certify these One Stops. And so we pivoted and adjusted and relooked at -- we worked with our board to relook at our criteria.

We had virtual meetings and ended up certifying one of our One Stops through a virtual process and we didn't have anything in place to do that. All of our One Stops had been certified in person by our board members. So we had to quickly adjust and pivot and just really make some quick adjustments on how to do that and coordinate that with our board and then get the information out to the One Stop.

I think work-based learning opportunities is going to be continuing to be challenging. It's a very difficult -- depending on where there are outbreaks and places of employment to find for especially youth to participate in work-based learning opportunities, I think that will continue to be challenging to figure out ways we can do that in a safe environment for youth, in particular.

And I think we're also going to have to just really adjust to going back and forth between in person and online education and I think that can be really challenging especially if there's that digital divide, either lack of broadband if there's a lack of just digital literacy or equipment even.

One thing that I think that we might continue to see or see a challenge is that workers in industries where consumerism hasn't picked back up and we're trying to encourage them to get back into the workforce in maybe a different industry or a different field and down the road I think long term I could foresee that causing potential issues for those employers down the road.

So right now, for whatever reason, and if you think about in entertainment or travel, those industries are still struggling because of the restrictions and social gatherings. And so we're trying to encourage those individuals and those workers to get back into the workforce in something different knowing that we don't know when those things are going to come back in full force.

And so what I foresee long term is then are we going to create some sort of shortage in those industries when they come back as we're encouraging people to move into these other fields and just finding that right balance, because I think it's important for us to help continue to get these workers into the workforce but then what is that going to do long term and just sort of keeping an eye on that and balancing that out.

And so we've approached that with a few different strategies. One is really just doing what we -- I consider online facilitated workshops. So an online workshop is more of like a rapid response workshop, here's the services that we offer, but then we've also created additional workshops around find a job you love and just really marketing, let's help you find something that you really do enjoy doing.

Maybe what you enjoyed doing isn't available right now but we could help you and here's the resources we have available just to sort of help people think through a little bit about what that next move might look like. I think we've also -- we also have started a find a career.

So just really talking to people about maybe you don't know what that next step is, maybe you don't know where you want to go, but here's some resources that we have and here's a sneak peak into what that looks like and you can connect with us and we can help you explore that more so that we can get people connected into the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and really start working with them individually and one on one about what that reskilling looks like.

Utah has done some short-term education across our higher educational institutions using Cares Act funding. They're typically like, I think, six to eight-week courses and trying to connect people to those. One of the things we have done is made individual phone calls to unemployment insurance claimants.

And so we've pulled reports about claimants who are in those extended weeks of unemployment benefits and we've reached out and called them to try and engage them and talk to them about their job search, what does that look like, what do they need help with and through those conversations we're able to connect with those who really want something more and want to maybe get some more of those short-term education opportunities versus those who just really want to get back in the workforce and then directing them to places where those jobs are open.

The way that we've done connecting them to jobs that are open is really creating a web page where we can direct traffic and doing sort of an education campaign for the general public about here's the top jobs in Utah and here's where you can go to find them and really just working with the industry partners to say where are you needing people the most and then focusing our attentions and efforts on that and directing people to those jobs so that either it will clue them in, like hey, I need some additional short-term training and then we can connect with them and get them started through that process or it will be hey, here's something that I could easily transfer into given my current skills.

And I should mention we really have thought about things more on a state level than we have in the past. For example, we've done virtual job fairs. We did a virtual -- we rolled out a virtual job fair on April 16th.

So roughly -- I mean, very, very shortly after Utah really started in the depths of this pandemic we felt it was really important to do a virtual job fair and we had, I think, close to -- maybe it was around 100 job seekers and maybe close to 100 employers and we did that at a state level.

So there were jobs all across the state and people could log in. We marketed it across the state. So we just took a state-level approach to that. A lot of our online -- all of our online facilitated workshops where we -- they're live workshops but just in an online forum, all of those are done at a statewide level.

So you can be anywhere in the state and you can be learning about how to find a job you love and especially when you have staff that are going, I'm sure like many other offices or other states -- had staff going to help unemployment insurance, because your staff size is shrinking and just finding innovative ways to sort of pool those resources.

I mean, we did access Cares Act funding to help educate the general population on just that you can find a job here with us and let us help you find this job, because I think it's one of the better kept secrets [inaudible] is that -- is what we do, because we have so much under our umbrella at workforce services that I think it's difficult for you at times to know all the things that we do.

So we did use some Cares Act funding. We started using that to reach out to people and just sort of educate them on what's available to them, that they can job search with us, we have these job fairs, we have these -- and we've titled it sort of hot jobs, the most in-demand jobs and driving people to that specific web page to engage them at workforce.

One of the other things that we've sort of partnered with is our higher education institutions had Cares Act funding to create these short-term education opportunities for people and we've partnered with them to try and refer or funnel people there when it makes sense and they're ready to engage.

I think one thing, from a state level perspective, is just the way that we train new staff or new employment counselors has changed. We have new employment counselors coming onboard and we've adjusted that training, because we realized that training in a virtual environment for eight hours isn't going to work.

And so we've adjusted what that looks like and I don't know, that's definitely something that we could consider in the future as well, just it is definitely more cost effective and I guess, cost effective in some ways, but I think we probably need a little more experience to say it's 100 percent cost effective.

Our governor had a taskforce pretty early on engaged in this process and as he came out with his plan about this pandemic, one of the things that I think was really good insight was right from the get-go recognizing that an economic recovery was going to be needed, just recognizing that right up front and starting to work on that right up front.

And so very early on he created a stay safe stay open type business model where he -- we rolled this out to businesses and we did it in conjunction -- it was -- it's a huge collaborative effort with like Salt Lake Chamber, other chambers, plus the governor's office and just anyone who's really engaging with employers just trying to help all of us and it helped us even give us guidance about how can we stay open and do it in a safe way?

How can we deliver services and continue business in a way that is safe and allows the public and those we serve to receive services in a safe manner?

That huge collaboration between the health department, Salt Lake Chamber, this taskforce that the governor put together, that really helped us in guiding how we ourselves could stay open but also what resources could we give to businesses as they're trying to navigate this and still continue to use that resource today?

And in fact, we've even added an icon in our labor exchange system to allow job seekers to know which employers have made a pledge to follow the guidance and conduct safe business given the guidance from the health department in how to conduct business in a way that allows consumers to engage safely.

I think another resource that was really helpful for us is our own management structure within the department of workforce services. Because we have so many programs and entities under one umbrella, my own counterparts in other divisions were really helpful, because we each had pieces of the pie; right?

So there's childcare, which as we know, when schools go virtual, that is absolutely vital and having our director over childcare at the table with our director over unemployment insurance and workforce and just all of us being together, our director over like SNAP and all of us at the table together, I think, was really helpful, because we each have a piece of that pie and being able to just have those conversations together and just learning so much from the other directors from other divisions was just extremely helpful as we adapted in this process.

So that's another [inaudible] that I think that we used. A couple of things that we've learned is that we've been down the right path in leveraging technology and we will continue to do that. We'll continue to head down that path and along that same vein, we've also learned that we need to ensure that there's digital access for people so that people have access to these services and can get what they need when they need it.

The other thing is is of course, out of any kind of hardship like this, innovation happens and even just small tweaks, I think, in the way that we've done business can be considered those little innovations that have spun off from this. The virtual job fairs that we've conducted we continue to conduct.

Those have been around forever, but we haven't ever leveraged them like we're leveraging them now and employers haven't leveraged them in the past like they're leveraging them now and I think just even that mind shift, I think that's another thing that comes from this is there's just a shift in the way that we think about things.

In the past, I think there's probably been a little bit more reluctance to leveraged technology in some areas and I think this experience has really opened us up to hey, we have to adjust, we're all in this together, employers, job seekers, education providers, workforce.

All of us are in this together and everyone in Utah has really come to the table and really just worked together to say how can we improve from this, how can we push through and push forward through what's happening and how can we help our citizens be successful and our state be successful [inaudible] as well as be healthy?

And those two key components, I think, together we really have worked on that and just everyone's come to the table focusing on those two things and really trying to figure out how do we make that happen and I feel like we're on a good path. We're in a good spot.

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