**Workforce 3One**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Enough Is Known For Action Webinar Series**

**Implementing WIOA in Rural Areas**

**Wednesday, September 30, 2015**

*Transcript by*

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CHRIS WATSON: As we transform here to the presentation, I am going to turn it over to Jennifer Troke, who is a chief Division of Youth Services at the Office of Workforce Investment. Jennifer?

JENNIFER TROKE: Thanks, Eric. And welcome, everybody. We're so glad that you've joined us this afternoon. If you can believe it, this is the eighth webinar in our Enough is Known for Action series. So we are so thrilled to have you here.

We have an open polling question here. You guys can weigh in. We want to know – and I saw quite a few of you from rural communities. We want to know if you live in a rural area. Do you live in an urban area, or maybe you even grew up in a rural area? So I'm going to give people just a moment to click.

But we're excited because today we're going to tell the story of rural workforce development through the eyes of two communities, and you were looking at pictures from Ajo, Arizona and Valley City, North Dakota. And I don't know about you but those pictures were just absolutely gorgeous and it makes me want to move to both places immediately. So you're going to hear from speakers today from those areas, and we can't wait to get started.

So let's take a look at our agenda. As you know, our new law does have some references to rural areas, and so we'll highlight those for you today. We're lucky enough to have a speaker from the White House Domestic Policy Council who's going to share the administration's perspective and focus on rural areas. And then, as I said, we'll have our local speakers, and then we should have plenty of time for Q&A this afternoon with you all. So looking forward to hearing sort of what's on your minds as well.

So let me get right to it. Let me introduce Doug O'Brien. Doug joined the White House Domestic Policy Council in January of 2015. Prior to joining the council, though, he served at the USDA as a deputy undersecretary for rural development. There he's done a lot of exciting work with rural communities, including work with minority farmers, a lot around bio-economy, and really how do you target resources specifically to impoverished rural areas. So I am absolutely thrilled to welcome Doug. Doug, please take it away.

DOUG O'BRIEN: Thanks, Jen. Thanks, everyone, for taking time today and for this opportunity to talk with you about the White House Rural Council and in particular some work around a two-generation bundled service approach. I'll be pretty brief. I do want to just provide a little bit of context about the White House Rural Council.

It is a council here that President Obama created in 2011, and it's designed to make sure that federal agencies work together in the most effective way possible so that we see better impacts in rural places. Essentially, how can the federal government support local strategies in a more effective way?

And in the last four years the White House Rural Council has focused on things such as job creation and economic recovery, a lot of work around natural resources and drought mitigation. Last year we focused on a made in rural America priority where helping small manufacturers in rural areas export their goods. This year and for about the past year and for the rest of the administration, the focus is actually on rural child poverty, the idea being that one of the greatest, if not the greatest asset, in rural places are the kids.

A generation from now, perhaps half those kids will still live in the rural community. They'll be not only the workers but the leaders and those driving the economy in the community. And of course now taking care of those kids, investing in those kids and the families so those kids can be successful is what we're looking at doing. So there's the goals of the rural child poverty initiative.

To enhance public awareness we've done a number of major report and convenings to amplify the administration's very strong budget to help poor rural kids and families by improving implementation accessibility programs. We've looked at about a dozen different programs across the federal government, such as the telehealth grant program, such as the programs that help feed kids in schools, and the summer feeding program to help target those programs for kids in rural places and also for the – finally the goal of developing a model for future federal action to address child poverty through focused investments. And we'll talk a little bit more about that.

Just a couple very quick data points, the poverty rate as measured by the official poverty measure – that's this first to the left box – you'll see the rural tends to be greater than urban. By a different poverty measure, the child – well, the child poverty rate you'll see there on the right. I guess they're both – the rural is greater and most disturbingly maybe is that about one in four kids in a household in a rural county is living in poverty right now.

This next one looks at – really it's a little bit more sophisticated look at poverty, and it considers that bottom blue line. You can read it to see the poverty in rural places is actually a little bit lower than urban places. And that's if you look at the supplemental poverty measure, which includes cost of living as well as income – many income support programs from the federal government.

So, for instance, SNAP is included as – essentially as income in this case. And when all that's taken together, rural people actually by this measure have a little bit less poverty. But I think the takeaway on that is rural places have essentially the same level of challenges, and one thing that I don't have on the slides is that of the persistent poverty counties, those counties that have had – that have experienced at least 20 percent poverty for the last three decennial census. So persistent poverty counties, about 85 percent of those counties are rural counties.

One thing to mention and we note is that the safety net programs within the federal government have made a very big difference in rural places, and this is a graph that shows how much poverty's been reduced because of these programs. And we see the one in the left on deep child poverty, those kids who live in households that are half the poverty rate or below tax credit, social security, SNAP, et cetera make a very, very big difference with social security reducing that poverty by almost 50 percent.

Then one more here is that children in rural areas are less likely to have access to services. I think that really blends into a lot of what the audience and the topic today that just a basic challenge in rural places. How do we access those services, including for adults, workforce development in the family? And that kind of speaks for itself.

Demographic characteristics differ in rural and urban areas. Certainly the educational attainment in rural areas tends to be lower, which is certainly an important piece of information as we look at workforce development strategies in the rural geography.

The Obama administration has been very active on what's called place-based initiatives, and these are initiatives that are designed so that the federal government supports a local or regional-based strategy and we're doing in a way that's most effective. And that is where the local broad-based collaboration looks at the assets that they have in the place, make sure that everyone from that region or from that community is at the table to look at a vision for the future, and then have measurable outcomes on how they want to see success in the future. And we've had a number of different initiatives.

One very well-known one is the promise zone initiative, and there's actually two tribal – and that's one in Southeast Oklahoma in the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. The latest tribal one for promise zone is not on this map actually. It was somewhat recently announced. It's up in South Dakota for the Pine Ridge, and then there's a couple rural ones. Southeast Kentucky is on this map, and the other is in South Carolina. And some very focused engagement with the feds in areas of persistent poverty in the promise zones.

Something that the White House Rural Council has worked on is the two-generation bundled service approach, and in fact just last week we announced 10 pilot demonstration communities where there will be increased federal engagement and a local strategy that is delivering services to the whole family.

And the way I describe this is, if there's a three-year-old in Early Head Start, are there systems in place to make sure that the mom and/or the dad can have access to workforce development programs? And that might mean colocation, or it may mean other ways to make sure that there's sharing of information and essentially making it not only easy but for many of these families just simply making it possible for them to access services that are critical to the success of that family.

So last week, as I mentioned, we announced 10 of the pilot demonstration places, and you'll see there in – I won't read them off, but a very well-represented across geography, Appalachia and the Delta out to Utah and the White Earth Nation up in Minnesota. And these are places that again are really focused on engaging young children as well as the parent on workforce development. So I definitely wanted to lift that up for this audience

And finally, I did want to say just thank you for the work that all of you do in the rural space. I grew up in a farm in Iowa. I have been doing rural policy for the last decade and a half or so, and I know that working in the rural space is challenging because of the innate characteristics of remoteness and sometimes lack of capacity.

But it's also a place that I've seen individuals can make such a big difference, and it's individuals like you on this call that are committed to the community, that are social entrepreneurs, and willing to collaborate. And the work that you're doing with the WIOA in this phase is just critical, and I just want to thank you.

So with that I will hand it back over to Jen and look forward to her conversation about some of the rural aspects of WIOA. Thank you.

MS. TROKE: Thank you so much, Doug. And I just want to say we are very proud because in the Division of Youth Services in all of our competitive grant opportunities we've made sure to include language around promise zone and trying to encourage applications from those areas. So we're thrilled to be a part of the team right along with you. So that's great.

MR. O'BRIEN: Absolutely. Great.

MS. TROKE: OK. So basically, as I mentioned at the top of the hour, WIOA really provides a lot of opportunities for us in rural areas, and so I'm going to just flip over because I talk a little bit deeper about opportunities in a moment.

But what I want to first do is I'm going to do a little bit of a pop quiz. If Eric can pull up the open chat feature, that would be great, and I want to hear about some of the challenges of living in a rural area. And Doug started to touch on some of those, and I'd love to open it up, if everybody would take a moment and type into the chat some of the challenges that you face in a rural area. And we're going to give everybody just a moment.

Lack of resources, transportation, lack of major employers, broadband access, lack of jobs, commute time, service providers, less WIOA allocations. Who said that? Just kidding. What else? This is great. Lack of jobs again, lack of childcare. There's some big themes emerging here. Difficulty attracting quality staff. We may have – I'm going to give it 10 more seconds. One-Stop centers under-resourced, low literacy levels. Oh, lack of medical facilities. There's a new one. Programming at community colleges, the distance to workforce centers, education levels. These are great.

And I flipped these slides because I have some of the challenges on the next slide actually, and I believe we've probably hit all of them. I think you guys got the services that are widely dispersed. Because of geography they're far away.

In fact, we were lucky enough to have some young people in this morning from Riverside, California, and they told a story – this relates to transportation – about his bus route, and they were able to get a new bus route for this young man to get to his job at the warehouse facility because his commute had been – he was waking up at 4:00 a.m. in order to get to the bus stop at 5:00 a.m. to get to the job at 8:00 a.m. So I can appreciate the transportation challenges and just how important that piece is, and many of you alluded to that challenge.

Insufficient number of available service providers, lots of people talked about that, and with the new law there are 14 program elements. So we have those five additional program – new program elements, and so in a rural community how do you make all those elements come to life and offer all of those elements for your young people?

And then I think somebody said it, fewer One-Stop partners in urban areas and even employers in urban areas. And then lots of comments I saw on telecommunications and broadband. It's just not there still in some of these more rural communities. And I think you'll hear more about this from Arizona and North Dakota. So I'm going to keep flipping through because I want to show you some of the provisions from the law that are relevant to rural areas.

The first is that local areas are required to plan regionally, and so you guys, if you're in a rural area, if you're joining from a rural community, you've already figured a lot of these regional plans out just due to necessity. But now, the law says let's do it. Let's do more of it. Let's go deeper. So it really acknowledges that rural coordination that you guys have probably been doing for quite a while now.

It also talks about local workforce boards facilitating access to service delivery, and so how do we use technology to really enable young people to get services? And I know even in our shop, we've been talking a lot about how do we offer traditional services in a non-traditional way? So can you offer virtual mentoring? What does that look like? And so which of these service can we take online, and which need to be face to face? So anxious to hear your thoughts and ideas about that.

The third excerpt is really about when you don't have enough service providers in a local community, what are some of your contract and grant options? And there is a clause in there about sole source.

In the final probably the one that rural communities are most concerned with might be our new focus on serving and expending resources for out-of-school youth. And so that's a big change, and having to identify those young people is impacting rural areas in a big way. So we wanted to pull those excerpts out just to list up to give you the general framework.

And then if we could flip to the next slide, you'll see that there are some basic best practices here that we know have been successful in rural areas. And this again is built from the work that you guys have already done, but transportation vouchers, carpools, services by phone or now by web, and sort of how do we sort of make the best of these situations where geography might prohibit direct service.

So we have a lot of other exciting practices to share, and so I am not going to talk any longer. I'm actually more excited to introduce our first speaker or our second speaker, Arnold Palacios who joins us from Ajo. He is the former executive director of the Tucson Youth Development Center in Tucson, Arizona. So, Arnold, please take it away. Welcome.

ARNOLD PALACIOS: Buenos dias. I'm very, very pleased and happy to be joining all my rural partners today, and I want to tell you that I'm speaking to you from Tucson, Arizona in Pima County where today it's 103 degrees in the shade. So I think we're going to stay out of the shade.

MS. TROKE: Wow.

MR. PALACIOS: In Pima County we have – just to give you a general perspective, an area of 9,200 miles in our county, which is equivalent to about the size of Rhode Island.

And with our rural communities there's a variety there. There are communities, rural communities right outside of the Tucson metro area, which is Sahuarita on the south and Marana on the north, and they're about 10 or 15 minutes from Tucson. And then at the other extreme on the west end of our county is Ajo, Arizona, which is about two hours from the Tucson metro center and where the One-Stop is situated.

So we are as a region about 60 miles from the Mexican border, and I want to really emphasize that we identify very, very strongly as a region, and we have a shared identity as a border-region-serving community, which means that all of our communities in Southern Arizona, we have taken that regional approach to workforce development and really developing communities and the skill sets. And there's a lot of expertise along those regions in terms – for example, there is land, people that have a large extensive area of lands, the food import and export from Mexico to the United States.

So as we move from WIA to WIOA with youth workforce services, like a lot of you, we have been in this business, in the workforce development business in Pima County for over 40 years, from MDTAC to JTPA, all of that alphabet soup of workforce development. But our fundamental mission and task to educate, train, and transition vulnerable rural youth populations to successful outcomes is something that we have been doing for a number of years. We're doing it today, and we'll continue to do that into the future.

Just to give you a brief synopsis of what our serving of youth in Pima County this year, we served 806 youth. And like you with your accountability measures, we exceeded eight of our performance measures and met the other two. But the point is that I believe that enough is known because of our experience and because of infrastructure and our history to implement WIOA and get going with it.

And from the perspective that we understand in the rural communities that it's shifting, that the out-of-school youth and disconnected youth population is at the forefront, but in reality most of us that really fits into the rural kind of mission because we are working with disconnected youth both figuratively and literally.

And communities too can be disconnected in ways that have been described. So if the priority is to begin to bring back those youth, the disconnected youth, the out-of-school youth, I think that fits right in line to what people in rural communities' workforce programs have been doing for a number of years, and we're happy to do that.

I wanted to say as we look at major considerations for rural programming in Pima County, it mirrors what a lot of you just said at the beginning of this webcast. In terms of distances, for us exactly. The postsecondary access is problematic because of distances and access, the access to healthcare for major health occurrences or incidences. The youth cultural and social events are problematic and serve to maybe alienate some of our youth that are out in rural communities but importantly, connections to employment, to jobs.

In terms of the economic realities, there's two sides of that picture. As was mentioned before, the poverty in the rural areas is an issue. In Pima County I think we're one of the fifth poorest communities in the nation. The percentage of children and youth in poverty is I think one in five, and in the case of Ajo, Arizona, you have the deterioration of an economic base, which was the mines that left the community, and that community struggles to recover. And how do you rebuild that community when a lot of the people actually stayed in Ajo, Arizona?

But on the other end there's a lot of opportunity also as we look at this as a region, as we look at the emerging workforce, the opportunities in terms of employment for the future. And our region is ripe in terms of logistics that is going to happen through this community for logistical access from Mexico to Canada, and we're right in that pathway. The aerospace and defense is a big industry and we can approach that from as a region and also healthcare and cybersecurity for the south region that we're in.

So in terms of resources, like many of you, in Pima County there's – we see there's limited local funding. The resources are scarce. So what do we do? I think what we do is ban together as a region and with our partners, and we move forward.

Now, because of our history – and we look at this next slide. At the center is the local One-Stop, but as I mentioned, we don't see that as setting up a mega One-Stop system in the urban – the largest urban area in Pima County, but we see it as being – helping to coordinate a regional response to our whole region's employment needs. The local One-Stop in Pima County has operated as a hub, as a focus point, as a central point for workforce development for Pima County and also Southern Arizona.

The impact then extends out from that center out to the edges of the regional response, and it's our collaborations with our partners, with other communities that organizes services like you in terms of the adult, the dislocated workers, and youth. So through these systems, as you have also, that sets up accountability systems, abilities to subcontract for partners to have services in the rural communities; and also the Pima County workforce system has acted as a convener for a regional response for employment needs and for the needs of the rural communities.

And as you go into the second circle, the communities that I mentioned, Sahuarita and Marana, would be close to us, and so they're the easiest to serve. And with that we can share, for example, recruitment, assessment of youth, intake eligibility, and referral for services as a system and working with also in-school and out-of-school youth.

And the way that we do this is through procurement and subcontracting for different agency partners so that the One-Stop system has a shared staff for all of those functions in terms of intake, assessment, workforce development. And agencies that have had experience with those different communities are part of that mobilization, and they can offer their expertise or be at that location but also bring in other resources.

As we go out to the third circle, it actually becomes more difficult, and many of our rural communities are in this situation that, for example, in Ajo, Arizona they're two hours away from the next larger metro area. It was a community that is close-knit that had a copper mine, and that copper mine closed down in Ajo. And so the economic base of the whole community left almost overnight. The people did not leave. They stayed.

And so how do you respond to that? And what Ajo, Arizona has done is to maintain a community that has come together and responded in a number of ways that I'm going to point out in the next slide. But those conditions like the youth that we serve cause youth to be disconnected, alienation, not working and not in school, and limited opportunities. But the WIOA shift that we're talking about is part of the response to that. Like in urban areas, Ajo has youth that are most in need, and the out-of-school youth in that community and also other rural areas of Arizona.

And when we come out to the final circle, the Innovation Frontier Arizona is the name of our regional response, and it encompasses for us 22,000 square miles with a population in this region of about 1.3 million people. Communities that we work with are Sierra Vista, Yuma, Nogales that are all counties along the border with Mexico. But I think the point of this is that we have an established history as rural providers. We have the experience, and moving forward I think, yeah. We are ready to act, and we're ready to start and move forward with WIOA.

In the final slide I just wanted to offer some examples. Tucson Youth Development is one of the oldest serving youth non-profit agencies in Southern Arizona, and they have contracted through the workforce system for workforce development specialists. And they work in the rural areas, and they also work with youth in Ajo.

And a story just to present example is a young man by the name of Epolito (ph), and Epolito came into the system through the summer youth experience program. He continued to work in Ajo in after school work experience programs and became an aid at the school there. And so when he had finished school, he was offered a position at the school, and he did two or three things. He was a maintenance man. He was the janitor, and he was a driver.

After that he decided he wanted to come to Tucson for community college, and he came without – just raw, wanted to come here and without the financial aid. And he was enrolled in school here, and his – there was an illness in his family, a very serious illness, and he needed to return back to Ajo to serve as a caretaker for that family member. And he did that until that – his father passed away. So where he was left is that he was not in school, and he wasn't working. And that's kind of the definition of disconnected youth. Epolito was living that reality.

So like all of you in WIA over the years, you don't – you keep a connection with your youth, and Eddie, who was his case manager at Tucson Youth Development, helped him to look at applications, to get his resumes together, and he landed a job with the Bureau of Indian Education with the Akum reservation. And he landed a job because of his previous experience as a driver, and he started at $17 an hour, and now he's at $20 an hour. And there's opportunities for him to move to other locations in this state in other places, but it's that connection, this relationship over time that is successful. That's an individual example.

In the next slide you see Portable Practical, the Education Program. PPEP was – has had contracts for YouthBuild in the rural communities, and they have landed YouthBuild in Tucson in the urban area. So that's rural expertise coming into the urban area, and also contributing with a very, very good program. The PPEP program is also the migrant and seasonal farmworker program. These are rural and agricultural workers and even undocumented workers and people that they help to bring into the community.

The other example I wanted to point out briefly is that the International Sonoran Desert Alliance was the organizing group in Ajo to begin to respond to kind of the stark reality of the mine that left that community. And they did this in three major ways. ISDA set up an educational program, a GED program that is combined with an opportunity for work experience. It is a GED program that works with a small group and gives them an opportunity to get their diploma and move on to employment.

The second prong is they have a registered apprenticeship program, and the registered apprenticeship program works with many of the tradesmen in Ajo. And the community of Ajo has houses and I think over 50 percent that were built before 1960. So the infrastructure and repair of those houses is a whole workshop in itself, and the registered apprenticeship program responds to that. And it's a three-year, 4,000-hour program, and the young man that I'm going to mention to you – his name is Joshua Manuel – is now in his final year. But it's rich that they've been able to learn a trade but also to rebuild that community.

And his words are, "It's a great opportunity if you are motivated and stick it out. What we are learning here is just as good as going to a trade school. Our instructors have a lot of knowledge and know what they're talking about because of their years of experience. It's also something that can help benefit the town in the long term. I know now that a lot of houses around here are dangerous to live in because there were no codes or no updated codes. The town needs a makeover, and now we know how to fix that."

And that is kind of the spirit of Ajo and with the International Sonoran Desert Alliance to respond to that kind of a critical and stark situation. And the third prong of it was that they had – they have support services for the youth that they work in and this year have contracted for emergency utility services for the community.

And finally, in terms of the regional response, the communities of – we have the Information Frontier Alliance, and the communities are responding to employment needs of the region. For example, Sierra Vista is located next to the defense installation that has cybersecurity as its main focus and probably cybersecurity for the nation. They have a youth program.

It's a four year high school that leads to that kind of training and those kinds of job opportunities as a pathway. Yuma, for example, another community as ongoing is a catalyst in terms of training youth for engineering positions and getting them into that pathway and also connections with the border patrol.

And there's a border patrol academy that works to train youth on what's going to be needed, what's required, and also even practical applications like writing reports. And then to the south in Nogales is the – is an import, an export gateway, and so supply chain management, logistics, and the programs for the Port Authority have been developed through those communities with youth career net.

So the border, all of our rural communities have issues that we deal with in terms of distance of economic realities of resources. But in terms of a regional response and looking at what jobs are coming up for the future, the regional response is one that we have taken very seriously in Pima County and are banding together to train youth in what I would call aligned education to real-world jobs and not jobs that would require a four-year degree.

But, for example, the machine trades – and we've had three generations of youth go through that training, but once – now that we have that, we need to build on that to connect with the four years and develop that pathway so that the transfer of technical skills is aligned with the four-year colleges.

So there's a lot of challenges. There's a lot of opportunities, and like many of you in rural communities across this country, we are excited about WIOA and the percentages that we're looking to serve for the future. So thank you for this opportunity to connect with you, and I appreciate it very, very much.

MS. TROKE: Arnold, thank you. Arriba y Adelante; right? That was awesome.

MR. PALACIOS: Thank you.

MS. TROKE: Perfecto. I thought that was absolutely inspiring, and I loved your rallying card. And I also really appreciate the holistic view that you take as the community, and so your graphic is particularly compelling for us. So thank you. Thank you, sir. That was excellent, and I know you'll be hanging in for questions. Let me just take a moment to let our audience know that now would be the right time to start putting those questions into the chat feature, and we'll have some time at the end to address those. So without further delay, thank you, Arnold.

I will be moving to introduce our North Dakota speaker. Please help me in welcoming Pat Anderson who is the state youth coordinator from North Dakota and also Bobbie Miller who works for Job Service North Dakota in the Valley City Customer Service Center. She's a customer service officer. So thank you, Pat and Bobbie. Please take it away.

PAT ANDERSON: Good afternoon. I'm Pat Anderson, and I am – I work in the administrative office or the central office in the capital city of Bismarck, North Dakota. And Bobbie is in the Valley City office, which is 140 miles away from me. So that in itself tells you we have a little bit of distance between us.

First of all, I would just like to start by telling you a little bit about our state, as Arnold had explained to you, just so you get an idea of how our state is. We have – North Dakota has a total of 70,704 square miles, and in 2014 the population in our entire state was 739,482. So for many people that probably sounds like a small city, but that's our entire population. So I thought that by just giving you some idea, the state of New York has 54,556 square miles and they have a population of 19,746,227.

So as you can tell from the population disparity, there's a lot of open space in North Dakota, and many of us like it that way. Our largest city is Fargo, and that has a population of 105,000. Like I said earlier, the capital city is Bismarck with 61,000, and in Valley City where Bobbie is – and she's going to present after me – there is about 6600 people.

So again, there's a wide range of urban, and Bobbie isn't even really as much rural as some of the other communities that we have. We have 156 towns in North Dakota that have triple digit populations. Between 100 and 992 people live in those 156 communities, and 77 of our communities have populations of 3 people up to 98. So – and we also have three tribal reservations in our state.

The state of North Dakota is one local area with one workforce investment board, and there are advantages to that because we know our partners very well. We work together. We meet often.

When WIOA came into existence, we already had many of those partnerships and relationships fully in place, and so it wasn't as difficult for us in our state to do some of the things we needed to do with partners. We have 16 job service offices across the state. Some of them are small, and their staff is only a part-time person. We are divided into four regions, and we have – we call them customer service areas.

So when we have a training – we had a training in June to start the implementation of WIOA, and we talked about the youth program of course and all the changes and updates in the youth program, but we also covered the adult and the dislocated worker so that we could gather all of the staff that needed to learn about WIOA and needed to know this information in one place and we could deliver all the information at one time. And as a minimally funded state, we have limited funding.

So our total training youth funds for PY '15, which is our PY '15 allocation plus unspent funds from PY '14, we have $797,000 – $7,097.30 – no. I'm sorry. Well, it's $798,000, and we also have a low unemployment rate. It's 2.5 percent unemployment, and the national unemployment rate is about 5.2 percent.

Our online job openings are about 17,000, and that's 8.8 percent lower than the previous month and 21 percent lower than one year ago. And I'm sure many of you have heard about the oil boom in North Dakota and all of the things that are going on in our state because of this oil boom, and so many people have moved to North Dakota. But the oil boom and the production has been cut down lately, and so there aren't as many people here. Our labor source in August was about 414,000 people.

So when we are looking at the out-of-school youth, WIOA required that 75 percent of youth funds be spent on out-of-school youth. So we took a look at what was going on in our state and looked at some reports and then looked at current and future obligations and realized that we were spending 55 percent on in-school youth, and we were spending 45 percent on out-of-school youth.

So in an effort to meet that 75 percent requirement, we placed a hold on our funding for in-school youth. That meant that staff could still enroll in-school youth, but no funds could be spent. So they are able to provide job search assistance, career exploration, other – any of the other youth elements that didn't require any money. And then we ran another report at the end of September and saw that 92 percent of the youth training funds had been allocated – that means dedicated to people enrolled that are going into training or need support services.

And then the total funds now are that 46 percent are being spent on in-school youth, and 54 percent are being spent on out-of-school youth. So that shows that the funding for out-of-school youth has increased 9 percent since mid-June when we placed that hold. So we're working towards that 75 percent, and it looks like we're moving in the right direction by placing that hold.

So our individual training accounts, our ITAs, are currently $3,000 per semester, and they can be obligated for one program year. So our case managers do inform all students there's no guarantee of funding levels for training for subsequent program years because – just because of our budget and we never know from year to year what it will be.

So we really determined that – workforce program staff and management determined funding levels prior to the beginning of each program year. And so it really is up to the student then to comply with all of the things that they need to do to stay in the program, to do well, to talk with their case manager, make sure they're submitting grades, getting a passing grade, all of those kinds of things so that their funding will continue, if we have it. So participants are told that we can only fund on a year-by-year basis, and then students must complete the program in three years or less.

So the trend priority for awarding these ITAs are that the governor has five targeted industries, and that's advanced manufacturing, value-added agriculture, energy, technology-based business, and tourism. And then we have additional target industries of healthcare, transportation, and life sciences. So – and then also a training for an occupation that will lead to employment and high-demand occupation and a high wage, which is currently $14.10 per hour.

So we also looked from a report at the end of August there were 89 out-of-school youth across the state enrolled in training. And I thought maybe the expansion of the age limit for out-of-school youth maybe would have attracted more people, but there were only 4 people out of those 89 that were between the ages of 22 and 24. But almost one-fourth of the out-of-school participants, which is 22, had more than $10,000 – $10,000 training allocated to them. And I just did some simple math and saw that the average cost per participant was about $6300.

Now, when we talk about urban versus rural, that is always a challenge when it comes to training because the training facilities, the entities tend to be in the more urban areas. So when somebody from a smaller community wants to go to training, they generally have to do some traveling. They have to maybe relocate temporarily during the training time, and it can be costly because we not only provide them with the cost of the training, if it's short-term and it's more than 50 miles away from home, we will also provide them with lodging and meals and mileage and some of those kinds of things.

So during that short-term training, which one of those would be considered a 12-week welding course, and welding is in demand in our state. And so a welding course could cost over $11,000, and when we add those support services in, that could be another $8,000 to $10,000 for just them to have an extended stay in a hotel and meals and those kinds of things that go with it. But then when those people complete their training and get job offers, they can make between $15 and $30 an hour. So it is attractive to young people thinking that they can make those – that kind of money right after they've completed a training course.

So that's kind of again just kind of an overview of what is happening in our state and how our WIOA program works. And now, I will turn it over to Bobbie Miller who is in Valley City, and she will talk to you about what goes on in her local office. Thank you.

BOBBIE MILLER: Hi, everyone. This is Bobbie, and as Pat said, from Valley City, North Dakota.

I guess the approach that I'm going to take as far as the challenges, our barriers, if you will, with the WIOA is more as the case manager implementing and going out and finding the folks that we're looking for. Our main thing that we have kind of changed and helped to transition into our WIOA is our partnerships. We really looked into who else is doing the work and who's contacting these folks and how are we especially going to find our out-of-school youth?

So what I did is I kind of looked around, and who are our agencies that are also targeting these youth and who are helping those people? So I looked at our human service agencies, our schools, our transition teachers, our vocational and high school counselors.

The one that I really found most effective that I went into the high school was our emotionally disabled or learning disabled teachers that are in our schools. It seems that once I made my relationship with those teachers, whether it be right here in our city, a population of around the 6600, or whether it's in the community within our two counties that I serve that are a population of 200, is making that rapport and knowing who I am.

We all know that our high school counselors are very busy. They are added more on in the students. The amount that they have per student capita is huge. So I'm trying to find who are they – I'm finding that our ED and our LD teachers are keeping more in touch with their students after they graduate, and they can still kind of go back and say, hey, I got an e-mail from this person. I've asked, and it's OK to refer them on to you. Here's their e-mail or here's their phone number. Can you contact them?

But getting in to the students, into their classrooms, making resumes, getting your face out there to the student so they feel comfortable to coming into the One-Stop or they're going to feel comfortable if I'm in their small community and, say I'm at the library or I'm in the café on – down the road that has Wi-Fi, meet me there. They're more apt and more willing to come in because they feel comfortable because I've already had their presence of them.

So that's one thing, and then also getting out into your colleges and your career fairs because networking and word of mouth is also still going to be our way of going through and telling things. But my main thing that I truly have found an asset in the last six months is our vocational rehabilitation counselors.

The two that serve our – my counties that I work with, we kind of tag team it. If I know that she's going into the high school, she'll just pop an e-mail and say, hey, I'm going. What do you – do you want to tag? Do you have anything new? Let's get this together, because we know, as youth and as adults and – I don't want people coming at me and throwing all this information at me 100 times. It's like, what can you give me? Here's your whole package deal and what can I get and let's go on.

So many times I think the youth get concerned that, oh, I didn't know I was supposed to go to this person, and then I had to have this person because I'm in so many programs right now that we try and keep it simple and let them know that even though you do have maybe two – you have a vocational counselor, but you do have also a workforce center counselor, case manager, that we want to do things together. And ultimately our goal is for you to succeed. So we do kind of do a little bit of conglomerating our people together and making it a little bit easier for them.

One thing that I did find for our library here in our town is they started a new campaign. And our director is new and he's very proactive and he wants people back in, utilizing a library. So they're offering lots of things. They updated their computers. They're wanting people to get back into the town. So when I heard that, I thought, you know what, these youth or the people that are in their 21 to 24, do they have desktop computers anymore? Do they even use their laptops? They're all on their smartphones.

And I had asked the library staff. I went to a staff meeting and said, do they – what do they do? Well, they're trying to do online applications. They're seeing a lot of that now because on their smartphones they don't – they can't get to the online applications, and it's so frustrating to try and type and get what needed to be done on a smartphone.

So I educated the library staff again. Do you know what job service is? Can I tell you? This is our One-Stop center. This is what we do. We have a bank of computers. Let us help refer them down. We will help them. So hopefully that will – we've gotten a couple people. I mean, it's not like we're saying we're walking in by leaps and bounds by any way, but we are getting some people.

We also have an influx in our small town of new Americans. There are language barriers. They're kind of hard. We've implemented English as a second language now within our adult learning center. So that is getting better. As far as getting the placement for the individuals to find high wages and to get wages because they are skilled – just because of the language barrier. So that is being offered now within our community, which has also helped and then also letting them get in – and acclimated to our rural and small ways of how we do things.

Pat had noted that welding school. When we talk about some of the distance and the limited training amounts, all of the training facilities that we have in our area are well over an hour away from us.

We are lined on a major interstate. So that is easy and accessible, but when you're trying to get to – 60 miles every day to, say, welding training and it is – and it's five days a week and it's 8:00 to 5:00 and it's pretty good training, they don't have – they lack the transportation to get there. They probably don't have a car that has proper tires or works well enough to go out in the middle of winter and to be driving on the roads. So that's one barrier also that we have because of our limited funding.

The training costs so much and then to get the support services in there on top of it, we try and put a goal – or I do – to say, you know what, OK. I understand that we want this training, but what can we give or what can you do because we need to be able to buy food when you get there? You need to be able to kind of support yourself and get there. Do you have a place to stay? So it's hard for them because, well, you have the money. Just give it to us.

But I want them to be accountable and go through to make it so it's attainable goals that they do. So it takes a little bit. Maybe they have to save some money to get going and all of the things that need to be doing, but those are just goals and things that can be attainable to go.

The other one that we have is age-appropriate training. So we're very age-related. So in our rural area we have – I have a scenario that a young man wanted to become a truck driver. Well, he grew up on a farm and he had driven his dad's semi and he's driven his dad's buddies' on the next farm over semi. And he's probably a very skilled truck driver, but his thing was I'm not going to go to college. I just want to go get my CDL. I want to go to truck driver training.

So we're looking into scenarios, and as you come across all these positions that he's looking at going, he's finding that he's not able to be insured because of his age, because he's 18. Even though he's probably can pass the CDL test, he can get through the training, it's going to be difficult per investigation of what we've found talking to employers and who are they employing and what are they looking for.

Well, to be a truck driver you have to have a clean driving record, and then you also have to be over the age of 24 or 25 because the high risk of insurance is so out there that they can't even afford to put that young man in that truck. So it's like, well, let's look at what's your second – what else do we want to do?

I mean, he did decide this year he was going to stay farming, work as a hired man in the community, and continue to do what he does and then possibly this January he'll look more at going for welding school and training just because of the hindrance of paying the $10,000 or $6,000, whatever it is, for truck driver training and then not being able to be employed. So that's kind of a unique situation here that we have had come across in North Dakota.

And then the other part, Pat brought up our oil that we do have in North Dakota. And this is probably more of a behavioral entitlement type of thing with our youth that I'm coming across is the high wage. We have plenty of jobs open that are service-related or healthcare, early skilled entry-level positions.

Our youth are hearing that why should they work for $8 an hour or $8.50 an hour when their cousins or their friends are working out west in the oil and at Walmart's and their McDonald's they're getting paid $12 to $15 an hour as counter attendant. That they're worth more, and they should be entitled to getting that wage.

So it's kind of hard to get back to the core of what is a part-time job. What is the meaning to it? What does it do to your work readiness skills? What does it do for your opportunity to find the career? Excuse me.

So we have to come back and bring it back down to real life. These are your skills. Can you operate this machinery? Can you do that? Have you ever provided customer service? Bring it back down into perspective that these – this is what the wage is at the entry level and why there's minimum wages, so forth and go from that.

So that's one big challenge that we're hearing now. It's just not fair that you won't pay me more than $9 an hour when I have to work on weekends and I have to work in evening. We are getting – our employers are knowing that their wages have to come up, regardless if it is a youth or an adult or who they're paying.

So we are trying to get there in our community to make it a livable wage and go from there, but they just have to understand that work readiness is part of getting your career and then also maybe deciding you don't like that career. You don't want to go into food service, and you thought you might want to be a chef but you're not going to be.

We also in our small community, we have the limited amount of employers. So to try and in our real small communities to try and add work experiences in. They don't have the amount of business or it's not as busy sometimes as they think that they would – they aren't getting the youth in there and getting them a good opportunity to learn.

Sometimes that can make a difference, or maybe not having a job at the end is a concern for them. So then their work experience is over and they're not moving away from their little community but they don't have the job at the end due to not being able to fund and pick up more employees for those small ones.

One of the main good things for our training as I go back is our welding schools are now accredited. So that's a good thing for ours is that they can use their Pell grant and they can get financial aid for their welding. But it's the distance of your commute, it's your cost of commute; and then of course there's always the behavioral sides of which all of you that are case managers know how do you get ahold of the youth.

Those are barriers all into their own and their own disadvantages that we have to try and keeping track of a human that we have to track. But it's all manageable. It's all attainable. We get creative, and we find out how to do things, who are our partners, and get out there and just – and tell it and what we do and what we have to offer. And sometimes it's just saying our own – tooting our own horn and saying, hey, we have this great program, and word of mouth and networking and going from there.

So that's in closing is probably one of the benefits of – we talk about all the barriers of living in a small town, but maybe one of the benefits that I can say is you go out for a game of golf. You go out to a local basketball game. You're out in your public, and they're like, hey, I know of this guy. He's not working. Do you have any money for him in your office? How can he get in your program?

So you're out there and people are seeing you and you're getting out there to say, hey, we do have something and we can help this workforce if you're in there. So it's just keep doing what you're doing, and getting creative is probably the best thing that we do in our rural communities. So thank you.

MS. TROKE: Pat and Bobbie, that was fabulous. Thank you. I love the state, local tag team. We – I liked hearing both of your perspectives, and I need Pat to know that I did watch Blood and Oil season premier. So I'm well-aware of the North Dakota oil boom. Sad to hear it's going away. And then thank you, Bobbie, for those hot ideas especially around the libraries and the teacher relationships, so going beyond the counselor. I thought those were fantastic. So thank you, North Dakota. Fabulous.

We do have questions rolling in, and so I'm going to start flipping those questions to our speakers. If you have other questions, go ahead and put them in the chat. Gary has put together a word cloud for us from our original pop quiz. So just so you guys can see sort of when we talked about the challenges of rural, look what came up in first place. Transportation. And I know that's actually one of the big questions that's come in around transportation. So I'll let Bobbie and Pat noodle on that, but I'm going to kick over first to Arnold.

Arnold, a question has come in around what kind of partnerships do you have with the tribal programs? Can you take that one, sir?

MR. PALACIOS: Yes. The tribes have their own direct funding for WIA programs – or WIOA. However, in the community of Ajo that is close to the Akum reservation, youth do come over to the ISDA programs to participate and also are involved in the school district. So the partnership is a strong one there with the Alca Nation, but direct WIA funding is – they – the Akum nation has their own funding in that regard.

MS. TROKE: Great. Thank you. And we have another question coming in around examples of overcoming transportation problems. And I guess I'll open this up to all three of our speakers and say do you have any specific examples around the transportation challenges which we just saw was one of the largest barriers?

MS. MILLER: I think one of the – this is Bobbie. One of the things that we have helped getting across – getting around that transportation is the welding school, being able to now utilize the Pell grants and the loans. They're able to use that money as Pell grants as their getting the transportation, maybe getting their car in working order.

Otherwise, it's we use support services or do they have a support service as somebody that they can borrow from, or can – have we gone through any kind of our local Bank of North Dakota who does the loans? And what – if they have a plan in place, can they get a loan? Are they eligible to help also with those in some of ours? Those are some of the ones that I have done so far in my case management.

MR. PALACIOS: This is Arnold. In Ajo and as I mentioned in my example, Epolito is a driver that is hired by the Bureau of Indian Education, and he has a route of about 80 miles per day and that extends to the border with Mexico along the reservation. Also the school district, the Ajo Unified School District offers transportation and picks up students in rural sites. In terms of getting to – moving to another community, that is a – not a real big option in Ajo because there's not a lot of public transportation, but individual students or participants make those arrangements.

MS. TROKE: Great. That's very helpful. And I have a few more questions rolling in around specifically out-of-school youth. And so I think this one might be for Pat or for Bobbie, but they're asking about the transition to the 75 percent out-of-school youth requirement and how did you handle that with your youth service provider contractors? And they're wanting to specifically know about RFPs. Were there new RFPs issued, new contract awards made, et cetera?

MR. PALACIOS: I'm sorry. Was that on the transition to 75 percent?

MS. TROKE: Yes, sir.

MR. PALACIOS: Yes. Yeah. In Pima County we brought the providers together, kind of some natural allies in terms of the juvenile justice system, bringing voc rehab into the picture, and other providers that worked say with programs for high school dropouts. So it's looking like for your natural allies and developing those relationships.

MS. TROKE: That's great. And, Bobbie, do you want to add a little bit – some about your experiences in working with youth and the criminal justice system as well?

MS. MILLER: What we have found here is it is hard with the youth that do have the criminal background and living in rural North Dakota for one. Usually if you're in their paper, everybody knows about you, and we know how that Small Town USA goes.

But the other thing we do have is we offer a bonding program that we can promote to employers and say, hey, you know what, let's give another chance, this is a youth; let's go from there. So we do have a bonding program that we can help utilize that employer to take on that employee if the skills they're looking for.

MS. TROKE: That's great. We should put a link in to our federal bonding program. That's a nice plug. Thank you, Bobbie. We are fans of supporter of the Division of Youth Services. So perfect.

And I think a couple more questions are coming in. People are still typing, Gary. There's one on, "What strategies have you found effective in engaging out-of-school youth in terms of promoting entrepreneurship in rural communities?" And I will just throw that out again to our speakers. Any entrepreneurial opportunities?

MR. ANDERSON: I don't have any on that area. Sorry.

MS. TROKE: Oh, no. No. That's fine. We're just throwing them out there. And then we have one more question. It might be more of a comment just around, "Students within rural communities are actually in-school youth, but they currently have a hole on" – I think that's a hold – "on in-school youth admittance into other centers we are tied to are over in their numbers. How do we make those connections to rural communities when we are held back from serving them?"

Oh, wait. I just lost the question. Oh, thank you. I don't know if anybody wants to try to take that one. I'm not totally sure, whoever submitted that question, if they want to type into the chat or with a little bit more detail. That might be helpful. I think it might be getting, Arnold, to your sort of rings of connection between the urban and rural is my guess there.

MR. PALACIOS: And moving forward there will be an RFP process in our county for the WIOA services. And I think those expectations of 75 and 25 percent will be reflected in terms of the responders to that. I think everybody's experience with WIA is – was way over 50 percent in in-school youth, but in Pima County we started to ramp down the in-school youth enrollment, looking at this coming our way for a number of months.

So it's – I think the different communities are going to have a challenge as they balance that, but I think it's a healthy initiative, and I think communities are looking at this through their RFP process and also in terms of exiters and as they bring in new participants to the system.

MS. TROKE: That's great. Thanks. And I think we might have time for one last question, and it's around, "What strategies do you use to expose rural youth to job opportunities when there are very few opportunities in your rural community?"

MS. MILLER: For one of the things that we do here in North Dakota is we have – yesterday – we have a university here that campus is about 1400 students in our town. Yesterday about 400 students between juniors and seniors all got together and they had a career fair. So they broke out into little segments of teaching, and different areas all over the state came in and talked to students. They signed up for what they wanted to do as career path-wise, and then at the afternoon they had a job fair that they could walk through, look at schools, look at other jobs and career opportunities.

So = the schools are really good about putting out there the career fairs. Fargo, the bigger city, they'll bus them every other year to the big job fair that they have there. So they're exposing what they have in each smaller community and getting out there to what they do. We also have a manufacturing plant here that does an ag equipment that each school I believe will take a day and go and tour our plants and say, this is what you are if you're welding, if you're engineering. These are the departments and the opportunities that they have here. So we're good about showing our own students what's out there for opportunities.

MR. PALACIOS: In Pima County our youth council working with the workforce investment board looked at the employment picture and the growth industries and identified six major growth industries for our community. And the youth council has put together, with the help of agencies and Tucson Youth Development in particular, youth expos, youth career expos where we have employers in that area to talk to students directly.

And the school districts and other agencies get their students there for those expos, and they've been well-attended and also parents have come along. So they've also set up like a parent track in terms of responding to what educational needs their students would have, and it's been hugely successful.

MS. TROKE: That's awesome. Those are both great ideas. Thank you. So I think that is – we've gotten to almost all the questions, and I would just say thank you. Great job, speakers. Such a wealth of subject matter expertise. So I really appreciate you. Your remarks today have been absolutely fabulous.

So now, we're going to do a tiny bit. We just have a few minutes left. So please hang in there with me. I need to get your feedback basically on some ideas for 2016. I want to first, though, point out the ION Network, which is the Innovation and Opportunity Network, and it's really a chance to connect.

It's an online learning connection point where we bring together workforce development professionals, stakeholders, and partners so you can connect with one another, share best practices, and strategies with one another. We're also hoping to provide a whole host of technical assistance on this online vehicle, so helping you forge comprehensive alignment, strategic investments, capacity building, and strengthen existing partnerships.

Eric has put up the link to the ION Network. So if you would please grab that and bookmark it, you can be a part of that community. I hope many of you have already been a part of this community. It was launched in June, and new content is being added on a very regular basis. So something to look for.

All right. So in the Enough is Known for Action webinar series I asked you earlier – I told you earlier – sorry – this was the eighth in the series for the year. We have two more webinars to close out the series. In October we're excited to talk about our TANF partnerships, and then in December super excited to talk about system-involved youth. So we will look forward to seeing you there.

But we just want to kind of check in and see how many Enough is Known webinars have you been on so far? Do we have any gold star participants who've been on all eight of these webinars? Oh, my goodness. We do have some perfect attendance records. I wish I could give you all a gold star.

So what we really want to understand – thank you, guys, for playing along with me. This was just fun. We just wanted to get a sense of how many you're joining in. And I know some of the topics will be of interest and maybe some not so much. So we're thrilled to have you here with us today to talk about rural issues.

But going forward into 2016 what are some of the topics that you really want us to go deep on? We have our first youth operating guidance TEGL out there. We will have a second youth operating guidance TEGL out there in the very near future, and what are those – some specific topics that you would like the Division of Youth Services to really bear down on in 2016 when we continue the series?

If you could open the chat for me, Eric, that would be awesome. And I just want to take these last couple minutes to have you guys enter your ideas for us, and I think the chat is open. Yeah. People are typing. So that's exciting. Again, open to any and all of your ideas going into 2016.

And I want to once again – as this rolls, I will thank everybody for joining and thank our presenters once again. And I will wish everybody a great day. Thank you.

(END)