

Update on Adult Education Podcast
Episode 2: Voices from the Field
with Barbara Gibson, Katy Parrish, and Sharon Johnson
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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 Katy Parrish, Program Manager, Region Six, Central Shenandoah Adult Education, and Sharon Johnson, Director of the Shenandoah Valley Workforce Development Board and Chair of the Virginia Association of Workforce Directors. Thank you for being with us today to share ways your organizations are collaborating to build a stronger regional workforce system. Today we're going to start with Katy and asking her to describe the work that she's currently doing in workforce education. Katy?

Katy Parrish: Thank you, Barbara, and hello, and hello to everyone that may be listening and thank you for taking the time to listen. Some of the stuff that we're doing out in our region in regards to workforce education are a lot of kind of IET job readiness, workforce essential kind of stuff. We have a lot of different partners that we work with, including our local workforce board, who's involved in a lot of the same type of programs with us.

For example, we have a partnership where we're working with the Career Pathways with Individuals with Disabilities through the DARS and DBDI, and then of course our local workforce board's also in there. And we're basically doing a type of integrated education and training in the field of manufacturing. And so, basically, all of these groups are working together and partnering together to offer a free training to somebody that would be interested in maybe trying to get a job in the logistics area. That would be one.

We also, of course, have our PluggedIn Virginia grant also in this area where we focus on healthcare. And, again, we have a lot of partners that help with that, with the employers, our workforce board—you know, they pay for anybody that's eligible through Title I. They pay for the funding for that, and then the ones that can't pay for the training, the PluggedIn Virginia grant picks up. We also have a GoodCare program that's a grant that was received by Goodwill. And again, that's all partnerships, working together, providing these type of trainings.

We do some more individualized things as well in the workforce. We have a partnership with the Department of Social Services' VIEW program where one week we teach the job readiness and then the second week we teach workforce essential skills. And all of this in hopes of these individuals getting a job once they get through this type of training.

We also work with the jails. We have GED® classes within the jails. We also have the career readiness certification [CRC] programs and one of the jails in the area, and then we have some ESL classes that are within certain businesses in our area. Some of the manufacturing plants and

poultry plants will have a teacher go in and teach an ESL class. So we're doing all sorts of different things in regards to workforce education, and the majority of it is working with our partners.

Barbara Gibsion: Katy, that's a really impressive list of programs that you're involved in, and I know some of them are quite complex and involve multiple partners. So it sounds as if you really are quite integrated into the workforce system in your region. Sharon, I'd like to know from your perspective with the workforce board, what do you see is the role of adult education programs in the regional workforce system?

Sharon Johnson: Well, Barbara, thank you for having me here today. I really appreciate the opportunity to talk about our wonderful adult education partners. And Katy, thank you so much for the great explanation of the many programs and projects that are going on with our region. We from the workforce board know that adult education programs are critically important and they always have been. And Katy certainly did a great job of pointing out the many ways in which we connect. But we, especially right now, with the very low unemployment rate that we're seeing throughout our region—the individuals that we are working with, are trying, attempting to serve and connect with, are those individuals that are the hardest to serve because really, with the low unemployment rate, if anybody wants a job, they could have a job. So adult education is even more critically important at this point in time because all of the partners have to come together to serve these most difficult to serve individuals and get them into a work environment. Because, from the demand side, from the employer side, they are needed. The workers are needed, and certain skill sets are needed. We just have to provide a lot more services to build individuals up to the level that they can be a supply to the demand side of businesses.

Also, too, we look at our adult education programs strategically, and they are an important partner on our board and both program managers from our region serve on our Workforce Development Board as board members and serve on other committees. We also depend on adult education strategically to work with us on the development of our local workforce plan that is due. Also to work with us on the—the local workforce plan and sometimes can be perceived as more of a compliance document, but it is quite a bit of detail on how we work together, and we look to our adult education program managers as our partners to work with us on literally developing that plan. And then hopefully that plan, as we could see from the last go-round, aligns with the adult ed plan that they have in place.

We also have adult education involved in the development of the board's strategic plan so as we in our region have these discussions about: there's so much that can be done in workforce. What are our priorities in workforce? Who are our partners? And how can we work together in adult education is very important, not only in our area from an operational standpoint and the delivery of programs, but they're important in our area from a strategic perspective as well.

Barbara Gibsion: What are some of the opportunities that you see for future collaborative work with adult education?

Sharon Johnson: Well, I think that we have many workforce challenges. And I know just from developing our strategic plan (we had a retreat in March), and I'm trying to, the staff is working

to pull all of those activities together, but we're even seeing from March to May how there have been changes in the workforce system. So, we see the need for flexibility in working with our partners. So now that we are co-located within centers (and that was a tremendous effort that took place over the last 18 months to two years); so, it's great to be located co-located within the centers. Our next collaboration, it needs to be with how to align systems—a system alignment of the programs within the center. Now that we're all there together, how do we work together in the most efficient and effective manner? So we're looking at our partners in these, and the program managers specifically, on helping us to find ... going through systems integration, or some call it functional alignment ,of the actual details of how we're going to operate within the centers in an efficient and effective way, producing or enabling us to deliver—reach more individuals and to deliver more services to more individuals. So that is really where I see our next step. But also, too, we've got to continue with the programs and the projects and looking for those opportunities. So a parallel path in continuing those efforts and then strategically moving to how we're going to functionally align in the details of that within our centers. So we've got many things to work on together.

Katy Parrish: I think Sharon covered most of that question, but I could also just add that we are very lucky to have Sharon in our area because she has allowed on the board both—her local area covers a bigger area than Region Six Adult Ed; it actually encompasses another adult ed program, and we are lucky enough to have both of us on the local workforce board. And I know other local workforce boards that have that same type of makeup don't have both adult ed program managers on the board. So we're lucky in that sense ,that both Amy Judd and myself are both on the board.

And we have, also, have two people from the workforce side that are on our Advisory Board. We have the service provider person that oversees for Goodwill on the board, and then we also have the operation center's manager that's also on our Advisory Board that works directly with Sharon, so they take a lot of what we're doing back to what they're doing on their end. So we're able to kind of know what's going on all the time between the two programs. And I think one of the ways that that shows is that Sharon reached out Amy Judd and myself about two weeks ago about the adult state conference that we have in July—and it's run by our adult education program at the state level, and she already knew about it, and she invited us to present with her. So I thought that was kind of great, that she's that aware of what's going on in adult ed that she reached out to us to present at a conference that's more focused on adult ed, that I have of course invited all the partners to come as well.

Barbara Gibson: That's a great example of collaborative work and getting out and working together and presenting training and informational sessions. I think that helps to promote collaboration, not just in your own region, but also across the state. So that's really great that that's happened. Both of your organizations are under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act or WIOA, Title I for the workforce board and Title II for adult education. How have those WIOA requirements changed the way the workforce board and adult education programs work together in your region?

Katy Parrish: I think it made it so that we are working even more closely together, as I had said just a few minutes ago, that we have people represented on both boards now. I think that's just

happened in the last two [or] three years, so when WIOA came out I think the fact that we have the colocation—and, again, this is something that the local workforce area board here did; you know, they're required to have at least one center that has colocation, but they actually set up two, one in my region and one also in Region Seven, Amy Judd's region. So we have colocation in two areas of their WIB, not WIB anymore, but Workforce Development Board Area. And so I think that's huge, that they managed to be able to get that as well as the satellite sites that they have all around the region. It makes it easier for co-enrollment. And then I think we also do a lot of stuff where the funding is braided now.

Sharon Johnson: Yes, I think those are great examples, Katy. And WIOA has certainly made it, set the expectations; and we were working, we're a very collaborative region anyway, and we were working that way, but it always helps when there's the federal act that clearly sets the expectations that will work together across the titles. So that was no problem at all, but it's nice that it was laid out so clearly in the WIOA act.

So that has gotten us now to moving towards the integration of our systems and, as Katy said, the leveraging of resources and the braiding of funds. And we want to look at leveraging resources in every way possible, from staffing to facilities to programs to funding. And how can we better do that? And we're just in the, really, the planning stages of how we can formally carry out that process of systems alignment. Also with co-enrollments, as we talk about systems alignment, co-enrollments and referrals and things like that will, even though we're doing them now, they'll be more clearly defined and we'll I'm sure see other opportunities where we can work together in different ways that we haven't noticed already. And we want to work towards a system of affirmative referrals, where there is already good communication, but there will be great communication back and forth regarding a referral of an individual—and this is across all partners. We want to implement the affirmative referral process so when someone is referred, both parties know that the referral has been made, there is action taken with the individual, and then there's communication back to the referring agency. And then there's documentation kept, and of course the case managers always keep documentation, but there's more of a group effort in trying to lay out the best path for an individual. So these are things through affirmative referrals that we want to implement across all programs. And, as Katy said, the use of supportive services that we have with WIOA helps us to braid funding in that way to work with adult education. So I think that WIOA truly does have innovation in it and that it does give us the lead way to look at that and to explore ways to work together: new opportunities to be innovative, and new opportunities to expand, and new opportunities to partner. And that is what WIOA is all about. And I think we are set up perfectly with adult education to take full advantage of all of those things that WIOA wants us to do.

Barbara Gibson: That's very exciting, and I think you laid that out really well so that, you know, we can understand the path that you all are taking in your region to continue to build that workforce system that will be changing over time. It certainly isn't going to be static, but it sounds as if you really are moving in a direction that allows you to have a dynamic workforce development system that includes all of the relevant partners in fully working together and collaborating and sharing resources to make that system a reality. That's very exciting. Katy, did you have anything else to add before we move on?

Katy Parrish: No, I think Sharon covered a lot it.

Barbara Gibson: Okay, I just wanted to make sure. One of the key aspects of WIOA requirements, at least from the adult education perspective, has been Integrated Education and Training, or IET, and co-enrollment. They've certainly been major focus areas of adult education under WIOA. IET has been defined by the Center for Law and Social Policy (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.’” Now that's a very formal and complex definition, but it covered, I think it covers, all of the relevant parts of IET. It represents a wide spectrum of services to build foundational employability and occupational skills. How has IET or how will IET and co-enrollment programs improve workforce development in your region?

Katy Parrish: I think that we have been pretty lucky in the sense that we have been doing Integrated and Education Training here for several years now, even prior to WIOA. We had the PluggedIn Virginia grant and, as a result of that, that was kind of the first time we really started doing more of a co-enrollment program. So we kind of had something in place, and it has grown from there. We now have several different grants that are now in this area that is all centered around IET. I mentioned some of those back at the beginning with the CPID grant through DARS, the Good Care, the apprenticeship grant that the local workforce board has. So, you know, and then of course, the PluggedIn is still going on. So, I think it just is making it stronger and stronger because we're really starting to kind of work through the kinks, and the funding is really becoming more braided and we're not duplicating services. So I think the resources are being used more efficiently. And then I know Sharon already talked a little bit about the system functional alignment that is really kind of the key that's being looked to now to making sure we're at the point—are we really talking back and forth outside of these programs where people are co-enrolled?—and the affirmative referrals and all of that kind of stuff. So that, I think, is probably more our next step, because I feel like we've done pretty well with getting in the IET part up and running. And that's starting to be much smoother. And so now we're kind moving on to the next stages. I don't know if you have something to add to that, Sharon.

Sharon Johnson: And I agree with that. The time for IET is definitely now, and we fully embrace that. And, as Katy said, we're looking to take that to the next level because we're in a situation with such a low unemployment rate. Again, individuals need a lot more services, and the Integrated Education and Training is a lot about what they need.

Now our challenge is: how do we reach more people? How do we get out there and do more outreach? Better outreach? Because the bottom line is, we've got to serve more individuals. And we know that there are individuals out there. Certainly, the pool hasn't gone away. And we just need to figure out better ways to reach more people. And, from a board perspective, we are really challenged with that, and what will that look like? The time has come for ... we, I think, have been pretty lax in using technology certainly to its fullest capabilities. And we are looking at the

development of an app to help us do outreach and other ways that we can expand our reach as far as: how far out can we go to try to get to more people? And technology seems to be the only answer that we can find. And that is one of the roles of the Board of Directors for the Workforce Development Board, is actually to use technology in a way to reach more individuals and to expand the services, to use it to reach more individuals and then to use it to actually deliver the services in a more efficient and effective manner. And we are certainly approaching that time and see it coming as we are looking ahead at our budgets over the next year and the next three to five years and the anticipated budget cuts that we're going to have. So, this time for IET, this time for partnering, this time for technology is certainly here. And we embrace all of that and feel like it's going to be a very exciting and changes that are going to have to occur in the near future.

Barbara Gibson: I think that is so well stated, both of you articulating the importance of those programs that reach out to more people and provide more in-depth and stronger workforce development services and workforce education and training services, maybe to people who have never been reached because they are among the hardest to serve and among the hardest to reach. It's good that you're building on the kind of foundation that you already have to think about how to reach out beyond the typical target audience that adult education and workforce training programs have had, to really reach the harder to serve elements of the population, and trying to bring them in to the workforce system in ways that they have not been included before. So, it's a big challenge obviously, as you've described it. But at the same time, it's exciting that you're at the place in your region where you can start thinking about that and moving beyond what's always been done to something more challenging and that will really serve residents of your region in ways that they have not been served before. I think that's something that all regions are probably struggling with, adult education, workforce boards, and other partners of the workforce system. Some of them are not nearly as far along as you are in developing your workforce system and in working together toward that end. So I feel that, from your experience, you have some important things to offer, advice to give to folks who are in other regions who maybe aren't as far along as you all are, but who could benefit from your experience and the work that you're doing now to build to the future. So, what can you share with us in terms of advice you might give to other programs?

Katy Parrish: For me, I think, a big part of what has made it successful for us is that Sharon has a very good understanding of what adult education does and what we could do, and at the same time, being a part of the local workforce board, I know what's going on on their side of things. And so the fact that we both understand what each other are doing, it makes it easier to find where the common goals are and how we can work together to strengthen programs. And the fact that we have a very open line of communication: it's very easy for me to just pick up the phone and give her a call or vice versa. And again, you know, we have people on both sides on the board so that you're always knowing what's going on. When the local plan came out, as Sharon stated earlier, we were a part of that process. And then when our grant proposals came out I just, you know, picked up the phone and said, "Hey! Do you have time to sit down, and I just want to make sure that what we're you know writing in our adult ed grants line up with what you guys see for the local plan, just to make sure that we're on the same page." And I think that type of

communication just strengthens everything that's going on. And the other big key, as I said, is just knowing what is possible on both sides.

Sharon Johnson: And I agree with Katy completely: the communication is so critical on a regular basis, and the collaboration, and of course that leads to trust. And it helps so much to understand—if you don't know where somebody's coming from, unless you understand the situation that they're in and why they need to do things the way that they do—and if you have a better understanding, then you can both talk about things that you can do differently or things that you can do together or to align. And so that understanding of the details of how each other's organizations and programs operate helped so much to learn from each other, and about the programs and requirements and performance metrics and outcomes and expectations: all of those things really factor in to really understanding where your partners are coming from. And then when you better understand that, then you can work together to work on solutions and new ideas and to be innovative. And you always know that you have, that somebody's got your back, and you're always there to work with and support each other in these changing times. And those things are important. So, if the number one thing is to communicate, communicate, communicate, and that leads to an environment of collaboration; and the bottom line is, that you fully trust each other and support which each other's doing. And that's the best scenario it can possibly be.

Barbara Gibson: Those are really good pieces of advice for any organization that is looking to collaborate and build systems, whether they're in workforce or in other areas, but I think it's certainly pertinent to what all of our adult ed and workforce boards are challenged with doing today. And I appreciate your offering that advice from your own experience. I think it will be beneficial to a lot of the folks from different organizations that are maybe just beginning the process or are new to it and a little bit further along. Do you all have anything else that you would like to include or offer that you forgot to say earlier? I'd be happy to have you do that now if you'd like.

Sharon Johnson: I just want to say that, from the board's perspective, we are so honored to have two great program managers with Katy and with Amy to work with in our region. And the staff that I have that works with the Advisory Board, they come back from every meeting and tell me these amazing things that are going on, and they learn so much, and we are constantly so impressed by all of the things that adult education does. And I don't think that they hear often enough about how appreciative we are of the great work that they do and the lives that they change every day. And it makes a huge difference, and it makes us a stronger board, and it makes us a stronger region to be working with adult education in this way. So thank you very much.

Katy Parrish: I'll just kind of echo what Sharon said. She has a great staff, and the fact that they take time to come out to our meetings—because it really is just adult ed, that they come to the Advisory Board; it's all about what's going on and our side of the world—and they come every time. And I keep, you know, every now and then I'll be like, “Hey, if you don't want to make this one, it's fine; there's not a whole lot of relevant stuff on your side of things.” But they still show up. So we appreciate the fact that they're coming out and spending that time with us and then taking everything back to Sharon to let her know what's going on our end. And the fact that she

has, you know, somehow found space for both of the adult ed programs to be on the local workforce board. Because I know they have a certain percentage of make-up that that board has to make, and so it can be hard to fit everybody in in regards to those type of requirements. So the fact that she was able to do that was fantastic, and it just makes things a lot easier because you really are aware of what's going on. And the more you're aware, the better you can work together. So I think that's all been great for us. I want to thank you as well, Barbara, for asking us to join you today and just talk a little bit. So thank you for that opportunity as well.

Barbara Gibson: Well, thank you for joining us today and sharing your wealth of experience with the field and with other partners who may listen to these podcasts. It really makes a big difference when we can hear directly from the field, from people who are working on the ground, so to speak, to build these programs and to have an understanding of what's actually going on in individual regions. And it is, I think, very helpful to all of us to have that opportunity to hear about your experiences, get advice from you—and don't be surprised if you get some phone calls from folks who want to know a little bit more about what you're doing in your region. Thank you again for being with us today and [I] wish you all the best as you continue to develop your workforce system in the valley. Thank you.

Katy Parrish: Thank you.

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