



LOCAL WORKFORCE INNOVATION AREA 23

2023 Success Stories

Local Workforce Innovation Area 23 serves individuals and businesses in 13 Illinois counties: Clark, Clay, Coles, Crawford, Cumberland, Edgar, Effingham, Fayette, Jasper, Lawrence, Marion, Moultrie, and Richland.

We are committed to making a positive impact on the local and state workforce through our programs, resources, and dedicated staff.

C.E.F.S. Economic Opportunity Corporation has been the program service provider for decades. Their Career Planners work closely with participants providing resources, guidance, information, mentoring, and encouragement.

It is our pleasure to share with you some of the LWIA 23 success stories for customers served July 1, 2022 through April 30, 2023.



C.E.F.S. Career Planners

Veya Jones – Centralia

Carol Hoedebecke – Effingham

Charlene Nelson - Effingham

Maureen Hays - Lawrenceville

Amanda Davis - Mattoon

Debra Schumacher - Mattoon

Tabithia Wilcoxon – Mattoon

Bobbi Hart-Walka - Olney

Maureen Hays - Robinson

Heidi Cade – Vandalia



About W.I.O.A....

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) took effect on July 1, 2015, which supersedes the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA).

WIOA formally adopts many parts of Illinois' progressive workforce development model on a nationwide basis, with the goal of ensuring that our workforce system is job-driven, responding to the needs of the employers and preparing workers for jobs available now and in the future.



These success stories focus on the Adult, Dislocated Workers, Youth and Trade customers who have been involved with WIOA and have been able to experience first-hand what can be achieved with assistance through WIOA.

Providing Opportunities...

Erika first came to learn about the CEFS/WIOA program through Lake Land College. She was a single mother of a little boy and they were receiving SNAP benefits. She needed to secure full-time employment that would have great wages and benefits to support her family. Erika had a dream about wanting to become an RN. She was working at Sarah Bush as a Certified Medical Assistant, but was only able to work part time due to her class schedule.

Erika was determined eligible and received financial assistance with tuition, fees, and books. She also received assistance with transportation and supplies such as uniforms, testing fees, and licensure fees. Since Erika was able to receive these services, she was able to continue working part-time hours, have more time for studying and to spend with her son, and not have to worry as much about her financial situation.

Before she was in the WIOA program, Erika would always try and pick up extra shifts just to make ends meet which led to a lack of time for her family. Since graduating from the Lake Land College/Associate Degree in Nursing program, Erika continues to work at Sarah Bush in the Emergency Department, but now she works full-time as a registered nurse. She is earning more than double her previous wage and she absolutely loves everything about her job.

Erika has also continued her education and will be graduating with her Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) from Southern IL University in Edwardsville in May, 2023. She's not stopping there as she's striving to begin the doctorate program in nursing within the next 6 months.

Erika was an ideal customer not only because she was a great student, but she also turned in her paperwork or anything else that was needed from her and it was completed correctly and submitted promptly. She was always very personable and appreciative of the services she was receiving.

"To me, the CEFS/WIOA program is an amazing program and it helps navigate those individuals that are wanting to better their lives for their families. CEFS/WIOA helped me in so many different aspects including financially. I was able to reach for the stars and now I'm able to do what I feel like I do best and that is taking care of my patients. I want to personally thank each and every person at CEFS/WIOA who made this dream possible for my son and I."



Erika Roderick
Neoga, IL

Career Planner:
Charlene Nelson

Adult Program



Allyssa Kenter

Toledo, IL

Career Planner:
Carol Hoedebecke

Adult Program

Allyssa first came into the workNet center in July 2020. At the time, she was working in an insurance office full-time but wanted to go back to school to earn a Management degree so she could find a job that would allow her to earn a self-sufficient wage to support herself and three children. However, Allyssa needed help paying for her college education.

She ended up enrolling in classroom training where the WIOA program provided multiple types of assistance to help her pay for her education including tuition, books, all required supplies and transportation reimbursement. She also received a computer from a grant in which she got to use while attending school. She was a good student during her schooling and completed her training. She was very excited about the opportunity to go back to school, as it was something she never would have been able to afford on her own. She continues to work full-time and has been on several interviews for Management positions.

Carleigh first came to our office in July 2020 and inquired about financial assistance with the Associate Degree in Nursing program after being referred by a friend. She had been accepted into the nursing program and her classes began in August 2020. Carleigh was a single mother with a young daughter to support, was currently unemployed and needed part-time employment to work while she was in training.

Since Carleigh was eligible for WIOA, she received financial assistance with all of her college costs as well as uniforms, supplies, testing and licensure fees, as well as transportation reimbursement. She also received the PELL grant and other financial assistance, so she didn't have to worry as much about her financial situation. This allowed her to have more time to study and to spend time with her family.

Carleigh, who had a passion for nursing, was a great student who studied hard to earn good grades. She was always willing to do whatever was asked of her. Carleigh was always pleasant and easy to talk to and very grateful of the assistance she was receiving.

When Carleigh first came to the CEFS/WIOA office, she was unemployed, receiving SNAP benefits, and needed assistance with paying for the nursing program. Since graduating Frontier Community College with her Associate Degree in Nursing and passing her state board exams, Carleigh secured a full-time position as an RN at Clay County Hospital. She is earning at least twice her previous wage and has great benefits for her family.

"In a time when I was going through many obstacles and struggles, I wasn't sure what the future would bring. CEFS/WIOA helped me feel hopeful for the future by providing me the assistance I needed in order to complete my education and create a better life for my daughter and I. I'm eternally grateful for CEFS/WIOA."



Carleigh Yeager

Effingham, IL

Career Planner:
Charlene Nelson

Adult Program

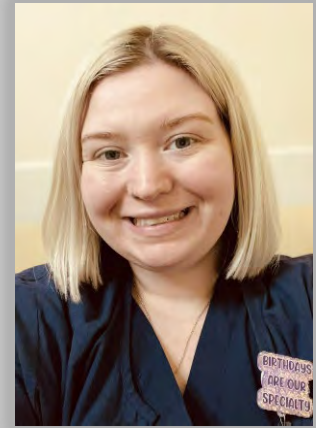
Providing Opportunities...

Boston was living at home with her mother and four younger siblings. She and her mother were the only source of income to support the household of six and Boston worked two jobs while attending high school. When Boston graduated high school, she was interested in the RN-ADN program beginning the Fall semester of 2020. She was low income and in need of assistance to complete an educational training program in order to meet her employment goal.

Boston was provided an application and testing services, as well as an Individual Service Strategy to determine goals and objectives. She had already received her CNA while in high school and planned to work while attending Lake Land College. She also decided she wanted to complete the co-requisite courses and lighten the load for when she started nursing classes. She was enrolled in classroom training and received assistance in the forms of books, tuition, transportation reimbursement, supportive services for uniforms and supplies, as well as costs of testing and licensure.

Boston had set a goal for herself to get her RN by May 2022 and go to work in a hospital as a labor and delivery nurse as soon as she got her license. She met that goal in August of 2022 when she began working for Carle Hospital in labor and delivery making \$35 an hour. She now works a full-time job doing what she loves and looks forward to getting out of bed at 3:30 every morning to go to work! Boston continues putting herself through school for her BSN at the same time and says she will meet her goal of receiving her BSN from SIUE in May 2023. Boston says her ultimate career goal is to be a midwife and she is actively working towards that end.

Boston recently stated "CEFS was so important to me as I was able to focus on school and took some of the worry about how to make money while going to school away."



Boston Roberts
Mattoon, IL

Career Planner:
Debra Schumacher

Youth Program

Providing Opportunities...



Haley Dust Effingham, IL

Career Planner:
Carol Hoedebecke

*Dislocated Worker
Program*

Haley came into the workNet center in December 2020. At that time, Haley was a single parent with four children and was receiving SNAP benefits. Haley had previously worked doing some landscaping but was no longer working and wanted to go back to school to earn a degree. She decided on the 2-year Horticulture program at Lake Land College but needed help paying for her college education.

Haley was very eager to go back to school and enrolled in classroom training. WIOA paid for tuition, books, transportation reimbursement and all required supplies to help her pay for her education.

Haley went to Lake Land College and graduated with an Associate Degree in Horticulture. She has big dreams about owning her own business one day. She stated that WIOA and CEFS are unbelievable at what we do for people and happy she does not have to pay anything back.

Kathleen (Katie) first came to the CEFS/WIOA office in October 2021 as a single mother with three young sons. She had been laid off because of the economic situation resulting from COVID-19 and out of work for longer than six months from her job. She had exhausted her unemployment benefits and was looking to secure full-time employment in order to support her family.

Katie was eligible for CEFS/WIOA as a Dislocated Worker and accepted a full-time position at Patterson Technology. She was enrolled in the OJT (On-the-Job Training) program, making significantly more than her previous job. Katie also received transportation and child care assistance while she was part of the OJT program. This made it easier for Katie financially until she could make enough to pay for necessities herself during and after the pandemic.

Katie achieved her goal of securing full-time employment at a company that had great wages and benefits. Katie received very good performance reviews from her supervisors at Patterson's. She was an excellent employee who was able to learn new skills quickly.

With Katie's experience at Patterson Technology, she was able to accept a union position at Consolidated Communications that paid her even more than she was earning at Patterson's. Her last day at Patterson's was March 17, 2023 and she began at Consolidated Communications on March 20, 2023. Katie's new position is as an Accounting Specialist II and will be working remotely. Katie has been able to provide for her family and was also able to gain work referrals to find better employment.

"CEFS/WIOA helped me when I needed financial assistance the most. I will be forever grateful for their assistance on helping me get back into the workforce and being able to financially provide for my children and myself."



Katie Hille Teutopolis, IL

Career Planner:
Charlene Nelson

*Dislocated Worker
Program*

Providing Opportunities...

Megan first came into the CEFS/WIOA office in July 2020. Megan had been laid off from her job as a substitute teacher for the Decatur and Sullivan school district due to COVID-19. Megan's only source of income was unemployment, which became a financial struggle for this single mom.

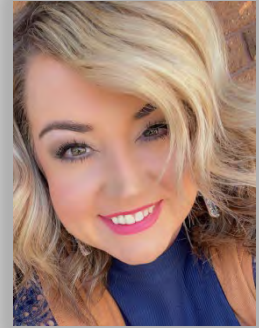
At that time, she had just left her ADN (Associate's Degree in Nursing) Orientation, which only accepts a limited number of people, and was inquiring about the CEFS Dislocated Worker Services. Megan didn't want to pass up the opportunity to pursue her Nursing degree; however, there was no way she could afford Nursing school on just her unemployment. Megan spoke with her Career Planner for over an hour and she immediately went to work on getting all of her paperwork together and turned back in the same day.

After being determined eligible, Megan received financial assistance with all of her college costs as well as a variety of supportive services uniforms and transportation reimbursement. Dislocated Worker funding also helped Megan financially due to her not having to pay out-of-pocket for required supplies and exam fees. Because of the WIOA program, Megan was able to use these services to earn her Associates Degree and RN License with no student loans.

In just two short years, Megan's life completely changed. Megan started this journey being a laid off substitute teacher with no future return date at the time--which we now know it took the schools over a year to open back up, being on unemployment, and struggling financially. Fast forward, she received her Associate's Degree in Nursing, obtained her RN License, and took a job immediately out of school working for Sarah Bush Lincoln Home Health, making \$40.00 an hour.

Megan could have given up when she was laid off and she started to struggle financially...but she didn't. She got up every day and did what she had to do to provide for her and her son. Not only did she keep in regular contact with her Career Planner and turn in any requested documentation quickly, Megan gave 110% in everything she did. Megan has shown that anything is possible and that giving up was never an option for her. This dedication presented itself as Megan was awarded the Lake Land College Nursing Program Peer Award.

"When I met Tabithia in 2020, I was a single mother wanting to go back to school to become a RN. Financially I was not going to be able to accomplish this, but with the help of CEFS, I was able to return to school and graduate with my Associates Degree in Nursing, receive the Lake Land College Nursing Program Peer award, take and pass my NCLEX. I now work full-time as an RN at Sarah Bush Lincoln Home Health. I absolutely love my job and my life as it is today. None of this would be possible without Tabithia and the amazing CEFS Program. I tell everyone to check out CEFS for help achieving their dreams."



Megan Walters
Sullivan, IL

Career Planner:
Tabithia Wilcoxon

*Dislocated Worker
Program*

Providing Opportunities...



Ciarra Spencer

Sumner, IL

Career Planner:
Maureen Hays

Trade Program

Ciarra was first introduced to CEFS Workforce Programs as a result of a Rapid Response meeting in February of 2022 following the permanent closure of her employer in Lawrenceville, IL in December of 2021. A certification of eligibility for TRADE Adjustment Assistance was made in January of 2022 and the process to meet with impacted workers began. Ciarra attended the Rapid Response meeting where a Trade Benefits Rights and Obligations form was read to and explained to Ciarra outlining her eligibility for various benefits through the Trade program.

Ciarra had worked as a team assembler just shy of 10 years when her employer, a business of manufacturing wire harnesses, was significantly affected by the production shift of wire harness manufacturings going to a foreign country that was due to the Free Trade Agreement with the United States. Her challenge to gaining employment was to seek out opportunities in in-demand occupations. Being unemployed was not a choice for Ciarra but she made what she determined to be a solid decision to retrain by going back to school and she stuck with it. Ciarra had a history of association with large equipment growing up and she had experience in backing and hitching up equipment to trailers. After researching for in-demand occupations, she decided on truck driving and getting her CDL.

Ciarra had a high school diploma and lacked the skills and abilities, along with the required credential, to work as a commercial truck driver. An assessment was completed and an Individual Employment Plan was developed and approved by the state for Ciarra to attend Wabash Valley College in the Truck Driving training course located at the West Richland Center in Noble, IL. Ciarra attended her first class on April 11, 2022.

Not only was her training covered, but transportation reimbursement to travel from her home in Lawrenceville to the training facility in Noble, her driver's permit and background check were all taken care of as well. Ciarra was consistent and attended all scheduled classes. Although semi-truck driving still hails as a non-traditional occupation for women, Ciarra made herself comfortable by simply stepping up to the challenge every day. She would seek advice from her fellow students and her family, as well as keeping her WIOA career planner up-to-date on how she was doing and giving her career planner the opportunity to encourage and coach her along the way. Ciarra passed her paper portion of her CDL in April and after a short, uncontrollable delay with the learning facility, finished up with her CDL driving test in June of 2022.

Ciarra overcame the stigma of possessing just a high school diploma and working in a low-wage manufacturing job in a small town by stepping out of her comfort zone and into a big wheel. Ciarra never wavered, never complained, always smiled, and said, "Yep, that's it," whenever there was another challenge or obstacle for her to overcome. Besides having to travel 42 miles round trip everyday she had class, she never said she couldn't do any part of the training requirement. She never said it was too hard to learn to back up a trailer and stay within the lines. Ciarra fought for each component of her training curriculum from reading and studying for the paper exam to handling a big rig, and she enjoyed the challenge. In Ciarra's mind, she would succeed. It was this attitude of getting it done that she impressed upon her WIOA career planner and her instructor.

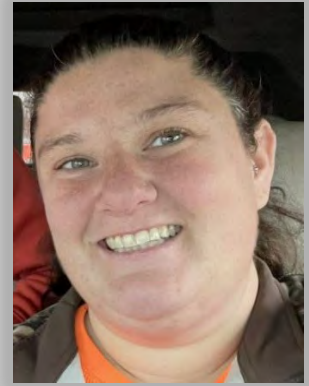
Ciarra drove a sanitation truck for a short-time, but a better opportunity presented itself and she grabbed it by the wheel! She now works for a national trucking company hauling goods to and from retail establishments in a regionally defined but local area. Since her layoff and retraining, Ciarra has moved into a new home. "The C.E.F.S. services have helped make my dream job come true and they helped me get back on my feet as well."

Samantha is a single mom of two boys and was working two jobs. She first came to the CEFS office looking for assistance for nursing school. She was already accepted into the nursing program at Kaskaskia College but unsure how she was going to be able to pay for the college expenses and mileage back and forth to Centralia and her clinicals. She was also facing the difficulty of paying her regular bills as her income was going towards her educational needs.

Samantha completed an application and was accepted into the WIOA program. Help was provided in multiple ways such as tuition and book assistance, uniforms, transportation reimbursement as well as a laptop. Her Career Planner also encouraged her to attend food pantry days as well as apply for LIHEAP assistance to help with utilities.

Samantha is a hardworking student and she doesn't give up when adversity hits. Not only does she manage full-time nursing school and working two jobs, but she also is a single mom of two school-aged children who are involved in sports as well as the homework assistance they need in the evenings. She will be graduating in the Fall of 2023 and is excited that once done, she can work one job making the income to where she can be home more with her family all while becoming more self-sufficient and being debt-free from school.

Samantha stated the following, "The impact that WIOA has had on our family is huge. There are so many aspects that went into going back to school for a single mom (especially with very active boys like mine are) and they were able to make that possible. There will always be the bills and life essentials that come up and can take a toll on any household. With this program-although still working I was able to have a sense of reassurance and stability to know that those bills were covered and tuition fees were not added to the pile. Heidi has been such a blessing to work with in the process and is one of the best cheerleaders and gives some great pep talks! Nursing school has caused more than a handful of tears in the process but she's been wonderful and frequently checking in to make sure everything's ok. Definitely a relief when looking forward to not having to work multiple jobs (unless as a choice) and being able to spend more quality time with my boys."



Samantha Evans

Vandalia, IL

Career Planner:
Heidi Cade

Adult Program



Clay County Hospital



In partnership with LWIA 23, Illinois Eastern Community Colleges and Clay County Hospital have developed the first Department of Labor-registered nursing apprenticeship in Illinois designed to take students from a high school diploma to an associate in nursing degree.

IECC Associate Dean of Allied Health Alani Frederick said, “The nursing apprenticeship program is an innovative next step in education for nursing in the state of Illinois. Our students will not only receive a quality education at Illinois Eastern Community Colleges, but will also be immersed in the world of healthcare through the apprenticeship hours that they will have at Clay County Hospital.”

Clay County Hospital Clinical Educator and Registered Nurse Kamy Vail said the partnership with IECC and LWIA 23 is a win-win for both the hospital and the apprentices: “We have to find new, innovative ways to bring in nurses to the hospital...The nursing apprenticeship program will be able to support students financially throughout their educational journey.”

In exchange for meeting the requirements of the apprenticeship, Clay County Hospital will be funding apprentices’ tuition, fees, books, and uniforms in addition to their competitive hourly wage. When they graduate and pass their NCLEX, apprentices will be licensed registered nurse in the state of Illinois and will come out with a full-time job at Clay County Hospital with benefits and further opportunities for professional development.

LWIA 23 Apprenticeship Navigator Nate Carlson noted, “In partnering with CCH to develop this exciting apprenticeship career pathway, we hope to showcase how Incumbent Worker Training funds and other WIOA Business Services can be leveraged by employers in ALL industries to cultivate a successful and productive workforce.” Clay County Hospital’s apprentices will earn their CNA, LPN, and RN licenses as a part of the program, demonstrating the value of stackable credentials in the Healthcare sector and beyond.



The Equity



The Equity in Effingham recently partnered with LWIA 23 to develop multiple exciting and innovative registered apprenticeship programs in the Agriculture sector. Working alongside LWIA 23 staff and the Lake Land College Center for Business and Industry, The Equity launched apprenticeships for CDL Drivers, Diesel Technicians, and Feed Mill Operators, offering new and current employees the opportunity to grow their skills through apprenticeship.

In addition to offering guidance and hands-on assistance throughout the DOL apprenticeship registration process, LWIA 23 was able to provide funding to assist in the Equity’s workforce investment through its Incumbent Worker Training program. In utilizing IWT funds to help pay for their CDL apprenticeships, The Equity was able to increase the number of paid training opportunities they were able to provide, growing their fleet of drivers to meet industry demand while strengthening their company culture.

LWIA 23 Director Jamie Corda-Hadjaoui said the partnership is a powerful demonstration of what’s possible when workforce stakeholders work together: “This kind of collaboration between an employer, a post-secondary education institution, and our WIOA team is a best practice that we hope to see continue as we expand our investment in registered apprenticeship development in LWIA 23.”

Local Workforce Innovation Area 23



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