

**Local Elected Officials (LEO) Board Meeting
October 26, 2023
3:00PM**

Minutes

The Local Elected Officials (LEOs) met on October 26, 2023, at 3:00 p.m. The meeting was held at Montaluce, located at 501 Hightower Church Rd., Dahlonega, GA 30533.

CALL TO ORDER

Greg James, Chief Local Elected Official (CLEO), called the meeting to order and thanked everyone for attending. A quorum was not established. The following was present:

Members Present

Greg James (Rabun County)
Chris Dockery (Lumpkin County)
Alfred John (Forsyth County)
Travis Turner (White County)
Jim Conley (City of Blairsville)
Lamar Paris (Union County)

GMRC Staff Present

Heather Feldman, Executive Director
Gina Kessler, Executive Assistant
Whitney Blair, WorkSource Director
Diane Jackson, Administrative Assistant
Dawn Bruce, Intake & Eligibility
Specialist

Consideration of Minutes

Due to a lack of a quorum, the minutes from the September 29, 2021, meeting and the October 27, 2022, meeting were not considered.

Old Business

None

New Business

None

Reports / Announcements:

Whitney Blair, WorkSource Georgia Mountains (WSGM) Director, provided an update on the activities for WorkSource. The Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs served 621 occupational skills training participants during PY22 and enrolled 265 new participants for a 64.5% increase from PY21.

Students included in this number participated in occupational skills training. Case managers served these students to assist in their job search or have completed training and were being monitored for success for one year. Those eligible for occupational skills training receive tuition, books, supply assistance, and supportive services like gas money and childcare.

During PY22, WorkSource paid \$673,308 towards tuition, books, and supplies for students and \$92,835 towards the costs of supportive services like gas money and childcare.

Participants primarily attended North Georgia Technical College (NGTC) or Lanier Technical College (LTC). However, WSGM also served students at the University of North Georgia (UNG), Piedmont, and Brenau, among other area schools. Students were also assisted in earning their GED or credits to complete their high school diploma and then transitioning to further their education or entering the workforce through partnerships with NGTC and LTC Adult Education and area Mountain Education Charter schools.

The interest in short-term training continues to increase, with many participants attending Dalys or other providers to earn their CDL-A. In response to the demand for short-term training from job seekers and employers, WSGM has actively sought and promoted available short-term programs. Through our transition program special initiative, 34 students graduated from NGTC with a welding credential and the opportunity to work full-time at Kubota. On average, these participants make \$17 an hour after completing the program and 75% were still employed one year after training.

The Youth Department continues to bring innovative ideas to WSGM. All of the GED classes at the center were ongoing this year and full, which we were delighted with. More than 86 GED students participated in the GED Career Pathways program, which slightly increased over last year. The Youth Department also pushes accelerated training opportunities for recent grads and served 55 students this year who averaged a wage of \$18.48 an hour upon completion. This included our welding and electro-mechanical academy.

Business Services continues to grow with On-the-Job Training (OJT), Incumbent Worker Training (IWT), Work Experience (WEX), and Apprenticeships, which are all available options for participants and employers to take part in. Since July 2021, WSGM has paid more than \$278,000 to area employers through training or wage subsidy reimbursements.

Sector Strategy work has continued with efforts concentrated on the manufacturing industry. WorkSource has made great strides, and the group WSGM contracted with to spearhead this work, Workforce Strategies, is engaged and doing an excellent job. This effort currently includes a steering committee composed of over 100 regional partners, including employers, community partners and stakeholders, and K-12 and post-secondary educators. WorkSource has continued to fund the Be Pro, Be Proud (BPBP) initiative, an interactive opportunity out of Cherokee County to excite students about skilled trades and the abundant

career opportunities in the Georgia Mountains area. It was offered to all of our school systems, with Banks, Dawson, Franklin, Gainesville, Lumpkin, Stephens, Towns, and Union County school systems participating in the Be Pro, Be Proud experience. Each stop meant hundreds of students from grades seven to 12 were exposed to 15 career pathways, including welding, plumbing, electrical work, and commercial truck driving. WorkSource is funding another round of visits this year and has asked the schools to become more involved either by assisting with a portion of the cost or committing to recruiting employers to be there and meet students.

Sector Strategies also launched the Georgia Mountains Works website for parents, employers, and students to find all these resources in one place. Sector Strategies also began the Supervisor and Industry Leadership (SAIL) program successfully and is in progress on the second cohort with LTC. We will be launching the program at NGTC this spring. The Quality Control apprenticeship has also continued to gain momentum this program year.

Our regular PY22 funding, which ended June 2023, totaled \$2.4 million. In PY23, our allocation did decrease slightly to around \$2.3 million. However, WSGM planned for these decreases and are actively seeking other available funding sources.

WorkSource was able to spend all the COVID grant received from the State and served 112 individuals during the three years of that grant. Due to the success of this grant, WorkSource was awarded a Quest grant totaling around \$326,000. WorkSource also received additional dollars from TCSG due to its unique programming, totaling \$320,000 plus \$276,000 for sector strategy and \$75,000 for rapid response, which helps make up the deficit of regular WIOA dollars.

WorkSource Georgia Mountains is one of the few areas in Georgia that provides most of its services through in-house staff. WSGM case managers' connection to the participants they serve is one of the largest reasons for our success. The staff truly cares about the lives they are touching, the success of this region and each of your cities and counties WSGM serves. Director Blair stated she appreciated all that each of the LEO Board members do to support WorkSource and the Regional Commission. Mrs. Blair informed the Board to reach out if they would like more information on what WSGM has to offer.

Travis Turner asked if WorkSource had any knowledge of future funding increases. Director Blair explained WIOA is all federally funded. Unfortunately, the unemployment rate being so low in the Georgia Mountains area affects the funding amounts. However, WorkSource continues to apply for other grants that become available.

Chris Dockery requested information to be sent to the LEO Board to show how many people WorkSource helped place and the cost per student broken down by program and program year. Director Blair stated that the State gathered information showing the cost and how much money was put back into the economy. Also, the Directors across the State are currently working on a one-pager of program information to use as handouts.

Travis Turner asked being that we have gone down in funding, is WorkSource more efficient with the funds? Director Blair explained that WorkSource has been more creative and less siloed. WorkSource is cross-training staff and trying to do more with less staff.

Executive Director Heather Feldman stated that WorkSource has seen a significant shift to the Businesses Services side, the OJT, IWT, and apprenticeships versus straight occupational skills. Director Blair explained that when money is directed towards businesses, it cuts into the amount of money left for participants.

Travis Turner referred to the 2022 LEO meeting minutes regarding the potential closing of the Mountain Education Charter (MEC) Schools. He provided the information that they did not close and have undergone management changes and asked about WorkSource's relationship with MEC. Director Blair stated that WorkSource has a very good relationship with MEC. The Youth team has scheduled or conducted workshops in nearly every MEC to date, making referrals for services and providing a pool of applicants for short-term training such as welding and electro-mechanical.

Due to the budget cuts, Travis Turner asked how many employees WorkSource currently has. Director Blair commented that WorkSource has 14 due to not replacing several positions to keep in line with the budget cuts. Cross-training is being done, and WorkSource is only replacing necessary positions. Travis Turner asked if all staff were back or working remotely in the office. Director Blair responded that all staff are back in person full-time. WorkSource has hired a new Outreach Coordinator who retired from the Forsyth County School System and has worked closely with MECs. He has been a significant asset due to his ability to speak the same language as the schools and students. There has been a 10% increase in enrollment over the same period as last year.

Executive Director Feldman stated that last year, we mentioned selling the Mobile Training Unit (MTU). WorkSource got very close, but the finance director at the State changed jobs. The new person has to start from the beginning, but we are still looking to dispose of the MTUs.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

Greg James, CLEO