

Community College Practices that Serve Older Dislocated Workers

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To overcome the challenges of reemployment in the post-Great Recession economy, dislocated workers, especially older dislocated workers, may particularly benefit from attending community college. Community colleges offer industry-recognized education, training, and credentials to facilitate dislocated workers' return to work. However, experience to date indicates that community colleges must figure out how to address dislocated workers' unique needs to encourage their enrollment, provide sufficient guidance around appropriate career options, and provide support to help them gain the basic skills necessary to being successful students. This brief highlights strategies under way at five community colleges serving high numbers of dislocated workers and examines how those practices meet the needs of older workers, some of whom may be aging with or into disabilities.¹

Introduction

Dislocated workers face many challenges in the labor market.² They often experience a range of consequences resulting from their job loss, including earnings losses upon reemployment that often linger for years (Katz, 2010). Researchers from the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development found that among dislocated workers who were reemployed, roughly half (48%) were forced to take a pay cut, with nearly 60 percent earning at least 20 percent less than they had been earning previously (Godofsky, Van Horn, & Zukin, 2010). In addition, they often face physical and mental health difficulties (Godofsky, Van Horn, & Zukin, 2010; Katz, 2010). A recent study noted that staff from the One-Stop Career Centers reported greater numbers of older dislocated workers with disabilities, particularly those who had previously worked in physically demanding jobs, and/or who had developed age-related chronic health conditions, including cardiac or respiratory disease, arthritis, diabetes, and hearing difficulties (Heidkamp & Mabe, 2011). Some dislocated workers who experience long-term unemployment and face health problems may eventually drop out of the labor market and turn to Social Security Disability Insurance (Autor & Duggan, 2003; Orszag, 2010). Given the severe economic, personal, and societal consequences, policies to shorten the duration of unemployment for dislocated workers are critical.

Older workers have faced particular challenges in the post-Great Recession economy. Due to a combination of demographic, economic, health, and labor market trends, they make up an increasingly significant portion of the workforce and have proven vulnerable to unemployment and especially to long-term unemployment. As of April 2012, approximately 2 million of the 12.5 million unemployed Americans were 55 and older (Rix, 2012). Unemployed older workers were the most likely of any age group to have been without a job for a year or more (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2012). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010), the reemployment rate for older displaced workers ages 55 to 64 was just 39 percent, and for those job seekers 65 and over, the rate was a dismal 23 percent, in contrast with significantly higher reemployment rates for younger displaced workers, 55 percent for those ages 20 to 24, and 53 percent for those ages 25 to 54.

Education and training may be particularly important in the reemployment of older workers who have experienced a job loss. As noted by public workforce system experts, older job seekers, especially older dislocated workers, may in fact be lacking the current skills, including postsecondary credentials, needed to succeed in the labor market (Heidkamp, Mabe, & DeGraaf, 2012). Prior research suggests that when they do participate in training, they have employment outcomes that are comparable and, in some cases, better than those of their younger counterparts. However, prior research has also found that older adults tend to participate in both publicly and privately supported training, including at community colleges, at significantly lower rates than younger adults do. The lower likelihood of older job seekers participating in training and education may be one factor in their higher likelihood of joining the ranks of the long-term unemployed.

Dislocated workers of all ages face a range of challenges related to education and training, many of which are more pronounced for older adults. Many dislocated workers, especially older dislocated workers, have been out of school for years or even decades and may not know what courses or programs to pursue to help them return to work, particularly if they need to complete substantial education to prepare for jobs in more stable or growing industries (Heidkamp, Mabe, & DeGraaf, 2012). Some dislocated older workers have basic skills challenges or previously unidentified learning disabilities as well as a range of age-related disabilities or chronic health conditions that could affect their ability to succeed in education (Heidkamp & Mabe, 2011; Heidkamp, Mabe, & DeGraaf, 2012). Furthermore, older workers may be reluctant to pursue education and training because they doubt their own abilities to do so; they may fear not being able to keep up with younger students or worry that younger students are both more technologically savvy and may be able to learn new material more quickly than they can (U.S. Department of Labor, 2008). Finally, many older dislocated workers may have limited time to invest in education, given their urgent need to return to work, as well as limited financial resources to support their education. For many older individuals with limited resources, the nation's network of community colleges can offer a more affordable, and more easily accessible, way to obtain necessary education and training. However, this combination of unique needs and barriers faced by older, displaced workers presents special challenges for community colleges.

Community College Strategies for Serving Older and Dislocated Workers

Community colleges are an important resource for helping both dislocated workers of all ages and older workers gain the skills and credentials needed to transition into new jobs and careers. Among older students, 40 years of age or older, enrolled in postsecondary education, 42 percent are enrolled in community colleges based on data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. While the numbers of dislocated workers at community colleges are not tracked by the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, community colleges are noted as being key institutions in the retraining of dislocated workers (Jacobson, LaLonde, & Sullivan, 2011). Previous research on dislocated workers has noted that an academic year of community college training can increase the earnings of dislocated workers by about \$4,000 if the training is in high-return courses, such as health-related fields and technical trades (Jacobson, LaLonde, & Sullivan, 2011). Greenstone and Looney (2011) note that training providers such as community colleges can be in tune with trends in the labor market, providing courses that are likely to offer high returns on investment, as well as the counseling to help students understand the benefits of pursuing these often more technical fields.

However, dislocated workers are not highly likely to pursue community college education (Jacobson, LaLonde, & Sullivan, 2011). For example, a study of dislocated workers in Washington State revealed that only about 15 percent took any community college courses, and three-quarters of those trained for under half a year; this “underinvestment in training” is attributed to a lack of information on the costs and benefits of training as well as budgetary constraints.

Recent initiatives targeted at older workers and dislocated workers provide insights on the lessons and challenges community colleges face in serving these populations. For example, the American Association of Community College's (AACC) Plus 50 Initiative is seeking to improve how community colleges serve older workers over the age of 50. And Michigan's No Worker Left Behind initiative, which served approximately 150,000 participants between 2007 and 2010, worked to provide education to large numbers of dislocated workers often at community colleges. These two deliberate attempts to increase community college attendance by older students and dislocated workers offer some interesting lessons regarding serving these populations.

For example, based on the experiences of the pilot colleges in AACC's Plus 50 Initiative, AACC identified several standards that define characteristics of community college programs to help older students succeed. Among these standards that highlight community college responses to the particular learning needs of older students are offering learner-centered programming and providing learner support services. Learner-centered programming calls for schools to understand the interests and appreciate the "life situations" of their older students, such as tailoring instructional delivery to reflect the needs of older students who are trying to upgrade their skills in order to return to the job market quickly by offering accelerated courses for training or retraining (LFA Group, n.d.). Providing learner support services involves helping older students make use of career exploration and assessment tools, providing them with information about the local labor market, and identifying courses that will help them prepare for their careers. Another standard encourages colleges to provide accessible and accommodating materials and environments to ensure the physical comfort and accessibility of older students, who may have age-related or other disabilities, through the use of "smart rooms" with dual monitors, microphones, and speakers; larger fonts for course materials; and event and course locations close to public transportation or with transportation services provided to increase access for older students.³

The No Worker Left Behind initiative in Michigan focused its efforts on helping dislocated workers obtain education and training, typically community college education. An evaluation of this initiative reveals some important lessons about serving dislocated workers at community colleges. College staff recognized that they needed to learn more about the needs of dislocated workers who had been involuntarily separated from their employers (Hilliard, 2011). They also found that dislocated workers knew far less about the labor market than they expected and needed extensive guidance (Hilliard, 2011). College staff also noted the enormity of the problem of basic skills among this population: one in three working-age Michigan residents lacked the basic literacy and numeracy skills necessary to participate successfully in community college (Good, 2011). To address this critical need, Michigan made a number of policy reforms, including expanding access to accelerated learning and contextualized basic skills tied to occupational training and jobs (Good, 2011). Finally, Michigan recognized that dislocated workers face a unique challenge in that they are burdened by concerns for how to pay bills and get reemployed.

Building on the lessons from these initiatives for older workers and dislocated workers, the Heldrich Center sought to specifically examine how several community colleges from across the nation are addressing the needs of older, dislocated workers. This brief highlights strategies across aspects of the student experience, including enrollment, advising and counseling, and academic and non-academic supports, at five community colleges.

Methodology

To examine community colleges' strategies for serving dislocated workers, including older dislocated workers, Heldrich Center researchers conducted case studies of community colleges in five states with high numbers of dislocated workers. The states were identified based on having a high number of dislocated workers and high unemployment, as well as a range of geographical areas with different local economies. States were ranked based

on the number of workers in Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) certified employers in 2010. The 5 case study states were in the top 10 of states with the highest number of TAA workers, had unemployment rates in 2010 of more than 10 percent, and were located in a range of geographic areas. Based on recommendations from community college experts, schools were identified in each of the five states. These included two colleges in the Midwest in local areas with significant economic development challenges due to declines in the manufacturing industry (Macomb Community College in Michigan and Lorain County Community College in Ohio); two colleges on the west coast: one in the Pacific Northwest with a diversified economy (Portland Community College in Oregon) and one in the technology-heavy San Francisco Bay Area (Skyline College in California); and one college in the Southeast in an economy dominated by the financial services industry (Central Piedmont Community College in North Carolina). See Table 1 for more information.

Table 1. Case Study Community Colleges

State	Total Workers in TAA-Certified Employers in 2010	Rank in Total Workers in TAA-Certified Employers in 2010	2010 Unemployment Rate	Case Study College
Michigan	34,931	1	12.5 percent	Macomb Community College, Macomb, Michigan
Ohio	25,822	2	10.1 percent	Lorain County Community College, Elyria, Ohio
California	20,363	3	12.4 percent	Skyline College, San Bruno, California
North Carolina	14,763	5	10.6 percent	Central Piedmont Community College, Charlotte, North Carolina
Oregon	10,051	10	10.8 percent	Portland Community College, Portland, Oregon

Heldrich Center researchers then conducted telephone interviews with credit and noncredit administrators, counseling staff, and dedicated dislocated worker staff (when applicable) in January and February 2012. They also reviewed college Web sites and relevant college documents provided by the interviewees. Interview topics covered the range of practices in use at each college, including student recruitment; services to help students choose among programs to study; and academic, financial, and support services for students. Older students were considered to be nontraditional students approximately 40 years and older because they comprise a sizable part of the community college population (42 percent) and they are likely to begin to face age-related health and/or disability issues. However, because most community colleges do not specifically target students by age, staff responded based on their estimates of age in the student population.

Findings

Encouraging Enrollment: Reaching Older Dislocated Workers

Partnerships with the public workforce system, including administering and collocating America's Job Centers (formerly known as the One-Stop Career Centers) as well as participating in Rapid Response activities, can help community colleges reach older dislocated workers.

While students choose to enroll at community colleges through a variety of ways, referrals from the public workforce system is a particularly common way older dislocated workers enroll. Community college leaders from the case studies noted that many dislocated workers enrolling at their colleges were referred through the public

workforce system. Additionally, they noted that these dislocated workers were typically older than the average student, mostly between the ages of 35 and 55.

The enrollment of students from the public workforce system in community colleges is facilitated by existing relationships between these two institutions. Community college leaders from the five case study colleges described a range of diverse partnerships with the public workforce system. Three models for partnerships between the public workforce system and community colleges emerge from the case studies: administration of the public workforce programs, collocation of America's Job Centers on college campuses, and participation of community college staff in state Rapid Response activities.

Serving Older Dislocated Workers with Disabilities: A Note from the Authors

The Heldrich Center research team examined whether colleges sought to serve the potentially distinct needs of dislocated workers. As this brief discusses, a handful of programs targeted dislocated workers, but none targeted or specifically identified those who may have disabilities. However, given that disabilities, including work-limiting disabilities, increase significantly with age, many dislocated older workers are likely to have age-related physical or mental disabilities, as well as undiagnosed disabilities that may affect their ability to complete the education (Burkhauser, Daly, & Tennant, 2010). Another recent Heldrich Center study examined how community colleges serve older students with disabilities. The findings from this study provide relevant insights for community colleges serving older dislocated workers who may have disabilities.

1. Older community college students are less likely to identify themselves as having a disability than younger students, but are more likely to self-report than younger students. Since they may not identify themselves as having a disability, they may not take advantage of services available through campus disability services offices.
2. Universal strategies targeted at the entire student body may be important in identifying disabilities among older students. These strategies include: "early alert" systems that enable faculty to identify and refer struggling older students who may have an unidentified disability to the disability services office; placement test screening, which is required of all students and thus provides a unique opportunity to uncover unidentified disabilities; and efforts to raise awareness about different "learning styles" that may help identify potential learning disabilities.
3. Faculty and staff members, particularly tutors, can have a critical role in identifying older community college students with disabilities who might benefit from targeted support services. Disability services staff may provide training to faculty and staff on how to refer students for services and how to use specific learning strategies that are especially helpful for students with disabilities.
4. Older students may benefit from additional support in accessing accommodations, especially those that are dependent on technology, since some may need to build basic computer skills. Staff with specialized knowledge on assistive technology may be important to ensure its availability to older students with disabilities, particularly because of its common use and importance in promoting their ability to function independently in college and the workforce.

For more information on this study, see: M. Van Noy, M. Heidkamp, & C. Kaltz. (2013). *How are Community Colleges Serving the Needs of Older Students with Disabilities?* New Brunswick, NJ: NTAR Leadership Center, Rutgers University.

One model of partnership is for community colleges to administer the programs of the public workforce system. Portland Community College (PCC) is the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) provider for the region, under its Workforce Network division, and many of the staff in PCC's workforce development division have previous experience working in the workforce system. Staff from the college indicated that this experience as the provider of WIA services has equipped the college with a deep understanding of the multitude of issues involved in helping dislocated workers get back on their feet, and of the "booms and busts" of the local economy. Given this history as the WIA provider, the college has significant experience in and a reputation for serving dislocated workers.

Another model of partnering with the America's Job Centers system is the collocation of America's Job Centers on community college campuses. Lorain County Community College (LCCC) has a satellite America's Job Center co-located on the college's campus, operated by staff from the college. The college holds frequent orientation sessions to introduce prospective students to the college. During the height of the recession, 40 to 50 people attended each session, among them many dislocated workers. According to college staff, LCCC and the workforce system work "hand-in-hand," striving to offer a consistent, integrated product in terms of career exploration, guidance, résumé assistance, interviewing skills, and job search techniques. They maintain one Web site where individuals can register for a number of joint workshops and services. Not all dislocated workers who visit the on-campus America's Job Center are ultimately served there, but having the satellite America's Job Center on campus provides visibility for the offerings of the community college.

A third model of partnership between community colleges and the public workforce system is for community colleges to directly reach out to displaced workers by participating in Rapid Response activities conducted by the public workforce system. Under WIA, state governments are required to carry out Rapid Response activities for dislocated workers, which are designed to assist workers affected by a layoff or plant closing in getting quickly connected to public workforce assistance benefits and services such as unemployment insurance, career counseling, and job search (Heidkamp & Kauder, 2008). Several of the case study colleges gave examples of participating in local Rapid Response activities. For example, Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC), through its Re-Careering Services Center, regularly participates in Rapid Response sessions organized by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Workforce Development Board.⁴ Through these sessions, CPCC staff are able to connect with groups of dislocated workers in many cases even before their layoffs occur, providing information about enrollment and about different program options that might be especially appealing to them. The college has developed a strong reputation with local industries for its retraining resources, and businesses often request CPCC's involvement in Rapid Response services when they are planning a layoff.

Community-based organizations (CBOs) also refer students who may be less likely to enroll, such as older dislocated workers, to community colleges.

Several case study community colleges reported a range of CBOs involved in referring students, particularly those who might not ordinarily find their way to the college. For Skyline College, CBOs like *Swords to Plowshares*, a nonprofit that helps veterans, are an important source of referrals to the college. Skyline also noted getting referrals from organized labor, including the San Mateo County Central Labor Council. LCCC cited several organizations, including the Urban League, Catholic Charities, and Hard-Hatted Women, an organization that helps women work in nontraditional fields, as important sources for referring students. CPCC noted that it receives frequent invitations from churches, nonprofits, and the local school system to speak about its programs. The range of CBOs that referred students to community colleges likely helped to reach a diverse group of students, including older dislocated workers.

Community colleges conducted targeted marketing to adults and dislocated workers that address their specific needs and encourage their enrollment, but motivating dislocated workers to enroll soon after their layoff occurs can be a challenge.

Several of the community colleges have developed targeted marketing for dislocated workers. Recognizing that dislocated workers want another job quickly but often need upgraded skills training, LCCC designed brochures tailored for dislocated workers featuring short-term training options. To reach out to older students and dislocated workers, Macomb Community College offers an “Adult Return to Learn” event in the spring that invites these prospective students to campus. This event features presentations from college staff that may be particularly relevant to dislocated workers, including admissions, financial aid, and counseling. The goal of this dedicated outreach is to attract the attention of older students and dislocated workers to the programs offered at the college and to create a welcoming environment to draw them in. Those with particular questions or needs, such as age-related disabilities, may have the opportunity to speak with college staff who could direct them to relevant college resources.

Another way that LCCC raises awareness among dislocated workers about its programs is through its “Stimulate Your Career” orientations, which provide background on what steps people need to take to enroll in the college. These workshops are in turn linked directly to a program geared specifically to dislocated workers, the Adult Transitions Program. The Stimulate Your Career workshops are held weekly at the local America’s Job Center, as well as occasionally at community organizations and libraries. Staff from the college commented, however, that motivating dislocated workers to take the next step beyond attending the Stimulate Your Career workshop can be a serious challenge, because such workers are often intimidated at pursuing education and also not motivated at the start of their layoff. College staff further commented that as dislocated workers begin to exhaust their unemployment benefits, they get into a desperate survival mode, where they are vulnerable and seek quick solutions. As such, college staff noted that the longer unemployed workers wait to turn to the community college, the less success these staff have in being able to equip the unemployed workers with the education and training solutions that will meet the skill demands of employers.

In addition to these targeted events, the case study colleges also conducted specific outreach through targeted placement of college information. They reached out to dislocated workers by posting information on social media sites that job seekers might be using for their job search, such as Craigslist, LinkedIn, and Facebook.

Providing Career Guidance and Counseling to Workers in Transition

Providing dedicated, front-end counseling for dislocated workers can support these and other older workers’ needs but is limited by college resources.

Once older dislocated workers enroll in college, they may need help deciding on a program of study. To help dislocated workers with this decision, some case study colleges offered dedicated counseling services for dislocated workers. LCCC and CPCC have identified point people for dislocated workers to provide them with guidance and help them avoid being “ping-ponged” among offices and staff members.

LCCC provides support to dislocated workers through the Adult Transitions Program (ATP). The goal of this program is to “build an enduring capacity at LCCC to recruit, enroll, retain, graduate, and otherwise prepare transitioning adults for employment and careers in the new economy” (Lorain County Community College, 2011). This program takes dislocated workers through a structured career exploration experience, interest assessments, one-on-one career counseling sessions, and periodic academic advising throughout their academic

experiences. A key component of ATP is upfront, in-depth advising, which enables advisers and dislocated workers to work together to “troubleshoot barriers” early. The ATP program first requires that a student completes an online interest profile or attends a career exploration workshop. After this component, students are asked to meet one-on-one with a career specialist. This mandatory meeting helps dislocated workers make appropriate choices, which in turn can help them save time and money.

CPCC’s Re-Careering Services Center provides counseling and other assistance to dislocated professionals to help them choose a new career. First the staff conduct an interest assessment based on O*NET — the U.S. Department of Labor’s Occupational Information Network — with the client. After identifying interests, the client attends a career transition workshop. These workshops are offered at different times of the day to accommodate as many people as possible. The workshop reviews how each client’s interests, as identified using O*NET, relate to transferable job skills. The client can then take advantage of five one-on-one sessions with a counselor and get help with résumé writing and developing an overarching job strategy.

A challenge to providing dedicated counseling for dislocated workers is finding the resources to do so. LCCC and CPCC’s dedicated counseling was supported by external grant funds, not ongoing college funds, so they might be difficult to sustain beyond the outside funding. LCCC’s funding for ATP came from a U.S. Department of Education Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education grant, as well as American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding. CPCC’s funding came from corporate foundations — first from Walmart and later continued with funding from Wells Fargo. Other case study colleges might have considered providing dedicated counseling to dislocated and older workers, but struggled to staff a counselor for dislocated workers, given budgetary constraints, since resources for these staff are limited within state and local allocations for community colleges. Limits in staff resources for counseling may pose particular challenges for older adults who have a range of issues in need of attention, including selecting appropriate programs of study and connecting with necessary college support services, such as tutoring or disability services.

Online and self-service tools can equip some older dislocated workers with relevant information to help guide their choices.

Given the challenges of funding staff to provide counseling, another strategy undertaken by colleges is to develop tools to provide better information to help students make decisions. These tools are sometimes offered online so they may be limited in their utility for some older workers, including those with disabilities, who are not computer literate. Yet, with some staff assistance when needed, they still may prove helpful for older workers in making career decisions.

PCC has tools to help in the decision making about what program of study to pursue. For every one of its Career Pathway programs, it has a tool called a “Road Map” to assist students in their decision making.⁵ Each Road Map is a graphic representation available on the college Web site for programs of study, and outlines how the educational program relates to the labor market. Links are provided throughout the map leading to further information. When job seekers click on the types of occupations each program leads to, they are connected to actual job postings on the Oregon Employment Department’s Web site. Information about opportunities for further education and training is also available. Older adults who need assistance using computers might need to seek staff assistance, but for those with basic computer proficiency, this information is publicly available to aid in their decision making. PCC has also created a set of comprehensive cost spreadsheets for several of its popular Career Pathways programs. These spreadsheets help dislocated workers and others determine how much a chosen course of study will cost, as well as what resources might be available from third parties to help them finance their education.

LCCC also offers online career planning resources for college students and adult career changers. The college provides free access to MyPlan, which provides information about careers and tools to help individuals assess their interests, personalities, skills, and values to help them sort out potential career paths. In addition, it provides information concerning the salaries for different occupations, as well as what background and preparation are necessary. LCCC also provides links to the Ohio Career Information System on its Web site. As with CCC's Web site resources, older adults who are not computer literate would need the assistance of a staff person to access this information.

Academic and Non-Academic Support for Older Dislocated Workers

Strategies, such as stackable credentials and embedded basic skills, address the academic and financial constraints of older dislocated workers.

Many dislocated workers, particularly those who are older, face both academic and financial challenges. Academically, many no longer possess the basic skills they need in order to participate in community college courses as an adult learner. At the same time, they face financial pressure to complete their education and training as rapidly as possible, because of the need to get back to work and earn an income, as well as time limits associated with some funding sources. The five case study community colleges all developed strategies to make their programming sensitive to the time limitations dislocated workers face, as well as their particular academic needs.

PCC's Career Pathways program provides dislocated workers the chance to obtain "stackable credentials"; that is, students may complete coursework to obtain a credential to allow them to enter a career, while continuing to pursue their education through additional credentials. The Career Pathways model involves breaking down or "chunking" out small parts of the curriculum of an already approved credit degree program. Most pathways are in technical areas, as well as health care and business, and are typically from 12 to 24 credits.

As part of the San Mateo Community College Career Advancement Academy (CAA), Skyline College offers stackable credentials that are sensitive to the need for job seekers to acquire job training and contextualized basic skills to return to work quickly. The model relies on cohorts or groups of students learning together, as well as coordinated services provided by the college, the local workforce board, and other community partners. The programs have multiple exit and entry points, allowing students to acquire skills, work, and return for more training and certificates to help them progress up a career ladder. Currently, CAA programs are available in automotive industries and health care.

Skyline College has developed some of its programs with the time constraints of dislocated workers in mind. As one college leader noted, if an individual loses a job in May, he or she cannot wait until August to start a training program. Skyline College has made efforts to address the "just-in-time" needs of dislocated workers by accelerating and compressing certain training programs, sometimes from 16 weeks down to 5 weeks. Instead of spreading out the class time over a semester, Skyline College offers the same content in a shorter period of time to better match the scheduling needs of unemployed workers who have time available and seek to complete their training more quickly. Whether the compressed schedules present difficulties for older adults, especially if they have a disability and may need more time to learn the material, is unclear and is a concern that needs to be balanced against older adults' need to get back to work quickly. The college works with the workforce board to pull together cohorts of 20 to 25 people, for whom such a program can be launched. The college has used this cohort approach for programs such as emergency management training, beginning auto technology, and energy efficiency and green marketing.

To help older dislocated workers move more quickly through programs of study, the colleges also needed to develop strategies to help older dislocated workers acquire or improve basic skills. Cognizant of the time constraints of dislocated workers, but also the need for basic skill remediation in math, CPCC offers Emporium Math. This curriculum is a modularized and customized remediation option that allows students to only take courses in the areas of math where testing has shown that they need assistance. This modularized approach to remediation allows students to improve areas of math they struggle in while avoiding those they have mastered. This customized remediation saves dislocated workers time and money.

A final example of an innovative approach to providing basic skills includes integrating this instruction along with other workforce relevant instruction. PCC's "Bridge to Healthcare" is a one-term, non-credit course targeted to career changers that integrates basic reading, writing, and math with an overview of high-demand health professions. Funding for the "Bridge to Healthcare" program is provided through a U.S. Department of Labor grant entitled Healthcare Oregon Pathways to Employment, which is designed to assist Oregonians with getting short-term training in high-demand health care occupations.

Flexible financial support can help support the needs of older dislocated workers facing financial stress due to long-term unemployment.

The periods of prolonged joblessness that are part of long-term unemployment, often faced by older dislocated workers, create extreme financial stress. Several of the case study colleges provided examples of recently established programs to help minimize some of the financial stress of attending community college. Some community colleges dedicated resources to help students handle personal expenses, such as bus tickets or eyeglasses, to help them stay in school. Holistic access to benefits programs often involves partnerships with CBOs, workforce boards, and philanthropic foundations.

For example, both Macomb Community College and Skyline College are participating in the Benefits Access for College Completion (BACC) program, a recently launched initiative led by the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) and AACC with support from several foundations. The impetus for the project is to test the notion that unmet needs of low-income and nontraditional students may contribute to poor outcomes in terms of completion, and that providing students with access to benefits, including information about public benefits they may qualify for, may reduce their financial stress (CLASP, 2011).

Macomb Community College has been involved in similar state efforts such as the Michigan Benefits Access Initiative, which worked to connect low-income community college students to public benefits systems, including food and energy services, while helping students develop strategies to stay in school. The school also participated in the Dreamkeepers Emergency Assistance Fund, which provides access to resources for non-academic financial emergencies, such as housing and rent, auto repairs and gas, and food and energy (Macomb Community College, n.d.). Macomb Community College will build on these state-fostered efforts under the new BACC program.

Skyline College will plan its BACC program under its recently created SparkPoint Center, which was launched in partnership with the California Employment Development Department and several CBOs in the Bay Area, including Jewish Vocational Services and United Way. Its goal is to create a one-stop site for accessing multiple services related to career development, employment, asset building, and public benefits. Skyline College recognized that dislocated workers and other job seekers of all ages need workforce training to get back to work, but they also need financial literacy and assistance in obtaining other important supports such as food, financial aid, earned income tax credits, and child care.

Finally, LCCC recently launched the Success Pass program. Under Success Pass, faculty are trained to identify students who are struggling financially and whose academic success might be enhanced by providing them with small amounts of cash — \$25 increments up to \$100 to help with moderate but necessary expenses. For example, Success Pass enables a struggling student to buy eyeglasses, or helps cover some other unexpected personal costs such as a car repair.

Conclusion

In the post-Great Recession economy, older dislocated workers have been affected by several trends, including high levels of long-term unemployment, rising worker skill needs, and a growing emphasis on lifelong learning, that make returning to school through the community colleges an increasingly affordable and important venue for their economic success. To meet their needs, community colleges have put in place several approaches that make them well-suited to serving the needs of these workers; yet, the colleges also face challenges in doing so, most notably in finding resources and ensuring these resources are sustainable.

As the research demonstrates, community colleges are using several activities and strategies to meet the needs of (older) dislocated workers:

First, community colleges recognize that *strategies that promote enrollment of older dislocated workers often rely on partnerships with outside organizations, including local workforce boards and CBOs, and/or external funding sponsors*. While these are important, it is necessary to consider their sustainability to ensure colleges are able to continue to attract this population to their campuses. Federal and state policies that promote and foster partnerships between community colleges and the public workforce system, such as having community colleges administer American Job Centers, co-locating American Job Centers on community college campuses, or involving community colleges in Rapid Response activities, can help to support and encourage enrollments of dislocated workers. At the same time, as one community college leader noted, there is sometimes a difference in philosophy or goals of these institutions, with colleges seeking to encourage training as a route to more sustainable employment and higher income prospects, and American Job Centers placing a higher priority on reemployment as quickly as possible. Nevertheless, the case study colleges, which are all serving significant numbers of dislocated workers, emphasized the importance of their partnerships with the public workforce system.

Second, to help older dislocated workers navigate the many possible programs of study at community colleges, *dedicated counselors provide helpful counseling*. This type of dedicated counseling was typically funded via external sources (including both federal funding and foundation funding), thus, its sustainability is uncertain. More stable ongoing funding, whether from federal, state, or local sources, would help ensure counseling is available to help older workers. It is important, as noted by the case study colleges, that colleges understand the value of this type of counseling and take into account ways to continue its support. Likewise, as noted in the research, colleges can consider alternate ways to provide the resources for career decision making by developing additional (and/or online) informational resources to help guide decision making. However, these resources may need to be coupled with some staff assistance for older workers who are not completely computer literate.

Finally, to support older dislocated workers in their studies once enrolled, *community colleges took into consideration both the academic and financial needs of older dislocated workers*. To address these needs, the case study colleges considered ways to reorganize their program offerings to help these students gain skills, particularly basic skills, to obtain employment while also allowing students the possibility of continuing their education. The colleges

also understood the importance of expanding access to benefits programs to help support the financial needs of low-income students that were under way at several of the case study colleges. Given the challenges facing older dislocated workers, these programs may help make a difference in their ability to complete a program of study to help them become reemployed.

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Endnotes

1. There is no standard definition of older worker. For the purposes of this brief, older workers are defined as workers over the age of 50, unless otherwise specified.

2. For purposes of this brief, the term "dislocated workers" refers broadly to adults who lost their jobs because the company where they worked ceased operations, moved, abolished their position or shift, or did not have enough work to give the employees. It also includes self-employed individuals who become unemployed as a result of general economic conditions.

3. Additional information on the standards can be found at: http://plus50.aacc.nche.edu/Documents/Standards_of_Excellence.pdf.

4. The Re-Careering Services Center was originally established in 2009 to help dislocated professionals affected by the financial industry crisis and continues to help educate dislocated workers about career pathways.
5. Examples of Road Maps can be found at: <http://www.pcc.edu/career/pathways/RoadMapPortfolio.html>.

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About ODEP

The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) provides national leadership on disability employment policy by developing and influencing the use of evidence-based disability employment policies and practices, building collaborative partnerships, and delivering authoritative and credible data on employment of people with disabilities. Learn more at: <http://www.dol.gov/odep/>.

About the NTAR Leadership Center

Founded in 2007 under a grant/contract with the Office of Disability Employment Policy at the U.S. Department of Labor, the NTAR Leadership Center's mission is to build capacity and leadership at the federal, state, and local levels to enable change across workforce development and disability-specific systems that will increase employment and economic self-sufficiency for adults with disabilities. Learn more at: <http://www.ntarcenter.org>.

This issue brief was published by the NTAR Leadership Center, funded by a grant/contract from the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (Number OD-16563-07-75-4-34). The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U.S. Department of Labor, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply the endorsement of the U.S. Department of Labor.

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