

FULLY UTILIZING SHERIDAN'S EXPERIENCE (FUSE)

Forum – May 6, 2008

FINAL REPORT

ISSUES OVERVIEW

FACTS:

- ✓ Sheridan County has a very low unemployment rate.
- ✓ Hundreds of jobs remain unfilled.
- ✓ Thousands of County residents are of working age, but remain unemployed or underemployed.
- ✓ In Sheridan County we have an aging workforce with an average age of 40.6, and that average is rising.
- ✓ The workforce shortage will be long-term and widespread as “baby boomers” anticipate leaving the workforce.
- ✓ Solutions will require a shift in employment practices by both employers and employees.
- ✓ In Sheridan County, we want to be proactive in responding to the needs of both employers and employees.
- ✓ A successful response will require identifying the needs of both employers and older workers, finding common ground from which to begin, and moving forward with initiatives that fulfill the needs of both.

There is a clear need to think outside the box when assessing ways in which we can address the workforce shortage into the future. In Sheridan County, we have an average age that is somewhat higher than the average throughout the rest of our state and the nation. We have before us an opportunity to utilize workers within the older generations longer.

However, there appears to be a community-wide disconnect with how to get older workers and employers together to meet each other's needs. This disconnect consists of attitudes, fears, perceptions, & misinformation, as well as simply lack of information. We found neither group knew how to reach out to the other, but willingness was evident that they both want to work together.

FUSE (Fully Utilizing Sheridan's Experience)

FUSE is a subcommittee of the Forward Sheridan Workforce Recruitment Task Force. FUSE is comprised of representatives from Wyoming Workforce Services, Sheridan Senior Center, Sheridan County Chamber of Commerce, Society for Human Resource Managers, Wyoming Division of Vocational

Rehabilitation, Experience Works, AARP, Sheridan College Industry Technical Education and Training Department, Forward Sheridan, as well as retirees and representatives of the older workforce.

FUSE is tasked with response to Workforce Shortage Initiative #1 in Forward Sheridan's Strategic Plan for Economic Development in Sheridan County:

- Utilize Sheridan County's mature workers.
- Encourage retired workers who want to return to work either full or part-time.
- Encourage companies to hire mature workers.

To that end, FUSE has created goals and objectives as follows:

Goals

Create infrastructure for employers and older workers to successfully connect.

Objectives:

- Educate both employers and workers regarding options and resources
- Promote benefits to both entities
- Training for older workers (including skills assessments)
- Training for employers and their management staff

FORUM TO ADDRESS NEEDS OF BOTH OLDER WORKERS AND EMPLOYERS:

In January 2008, FUSE members agreed that, though we have much data that tells us about national trends, we would be ill-advised to assume national trends and priorities are necessarily the same in Sheridan County. We would be better served to assess the needs of both workers and employers in Sheridan County, establish their priorities, and move forward with initiatives that address those priorities, utilizing all possible resources available.

For business participation, we invited members of the Society of Human Resource Managers, Forward Sheridan Investors, and the Top 40 businesses in Sheridan County. For workforce participants, committee members were all asked to provide a list of mature workers in a variety of work situations, retirees, and semi-retired persons from multiple business backgrounds.

Thirteen employers and twenty older workers (ranging from currently employed and anticipating retirement or change to semi-retired to fully retired looking to re-enter the workplace) responded to our invitations to attend a two-hour forum, the goal of which was to establish the needs of each group, find common ground,

and develop the next steps to find a system through which we can match older workers with good fit jobs in our business community.

First we spent an hour in two breakout sessions (a group for employers and a group for older workers), during which we identified the needs of each group. We then brought both groups together and shared the findings of the two groups. This report is a compilation of that information with conclusions and next steps to formulate initiatives to address the identified issues.

GENERAL RESULTS:

- Definition of Older Worker is 55+ depending on circumstances:
- Why people are working longer:
 - Economics
 - Change work environment
 - Benefits
 - Keep busy/keep mind and body active
 - Socialization
 - Identity
- Needs of older workers:
 - A senior representative to provide face-to-face services and assistance with access to resources
 - Flexibility – hours, benefit packages, perks, etc.
 - To be valued (identity is often found within their vocation)
 - Socialization
 - Promotion opportunities
 - Education opportunities (refreshers for skills, transitional skills assessments and remediation, etc.)
- Skills desired by businesses:
 - Appearance/presentation
 - Patience
 - Dependability
 - Work ethic
 - Adaptability
 - Humor
- Advantages to hiring older workers:
 - Patience
 - Dependability
 - Work ethic/maturity
 - Experience – built-in skill sets
 - Motivation
 - Mentorships

- Disadvantages to hiring older workers:
 - Health issues
 - Difficulty working night shifts
 - Training/skills refresher might be needed
 - Learning curve is slower
 - Generational differences
 - Less adaptable
 - People skills might be different than needed in current market

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the forum indicate there are common issues between both employers and workforce with common needs and a common willingness to come together. Employers, when advertising positions, may not use key words that relate to older workers' views of their qualifications, and employers generally operate under requirements for typical, full-time 8-5 or 9-5 positions with specific skill sets. When older workers see advertised positions, they may not realize they have the skills required for the job due to different terminology used or that an employer might consider their transferrable skills for a particular position. Older workers also hesitate to find out if an employer might be willing to be flexible with regard to hours or skills requirements.

There appears to be a gap with bringing them together. FUSE is willing to be the catalyst to enable our older workers and employers to bridge this gap by providing resources through existing facilities within Sheridan County for the two groups to come together to meet their needs.

It is clear that older workers would benefit from a representative or coordinator who understands their specific needs and is familiar with available resources for older workers. This single point of contact would be "the familiar face" who can help older workers access local resources, help them assess their transferrable skills, assist them with online application processes, and provide pertinent information specific to the older workforce issues. Ideally, this "advocate" would be available through Wyoming Workforce Services. Through this "advocate", older workers would be able to access additional resources such as assessment and training opportunities, as well as related assistance and services available through Experience Works, AARP, the Sheridan Senior Center and other relevant organizations.

STRATEGIES:

- Facilitate the creation of an older worker representative or coordinator, preferably at Wyoming Workforce Services to work with employers and older workers, as well as with AARP, Experience Works, Sheridan Senior Center, assessment and training facilities, etc.
- Participate with existing career expos and job fairs to include positions for older workers.
- Develop education and marketing plans to promote advantages and opportunities for both employers and older workers.
- Promote skills assessment and training programs available to older workers for them to assess their transferrable skills.
- Target industries and do education forums for employers and their management staff.
 - Age discrimination laws and practices
 - “How to” seminars for carving out job descriptions, creating project type opportunities, creating job share programs, etc.

ADDENDUM 1:

EMPLOYERS ISSUES

- At what age do you consider an employee to be an “older worker”?
 - 60’s
 - 50’s wanting to make retirement sooner
 - 65+ = retired or semi-retired
 - Mid-50 to 65 = displaced
 - Eligible for retirement according to federal law or within their retirement system (i.e. the state system, etc.)
 - At what age do you think the majority of your employees will be considering “retirement”?
 - Some baby boomers are still bringing in two incomes and can’t afford to live in a retirement situation, so may never retire.
 - Every individual will be different.
 - Depends on what skills are required
 - No mandatory retirement ages
 - At any age – retooling will be required
 - One of the barriers to using seniors is the rigidity of the 9-5 work environment. It is more important to find what works and get a good fit for all concerned. Briefly describe the work environment in your organization.
 - Girls School: Variety – 24 hours/7 days – flexible shifts – varying shifts but must maintain coverage 24/7
 - School District: Positions from maintenance, cooks, youth workers, admin
 - Hospital has tried flexibility – giving flexible scheduling is great but workers need to be flexible as well
 - Office environment – open 7-7 – challenging to find licensed people in insurance industry to cover these hours
 - Small printing business – hours 8-5 – small office with bookkeeping needs. They have a lot of machinery, physicality, lifting required. Part-time help for bookkeeping is possible.
 - School districts see people coming back for health coverage (6 hours/day)
 - Low pay scale at YMCA for part-time – however, work with flexible hours – cross-train to work in separate departments so employees can see how the company operates.
 - Discussion:** Changing the 9-5 environment comes down to supervision
 - Front-line supervisors have had little training prior to promotion
 - Need new skills sets for supervisors.
 - Matrix for shifting – where do people fit in?
 - Supervisors need skills sets or will have push back because it is more work
 - Do you offer any benefits or perks for your part-time workers?
-

- Scaled benefits available:
 - Girls School (80 hours/month)
 - Hospital (36 hours)
 - School District (30 hrs/to access health care)
 - YMCA
 - Normative Services

- What do you think are the needs of “older workers” -- in your opinion, why do they work?
 - Benefits for spouses and/or for themselves
 - Some employees know exactly what they can do for how long, so they can break even on their retirement plan – they will need flexibility based on staying okay within their retirement benefits, but still being able to work.
 - Some work because they need to economically – financially can’t afford to quit
 - Some are on fixed income and expenses are rising
 - Some simply need to “get out of the house” – best for relationships not to be together 24/7
 - Social interaction – need to feel engaged, valued, wanted
 - Loss of identity – many baby boomers feel they are identified by what they do, so they need to continue working to maintain their identity and feel valued
 - Things to watch for: Once on Medicare, issues with Medicare and supplemental insurance programs – especially when offered to older workers and not to other employees

- If you are interested in employing older workers, do you know where to go to find them?
 - Workforce Services – free service
 - Help wanted online,
 - Private company or corporate websites
 - Radio
 - Sheridan college website
 - Experience Works – At the VA – Low income – 55 years old – 20-24 hours/week – training to get people into the workforce
 - Many employers agree they are not getting applicants in this age group
 - Fewer older workers respond to the websites and online postings
 - Many need face-to-face interaction when they are applying for jobs

- What types of positions are you looking to fill in your organization?
 - Financial – full-time usually – rarely job share
 - Tellers, loan officers, receptionists
 - City – land fill person - advertised part-time but when they offered it was turned down because wanted full-time
 - Insurance industry: Non-licensed, entry-level, bonus
 - Most have entry-level positions, which seem to turn over the most – either through promotion or employee moving on to another job
 - Training available for many positions, but most don’t indicate so in their advertising

- Do you have “older workers” in your organization?
 - **If yes:**
 - What positions in your organization are suitably filled by “older workers”?
 - Many at Home Depot – part-time
 - Most any positions would be
 - Positions at prep school can't work with kids unless in good shape
 - Methane, construction
 - YMCA – perception is you have to be fit, but they can use older workers in almost everything except the teaching staff
 - Some executive positions are best filled by younger people so they can grow with the company on the executive level
 - Fire fighters and policemen have to pass physical tests
 - Gen X and Gen Y are not going to stay anyway
 - General maintenance
 - Office work
 - Methane and heavy physical work situations that are too demanding can be avoided
 - Jobs that can be trained
 - Are accommodations made to meet the needs of your “older workers”?
 - Project or contract work -- City, NSI, School, YMCA, 1st Fed
 - Flex scheduling -- Schmidt, YMCA, Hospital, Girls School
 - Job sharing – Girls School, School District
 - Jobs carved out to limit physical demands -- None
 - Do you have positions in which “older workers” are ideal in providing the following:
 - Mentorships to younger staff
 - YMCA – After school positions to mentor younger staff (teachers or psychologists)
 - Teller line – experienced tellers to mentor younger tellers
 - High levels of experience or expertise (i.e. management experience, specific industry or job knowledge or experience, etc. e.g. credentials, licenses, master or journeyman levels, etc.)
 - Construction – journeyman
 - Licensed electricians
 - Management executives
 - Accounting
 - Specialized tasks
 - Relationship building (mentor)
 - What do you look for in an “older worker”?
 - Specific skill sets relative to industry or job needs
 - Experience

- Sense of humor
- Patience
- Dependability
- Presentation/appearance
 - Strong work ethic
- Advantages you have discovered with hiring “older workers”
 - Motivated, dependable, skill sets, honesty
 - They show up!
- Disadvantages you have experienced with “older workers”
 - Depends on where they are in their life – whether you can count on them being long term (It was pointed out that Gen Y is not looking to spend 20 years at one company, as their predecessors did!)
 - Health issues
 - Training challenges – slower learning curve
 - Generational differences – can’t relate to younger generations
- If you **do not** have “older workers” in your organization:
 - Are there particular reasons you might hesitate to hire “older workers?”
 - Are there positions currently available that would be suitable for “older workers” without restructuring your organization?
 - Girls school – maintenance, administrative, night positions
 - Currently Advertising in Newspaper, Job Service
 - School -- Cook, Activities, maintenance, custodian, drivers
 - Senior Center – Health Aid
 - If no, would you be willing to create positions for “older workers” (through carving out projects, realigning job descriptions, job sharing, flex scheduling, etc.?)
 - Tellers
 - City has split full-time to part-time (street sweepers)
 - Supervisor returned as a part-time worker on the staff

➤ Training Opportunities:

- Would you or managers in your organization benefit from education or assistance to improve your ability to hire older workers (i.e. age discrimination, assistance with carving out job descriptions, or flex scheduling, etc.)
 - Training for managers and HR directors (laws)
 - Training to carve out jobs and flex scheduling
- Do you have “older workers” in your organization who could benefit from skills training that would improve their opportunity for continued longevity with your company?

- If yes, what types of skills?
 - Computers
 - Internal programs and basic computer skills in general
 - Computer classes for older students – slower, one-on-one
 - Partnerships with Senior Center to offer classes
 - Experience Works – Techno media for their staffers

ADDENDUM 2:

OLDER WORKERS ISSUES

Jim Craig spoke about FUSE and its purpose. He shared that nationwide DOL reports 20% of working population is 55+.

Jim asked several questions to get people thinking.

What is an older worker?

Responses - An experienced worker - Makes me feel old

Jim said that some say 50, some say 55, but that FUSE hasn't defined an age, that they feel it is about workers who are retired and wanting to re-enter the workforce, getting ready to retire and/or possibly change careers. Jim stated that older workers encompass a larger group than we might initially think

What would it take to get workers back in the workforce?

Have you retired – do you want to re-enter the workforce – do you want to change career?

How does the employer view the worker?

- **If you have recently returned to work, or are considering going back to work, please share your reason(s) why.**
 - Use to identify the bottom line needs of Older Workers (i.e. need insurance, boredom, need a little extra money, can't afford to retire, etc.)

Discussion

Employee tried to retire from Bank – but has a mind that he needs to keep busy...back to work part-time, set schedule as long as meets needs, technical type position – he is 69. Returned to work because concerned that his resources might not last during an economic recession. Discussed importance of retraining resource through college. He made his re-connection through an established relationship.

A worker retired 3 years ago from a company in Sheridan that had actively sought experienced workers. Upon retiring he found that Medicare and supplemental insurance were not enough. Became self-employed. He does many different types of work including engineering and doesn't have to punch the clock.

Participant shared that benefits might be more important to older workers than wages.

- **If you are interested in returning to work, and have not yet done so, what is stopping you?**

- Objective is to open discussion on barriers and challenges seen for returning to work and
- What methodology would they use to look for work?

Discussion

Nurse retired – considered going back to work. Talked to nursing director at college. Asked about refresher courses. Told nothing available and nothing planned for future for skills refresher. Nothing in place.

Employee retired from hospital kitchen. Resources not enough so went back to work. Retired 2nd time for good from hospital. Needed something less stressful. Then went to work through Experience Works. Had tried to go college, but no resources to help pay for computer training. Experience Works helped her with retraining and computer skills. Also has taken classes at library.

Person living in Greybull – works for Experience Works. She saw that there was discrimination because employers had a negative feeling about employing older workers. Jim asked if some other system might have been helpful. They don't have workforce development. Skills training needed.

Retired for 2 years from airline. Wanted to go back part-time, but told no positions available other than full-time. Then said she would go back full-time. Had to wait until new manager came on board that did not discriminate.

Job service manger for 25 years – states employers discriminate against older workers without asking age. He felt that employers sometimes just look at you and determine you are too old.

Self-employed now doing cleaning - had been receptionist and in retail sales - lost job when business sold and brought in own employees. Now that she is older, cleaning is not something she can do day after day. Utilizing Experience Works. Believes employer afraid to hire her because she had been self-employed and might be too independent.

Medical health problems an issue – worked in school for 35 years. Community organization caseworker sent her to doctor, told to quit smoking and lose weight to have surgery. Was then told condition preexisting. Told to wait until she was 65 and could go on Medicaid. Told more cost productive to wait and take pain pills.

Help with accessing training for new skills or refreshing skills seemed to be a hurdle.

➤ **What type of work would you be interested in doing?**

- Open discussion on continuing former employment areas or trying something totally different or new.
- What type of working conditions are needed?

Discussion

Something different seemed very appealing – majority of group would like to change what they have retired from.

Older worker forum participant stated in recognizing workforce shortage, we should talk about what older workers can bring to table. Older workers don't always work for money. She shared some retired people might want to only do a portion of a job or a time limited job and might do better as a contracted skilled employee. Need a system to make these connections between employers and employees. Some kind of database needed that shares specifications of position. Employers may want to base contract on results, not day to day.

Employee stated interested in going back to work – but what they identify as the cafeteria type of employment.

Independence was mentioned as a desirable feature.

➤ **What skills or characteristics do you have to offer employers?**

- Skills and abilities and how to identify them
- Other qualifications or characteristics
- Is help needed?
- Could you benefit from skills training? If yes what types of skills?

Discussion

- Experience
- Dependability – showing up
- Interpersonal skills training would be important
- Technical skills training important
- Real world experience training important.

Transition offices or training for people who want to do something different...maybe college could do something. Assessing skills.

Jim discussed a military friend who had written his resume showing skills he obtained in the military without referring to military. Group thought it would be very helpful to have help with resume for skills transfer from previous job or military to business world (translate skills into functional resume).

A person retired from the military said Dale Carnegie teaches people skills. She took a course – was given two books to read. Was to read 10 pages per day until book finished...and then to go back and reread, she did this for 5 years to help her transfer her people skills from military to business.

Jim shared there are training programs out there to help with training older workers. Employers are feeling need for workers. Jim discussed job carving and appealing to a

different way of thinking on the part of employers. He explained that the employers would be determining what they think the shortages are.

- **How would you describe your learning style? What learning environment works best for you?**
 - i.e. hands on, listening, reading, on-line, classroom, etc.

Discussion

Some participants really like the face-to-face person in the equation for any dealings from training to looking for a job. Not so much computer, mostly face-to face

Some participants indicated that they really liked to be in control of their work environment and work independently

- **If you are interested in returning to work, do you know where to go for the employment you are looking for?**

Discussion

The group thought a central resource network with face-to-face contact could be very beneficial.

The group said that lots of connections have been made through already established personal connections.

Participant suggested that if you find someplace you want to work be persistent and keep going back to employer because those hiring may change and their ideas regarding employable people may change.

Suggestion to put statement in ads to call if you are interested or have questions

- **What do you need?**
 - Flexible Hours
 - Job satisfaction
 - Valued for experience
- **Methodologies**
 - Networking – organizations you belong to
 - One participant suggested becoming involved in volunteering because in retirement, he found that volunteer work increased the amount of people he knew with whom he could network.
 - Organization resources – focal point of contact to put employers and employees together –
 - Face to Face important
 - Education

- **Dreams**
 - Central Resource Network

Discussion: One participant thought it would be nice to revamp Experience Works – it is currently a low-income program – Kate said they are helping to coordinate other employment opportunities and networking in the community
Helping older people to get back into work force

- **Perks other than wages**
 - Great Lake Airlines employee shared their organization is looking for employee to work 10 hours week @ \$10.00 and offers free flying.

ADDENDUM 3:

Participating Employers:

First Interstate Bank
State Farm Insurance
Wyoming Girls School
Sheridan County School District #2
City of Sheridan
Sheridan Memorial Hospital
First Federal Savings Bank
Quick Printing
Normative Services
Experience Works
Sheridan County YMCA
KMS & Associates
Northeast Wyoming Fire Safety Solutions

Participating Older Workers:

Sandy Neeson
Ray O'Leary
Terry Cram
Ky Dixon
Georgia Huckleby
Dennis Vogler
Bob Orrell
Keith Roach
Nancy Mrvos
Frank Farrington
Bonnie Peterson
Vernita Gordon
Sandra Uhrmann
Glen Hett
Linda Chandrill
Marcia Leslie
Martha Smith
John Meyer
Rick Rossa
Roger Roebing