



**State of Alaska**

**Workforce Innovation and  
Opportunity Act**

**Annual Report Narrative**

**Program Year 2015**



**ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF LABOR  
& WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**



THE STATE  
*of* ALASKA

GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

Department of Labor and  
Workforce Development

Office of the Commissioner

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September 30, 2016

The Honorable Thomas E. Perez  
United States Secretary of Labor  
U.S. Department of Labor  
200 Constitution Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20210

Dear Secretary Perez,

On behalf of Governor Bill Walker, the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, and the Alaska Workforce Investment Board, we are pleased to submit Alaska's Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Annual Performance Report for Program Year 2015.

Alaska's workforce system is vibrant, flexible, and innovative, with a strong connection between industry, employers, educators, labor, and training providers whose common goal of developing and providing career paths is aimed at high wage occupations in vital industries that strengthen our economy.

This annual report provides information about Alaska's performance with USDOL-funded workforce programs and an overview of Alaska's workforce system as a whole. Alaska will continue to expand and solidify our commitment to workforce development and refine strategies to increase the responsiveness of the system.

WIOA funds are a significant contribution to our public workforce system and we appreciate the federal/state partnership to develop the workforce. Thank you for your continued support of the people of Alaska.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Heidi Drygas in black ink.

Heidi Drygas, Commissioner  
Department of Labor and Workforce Development

Handwritten signature of Larry Bell in blue ink.

Larry Bell, Chair  
Alaska Workforce Investment Board

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**Assurances:** The Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development assures that all required elements for the Program Year 2015 WIOA Annual Report are reported uniformly.

## Overview

Program Year 2015 was an eventful year with the ongoing implementation of WIOA and the crafting of Alaska's Combined State Plan. In preparing for the development of the Combined State Plan, regional planning meetings were held in Juneau, Anchorage, and Fairbanks to inform the public about WIOA and the department's implementation efforts. These meetings provided an opportunity to solicit comments and feedback from regional and statewide partners to enhance Alaska's workforce system. The state's vision and goals were identified along with a solid path to achieve them.

Our strategic and operational planning included a thorough economic and workforce analysis (current and future); an education and training activities analysis; and development of an implementation strategy including the creation of policies, service delivery modifications to target priority populations, assessment of programs and one-stop partners, and data analysis and alignment.

Alaska's priority industries of Healthcare, Oil & Gas, Mining, Construction, Maritime, and Transportation were identified and Industry Sector Partnerships established by collaborating with colleges, schools, labor and workforce agencies, training providers, community organizations, and other stakeholders to align training with the skills needed for the industry. Six Economic Regions were identified for WIOA planning and service delivery investments.

Day-to-day operations in the Job Centers were revamped to meet the requirements of WIOA with technical guidance, forms, processes, and procedures created and delivered in person and through webinars to all WIOA staff throughout the state. Over two dozen policies were rewritten: our Youth program was restructured to focus on the Out-of-School youth population with a stronger tie to partners including Vocational Rehabilitation and the Disability Employment Initiative; priority populations including Veterans, long-term unemployed, individuals with barriers to employment, low income, public assistance recipients, and English language learners were targeted; and the department's priority of work-based learning programs, including apprenticeships, incumbent worker training, and on-the-job training, was reinforced.

Alaska recognizes that WIOA emphasizes informed consumer choice, job-driven training, training provider performance, and continuous improvement in performance achievement and accountability. A primary means to achieve these goals is through the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL). The Division of Employment and Training Services maintains the ETPL in partnership with the Alaska Workforce Investment Board (AWIB). During PY 2015, the Alaska's ETPL received a complete overhaul with new policy, operating guidance, and applications, ultimately resulting in training programs that are successful with a proven capability of providing valuable training that enables participants to secure quality employment.

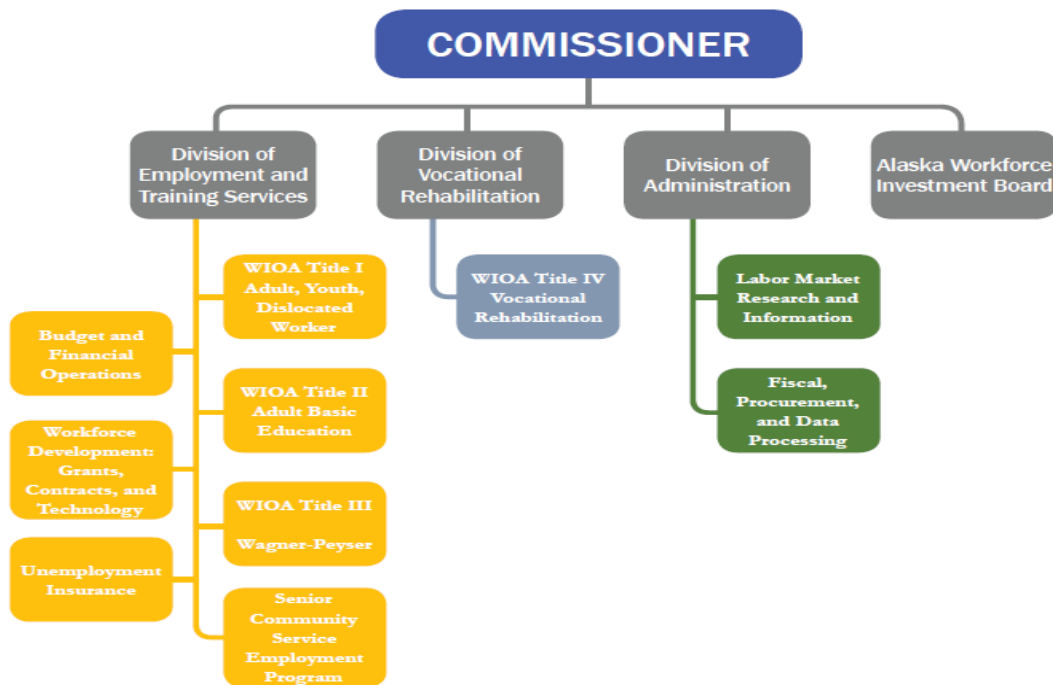
Alaska has a unique culture and economy and a diverse population. We face a difficult fiscal future where the demand for services we provide, along with employers’ continuous desire for new employees with needed skills, will continue to grow even as we feel the impact of low oil prices on our state budget. Alaska will stay focused on engaging businesses as partners; aligning workforce and economic development; coordinating training programs and education; supporting adult basic education and occupational skills training; and increasing training and industry-recognized credential attainment, as these are all critical components to Alaska’s workforce system success.

## Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development

The Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development promotes safe and legal working conditions and opportunities for employment in Alaska. Department priorities include:

- 1) protection of Alaska’s workers through statutory and regulatory assistance and enforcement;
- 2) workforce development to support Alaska hire and economic development; and
- 3) income replacement for injured, unemployed, and permanently disabled workers.

As the state’s lead entity for workforce development, the department, through the Division of Employment and Training Services, administers the WIOA programs as well as state-funded employment, job training, and career training programs offering services through Alaska’s Job Center Network, Wagner-Peyser Labor Exchange, and Unemployment Insurance. The department also supports the Alaska Workforce Investment Board, which provides policy and oversight of the state’s workforce investment activities. The department’s functional organizational chart is shown below.



### **Office of the Commissioner**

The Office of the Commissioner provides policy guidance, administrative oversight, and coordinated communications for the Department of Labor and Workforce Development and the Alaska Workforce Investment Board. Also reporting directly to the Commissioner is our Division of Administrative Services, which provides management information and support services, develops and distributes labor market and population information, and conducts workforce research.

### **Division of Employment and Training Services**

The Division is the designated state administrative agency for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title 1-B programs. It grants WIOA funds to the state's qualified youth employment and training providers as recommended by the Alaska Workforce Investment Board (AWIB). The Division also provides labor exchange services, employment and training services, unemployment insurance (UI) to Alaskans and Alaska businesses, and grant administration for various state and federal workforce programs, thereby advancing opportunities for employment and providing economic stability for communities in Alaska.

## **Alaska Workforce Investment Board**

The vision for the Alaska Workforce Investment Board (AWIB) is to "build connections that put Alaskans into good jobs." This comprehensive vision keeps the board focused on developing a workforce system that is useful, accessible, and understandable to all of the system's customers, which include businesses looking for qualified workers, unemployed Alaskans looking for jobs, and incumbent workers wanting to upgrade their skills in a changing work environment. The AWIB reviews workforce plans and provides recommendations to the department and the Governor to further train and prepare Alaskans for the workforce and help grow Alaska's economy.

The AWIB uses three primary strategies to help the programs meet the governor's vision: identify priority industries and occupations for the investment of scarce workforce investment resources; work with industry sectors to prepare and implement targeted workforce development plans; and monitor investment of federal and state workforce programs.

During Program Year 2015, Alaska Governor Bill Walker issued guidelines restricting state government funded travel. State boards and commissions, including the AWIB, are authorized to hold only one in-person meeting per year. The AWIB will hold its annual in-person meeting each February in Juneau. The other two AWIB meetings will be conducted via videoconference and teleconference.

Program Year 2015 meetings were held October 29-30, 2015 in Fairbanks; February 4-5, 2015 in Juneau; and May 24, 2015 via videoconference sites in Anchorage, Juneau, and Fairbanks.

Alaska Workforce Investment Board (AWIB) activities during Program Year 2015 include:

- Contributed to the development of Alaska’s WIOA Combined Plan. AWIB members participated in three regional planning meetings, and reviewed and provided additional input on the draft plan.
- Reviewed grant applications for the State Training and Employment Program and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Youth program, and provided recommendations for funding.
- Monitored and evaluated WIOA Youth grantees and Job Center Adult and Dislocated Worker programs.
- Reviewed and approved the 2015 Annual Workforce Reports to the Legislature.
- Amended AWIB Bylaws to update references to WIOA and accurately reflect current board duties and committee structure.
- Adopted Policy 100-2016 Process for AWIB Endorsement of Industry Workforce Development Plans.
- Revised Policy 100-2014 Alaska Technical and Vocational Education Program Assessment and Transcription of Credit for Military Training and Experience to clarify eligibility criteria.
- Adopted the following resolutions:
  - Resolution 15-04 Kodiak Job Center Certification;
  - Resolution 15-05 Support of Registered Apprenticeship as a Workforce Development Strategy;
  - Resolution 15-06 Approving Eligible Training Provider List Policy, Procedural Guide and Applications;
  - Resolution 16-01 Supporting Consistent Transition Policies;
  - Resolution 16-02 Resolution to Increase Alaska Resident Hire;
  - Resolution 16-04 Resolution in Support of the Alaska Mining Workforce Development Plan.

## **Alaska’s Economic Overview**

### **Statewide Overview**

Alaska ranks 48<sup>th</sup> among states by population but is easily the largest geographically. The state’s 570,641 square miles of land make up 16 percent of the U.S. total. For the U.S. as a whole, there are 89.5 people per square mile; in Alaska there are 1.3.

The Alaska economy is heavily dependent on oil and gas and other resource extraction industries and on the federal government, including a substantial number of military bases and installations (Army, Air Force, and Coast Guard in particular). Alaska has more veterans per capita than any other state.



Two other major basic sector industries — those that inject new money into the state’s economy by providing goods or services to outside consumers — are fishing and tourism.

Alaska has especially high concentrations of employment in natural resources and mining (more than four times the national average). It has at least slightly higher concentrations in construction, utilities, and transportation and warehousing. The state has lower than national average employment concentrations in manufacturing, financial activities, and professional and business services.

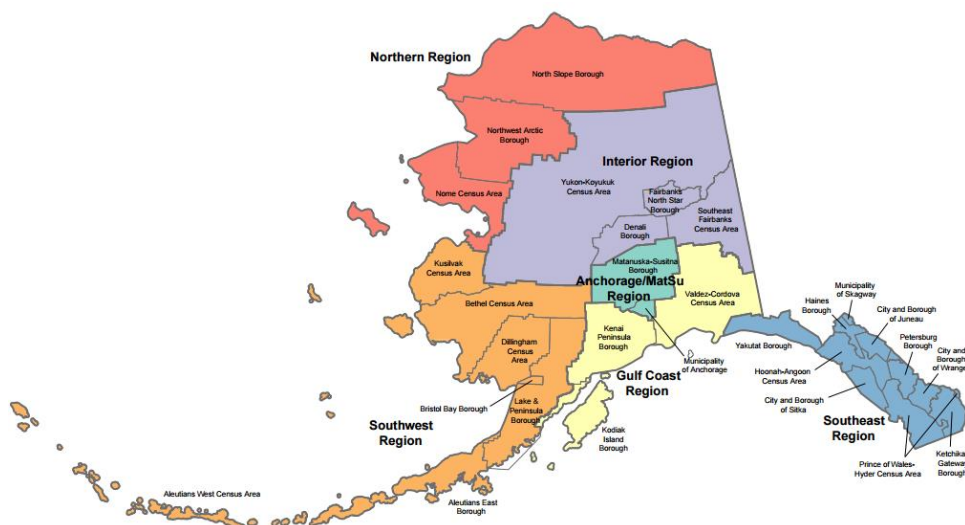
In contrast to the national trend, Alaska will see a net loss of jobs in 2016 as a result of low oil prices, layoffs, and a very large state budget deficit. So far the losses have been relatively mild overall, although oil and gas, state government, construction, and professional and business services sectors have all seen substantial job losses. Health care, retail trade, and tourism-related businesses are all showing moderate job growth through the first half of 2016.

However, overall, during the 2014 to 2024 period, Alaska is projected to add 19,700 jobs for a 10-year growth rate of a little less than 6 percent. Although health care jobs are not expected to grow as fast as they have in recent years, the 16 percent growth rate for that sector (which also includes social services jobs) is still expected to substantially outpace overall job growth.

Other areas of relative strength among major sectors include leisure and hospitality at 11 percent growth and transportation and warehousing at 10 percent. Large or especially important sectors projected to lose jobs or see weaker than average growth include oil and gas extraction (-10 percent), support activities for mining (-7.2 percent), financial activities (-1.2 percent), and state government, excluding university jobs (-3.4 percent).

### Economic Regions Overview

The state is divided into six economic regions: Northern, Interior, Southwest, Anchorage/Mat-Su, Gulf Coast, and Southeast.





The economies and job markets in the Anchorage/Mat-Su, Gulf Coast, and Southeast regions roughly mirror statewide patterns, with declines in any of the state's major industries having either direct or trickle-down effects. Fairbanks, the largest part of the Interior Region by population and job counts, would also have a mix of current and projected employment that resembles the state as a whole.

Although parts of the Gulf Coast and Southeast regions are isolated and rural, as a whole they contain a mix of jobs that is not dramatically different than the statewide pattern. Coastal areas will have more opportunities in fishing and fishing support industries, for example, but strong health care growth is expected wherever there are stable or growing populations. Similarly, the mix of government and private sector support jobs (in retail stores, restaurants and bars, construction, transportation, etc.) does not differ markedly between areas with population centers of 10,000 or more.

The Northern Region is home to most of the state's very large oil and gas industry and also includes the Red Dog Mine, one of the world's largest zinc mines. Because North Slope workers typically work schedules of two weeks on/two weeks off, or some variation of that, there are also a substantial number of food services, health care, and custodial jobs generated when oil and gas activity picks up and a corresponding reduction in those jobs when it falls. There is little in the way of permanent population centers in close proximity to the oil and gas fields. The Northern Region's largest city is Barrow with about 4,500 people, but it is 200 miles away from the center of oil field activity and not connected by road.

The Southwest Region of the state is heavily dependent on fishing. The region supplies a large percentage of the nation's total commercial fish harvest by both poundage and value. Bristol Bay sockeye salmon, Bering Sea crab, and Pollock caught in the region represent some of the largest salmon, crab, and whitefish fisheries in the world.

Much of the fishing activity itself is not captured in wage and hour employment data sets because both permit holders and their crew are considered self-employed and not generally subject to state unemployment insurance coverage and the mandatory reporting from which the most reliable employment data are collected. What the employment data do show, however, is a large number of seafood processing jobs and the roughly typical mix of government, health care, retail, construction, and restaurant/bar employment that result from economic base industries such as the area's fisheries.

Two census areas in the region — Bethel and Kusilvak — have some of the state's and nation's highest unemployment rates among counties or county equivalents. Jobs in these areas are primarily connected to local government and to the general support jobs that exist wherever populations cluster, including health care and retail jobs and a certain number of construction and transportation

jobs. Unlike the southern parts of the region, the area does not profit substantially from commercial fish harvests.

The Interior Region has a mix of resource industries — large coal and gold mines, for example — and is also home to Denali National Park, which generates a large number of seasonal jobs and a handful of year-round jobs. Fairbanks, with a borough population of nearly 100,000, depends heavily on the military and the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Fort Wainwright, an Army post, and Eielson Air Force Base are home to 8,600 active duty military and an additional 1,400 dependents. The University of Alaska Fairbanks has a student enrollment of nearly 10,000, 88 percent of whom are undergraduates. Both the military and the university produce a number of jobs specific to national defense and educating students, but also create significant demand for goods and services in the community and state. At both the industry and occupational levels, existing demand would be similar to the statewide pattern: 1) especially high demand for health care workers; and 2) demand across the rest of the industry and occupational spectrum that will be roughly similar to population trends.

## **Department Priorities**

### **Alaska Hire**

The Department of Labor and Workforce Development recognizes that it is critical to hire Alaskans for Alaska's jobs. The department plays a vital role by making Alaska Hire a priority. Alaska Hire requires that at least 90 percent of jobs on state-funded projects go to Alaska residents. At a time of shrinking capital budgets and declining oil sector employment, it is more important than ever that Alaska's limited tax dollars be invested efficiently to create economic opportunities for Alaskans.

The department's Research and Analysis Section found that in 2014 (the most recent year for which data is available), the percentage of nonresident workers in Alaska increased by two-tenths of a percentage point and the percentage of wages earned by nonresidents increased by four-tenths of a percent. Nonresidents earned 15.6 percent of total wages, up from 15.2 percent in 2013. Reducing the rates of nonresident hire will mean more money staying in Alaska's economy to benefit more Alaskans.

### **Registered Apprenticeship**

Increasing and expanding Registered Apprenticeship as a training model is another department priority with a focus on the healthcare, construction, oil and gas, mining, and maritime industries. Apprenticeships create great career paths and are an important tool for our evolving, technologically sophisticated labor market, and smart use of apprenticeships will ensure more Alaskans get hired for jobs in their community.

### **Universal Access and Priority of Service**

Universal access and priority of service continues to remain a department priority with priority given to veterans, public assistance recipients, other low income individuals, individuals with barriers to employment, the long-term unemployed, dislocated workers, individuals with disabilities, individuals with limited English proficiency, the homeless, older workers, and returning citizens.

### **Integrated Service Delivery**

One of the department's objectives is to maintain a fully integrated system that ensures availability of workforce services to all customers through a single delivery system. This efficient use of resources includes integrating WIOA core programs, Unemployment Insurance, Veterans' programs, Senior Community Service and Employment Program, and other required partners into the One-Stop Job Center system.

### **Universal Access**

The department's vision for the One-Stop Job Centers is to field all job seeker needs, including case management, support services, basic and individualized career services, training services, specific job-seeking services, and information on referrals and educational resources into one single location. To make the Alaska One-Stop Job Center system more efficient, the department identifies high-skill/high-wage/high-demand occupations and develops job training strategies to meet the needs of Alaska businesses. These strategies are used across the WIOA core programs in order to improve the outcomes for our workforce system.

## **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title IB Programs and Performance**

### **Adult, Dislocated Worker, and National Emergency Grant Programs**

The Adult, Dislocated Worker, and National Emergency Grant program services are delivered by Career Support and Training Services (CSTS) case managers located at the One-Stop Job Centers. CSTS staff work one-on-one with participants to provide individualized assessments and determine the appropriate range of services, goals, and support to meet the participant's needs. The case manager gathers participant information for data validation and reporting purposes, provides career counseling, makes appropriate referrals to other resources, reviews labor market information with the participant, and helps identify short and long term employment goals to create an individual employment plan. The ultimate goal is credential attainment for employment in industries and occupations that offer good wages and opportunities for advancement.

The department's Adult program prepares workers, particularly low income, disadvantaged, low-skilled, and underemployed, for employment in industries and occupations that offer good wages and opportunities for advancement. The program provides adults with workforce preparation,

career services, training services and job placement assistance needed to increase occupational skill attainment, obtain industry-recognized credentials, and secure a good job that provides earnings that lead to self-sufficiency. In PY 2015, there were 2,661 participants in the Adult program, with 1,862 of those receiving self-services. Case managers actively worked with 387 participants, of which 238 were new registrants. Program exits increased from 198 in PY 2014 to 218 in PY 2015 as case managers prioritized timely exits.

The Dislocated Worker (DW) program offers employment and training services to individuals who have lost their jobs, displaced homemakers, and employed workers who have received a notice that they will lose their jobs if additional training or credentials are not secured. The program enhances the quality, productivity, and competitiveness of Alaska's workforce while meeting the needs of Alaska's employers. PY 2015 saw a slight decrease in enrollments from 211 in PY 2014 to 191 in PY 2015 with the overall number of participants served decreasing from 419 to 290 while case managers focused on getting participants back to work in a timely manner. The program experienced 173 exits during the program year.

Leveraging resources resulted in a 100 percent co-enrollment between the Dislocated Worker program and the Dislocated Worker Training-National Emergency Grant (DWT-NEG), which enabled more opportunities for unemployed workers to obtain employment and training services. There were 101 active DWT-NEG participants during the program year, 38 of which were new enrollments. During PY 2015 there were 58 participants exited from the program.

### **Performance Measures**

The department continues to focus its workforce development programs on transitioning workers into high-wage, high-growth, and demand-driven jobs. The Adult and Dislocated Worker programs' average earnings performance remained strong as shown in Table 1. Alaska exceeded three of the six performance measures and met the remaining three.

Alaska's performance outcomes reflect the department's commitment to continuing improvement of its coordinated and comprehensive workforce development system, and the hard work and dedication of department leadership and program staff. Participants who exit our systems are work ready and obtain and retain self-sufficient wages.

Alaska will continue its commitment to expanding and maintaining public and private partnerships, refining effective One-Stop service delivery strategies, monitoring program performance strengths and areas needing improvement, and by providing in-person technical assistance activities to improve program quality.

**Table 1: WIOA Performance Measures for Adult and Dislocated Workers Program**

	PY 2015 Negotiated Performance	80% of Negotiated Performance	Exceeded/ Met/ Not Met	PY 2015 Actual Performance	PY 2014 Actual Performance	PY 2013 Actual Performance
<b>Adult Employment Rate</b>	80.0%	64.0%	Met	76.8%	73.9%	79.4%
<b>Adult Retention Rate</b>	82.0%	65.6%	Met	82.0%	84.8%	86.2%
<b>Adult Average Earnings</b>	\$20,100	\$16,080	Exceeded	\$20,936	\$21,334	\$22,406
<b>DW Employment Rate</b>	81.5%	65.2%	Exceeded	86.4%	86.2%	92.5%
<b>DW Employment Retention Rate</b>	90.5%	72.4%	Met	85.2%	89.9%	95.1%
<b>DW Average Earnings</b>	\$23,500	\$18,800	Exceeded	\$26,012	\$24,486	\$25,388

*Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Division of Employment and Training Services*

## Youth Program

Alaska’s WIOA Youth program promotes economic development and stability through comprehensive employment, vocational, and academic services to in-school and out-of-school eligible youth. In PY 2015, the State awarded \$1,458,251 to six service partners to deliver Youth services.

Grant recipients included Alaska Native Corporations and Health and Social Services juvenile treatment centers and other high performing youth-serving programs. Services targeted eligible youth populations statewide, including the harder to serve, remote youth populations in rural Alaska. Because Alaska’s rural youth are at high risk of dropping out of high school and suicide, they remain a priority demographic for service delivery. Rural areas have limited resources and opportunities for training, support services, and employment opportunities pre- and post-high school. The State has faced many barriers serving this high risk population but is continually seeking strategies to fill training and employment gaps. A best practice of rural youth programs’ service delivery is to establish partnerships with the local school districts to collaboratively meet the needs of youth. Such partnerships positively impact graduation and employability rates when implemented successfully. Additionally, Alaska continues its focus on neediest youth populations of incarcerated, homeless, transient, and youth with disabilities.

Program Year 2015 focused on continuing the transition from WIA to WIOA priorities and regulations while maintaining a consistent level of service delivery. The transition required

development of new strategies to meet the 75 percent requirement for services to out-of-school youth as well as the mandate to see 20 percent of local youth funds expended on work experience activities. The State required programs to develop training models that would facilitate both mandates successfully, compelling applicants to present program budgets that designated a minimum of 40 percent of funds for direct training and support services to participants. This strategy resulted in 42 percent of the total funds awarded in PY 2015 budgeted for direct services to participants and included the work experience requirement.

During PY 2015, the WIOA Youth program provided services to 406 youth experiencing barriers to employment and academic progression, serving 230 out-of-school youth and 176 in-school youth. The total served marks an 18 percent decrease from youth served in PY 2014 (499). The decrease in youth served is in part attributed to the reduction of service partners delivering services in PY 2015.

The number of service partners was reduced by 40 percent. In light of the release of underperforming programs, coupled with the limitations of reduced federal allotments and navigating the WIOA rollout, the State chose to focus on maintaining consistent service delivery with a core of four performing programs (Nine Star Enterprises Inc., Southeast Regional Resource Center, Alaska Vocational Technical Center, and the Department of Health and Social Services) and two new programs (Adult Learning Programs of Alaska and Kawerak, Inc.), which appeared to possess the skills to be successful under WIOA Youth over the long term.

### Performance Measures

State performance remained strong for two of the three areas of performance, but saw a decrease in the Literacy/Numeracy measure. This decrease may in part be attributed to confusion with Literacy/Numeracy tracking during the transition year. With Literacy/Numeracy no longer a performance measure under WIOA, service partners were for a time confused with tracking basic skills deficient youth, prior to technical guidance from the State to continue tracking basic skills outcomes.

**Table 2: WIOA Youth Program Performance Measures**

	PY 2015 Negotiated Performance	80% of Negotiated Performance	Exceeded/ Met/Not Met	PY 2015 Actual Performance	PY 2014 Actual Performance	PY 2013 Actual Performance
Placement in Employment or Education	57.5%	44.8%	Met	55.0%	47.1%	57.5%
Attainment of Degree or Certificate	62.0%	49.6%	Met	61.2%	51.3%	72.8%
Literacy and Numeracy Gains	38.0%	30.4%	Not Met	25.0%	34.1%	48.8%

*Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Division of Employment and Training Services*

## **Sector Partnership – National Emergency Grant (SP-NEG)**

Alaska's SP-NEG gained momentum during PY 2015 with a focus on:

- Serving laid off workers, Transitioning Service Members (TSMs), and Veterans through Individual Training Accounts and support services facilitated through the Job Centers;
- Industry Sector Planning in the targeted areas of Health Care, Oil & Gas, and Maritime, including collaboration with the Alaska Health Workforce Coalition, AVTEC's Alaska Health Care Academy, Alaska Health Care Apprenticeship Consortium, and regional stakeholder meetings for input on a preliminary workforce plan for Alaska's Natural Gas Pipeline project; and
- Regional Workforce Planning including meetings focused on gas pipeline workforce planning, regional training centers, and apprenticeships.

The Job Centers are using SP-NEG funding to provide services specifically for dislocated workers, and enhancing mobile job center services in both rural and urban areas that have high numbers of long-term unemployed. Notable partners for industry sector and planning work include Alaska Process Industry Careers Consortium (APICC), Maritime Works; Alaska Health Care Apprenticeship Consortium; and Health Workforce Coalition. Enhanced services to Veterans and TSMs are provided by Alaska's Healing Hearts and Alaska Works Partnership. Many of the SP-NEG activities also work in support of the USDOL American Apprenticeship Grant as leveraged activities and resources for Health Care Registered Apprenticeships (RA).

## **American Apprenticeship Initiative Grant for Health Care**

Alaska's American Apprenticeship Initiative Grant for Health Care began October 1, 2015. During the program year, the department's Health Care Apprenticeship Coordinator, along with the USDOL Office of Apprenticeship, worked with a variety of health care providers to establish Registered Apprenticeship (RA) programs focusing on Behavioral Health workers. They are also working with school districts on school to apprenticeship programs, Alaska Pioneer Homes, Alaska Native Health Care providers, and other agencies across the state in establishing health care RA programs.

A unique multi-employer group, the Alaska Health Care Apprenticeship Consortium (AHCAC), representing both small and large health care providers and both union and non-union employers, is being formed specifically to sponsor and expand RAs in health care. This Consortium is working towards gaining 501(c)(3) status, establishing a governing board, developing bylaws, and creating a strategic plan. AHCAC will provide a structure through which employers may expand the RA training more quickly, affordably, and comprehensively, in coordination with other employers and labor unions, than they would in the absence of such a group.



## Wagner-Peyser Employment Service - Title III

The Division of Employment and Training Services also administers the Wagner-Peyser Employment Service program. The Wagner-Peyser program is delivered through 17 Alaska Job Centers located across the state and is collectively referred to as the Alaska Job Center Network (AJCN). Job Center locations can be located online at <http://www.jobs.alaska.gov/offices/index.html>.

The Alaska Labor Exchange System (ALEXsys) is an online, no-fee job bank that connects job seekers with employers looking for skilled workers and is available throughout the AJCN as well as accessible on-line 24 hours per day.

Programs and services to advance opportunities for employment and provide economic stability for communities in Alaska can all be found in the Alaska Job Centers. These include employment and training services, unemployment insurance, job search assistance, career counseling, recruiting, job referral, and placement assistance for job seekers, re-entry services for recently incarcerated individuals returning to the workforce, and re-employment services to unemployment insurance claimants. Free IRS-certified tax services, provided through My Free Tax Initiative, continue to be made available annually, resulting in what to some Job Center customers are life-changing refunds. The opportunity for customers to utilize these services also fits well into the Disability Employment Initiative Asset Development strategy.

Employer services continue to expand beyond the entry of job orders, focusing on and emphasizing intensive outreach and regular follow-up to discern employer needs, advise of hire incentives, and inform of new developments that help ensure compliance with state and federal laws. Additional significant services include the matching of job seeker experience, skills, and other qualifications with job requirements and assisting employers with special recruitment needs.

Reviewing resumes and referring qualified individuals to good jobs, coordinating job fairs and mass recruitments, helping employers analyze hard-to-fill job orders and minimize or avoid layoffs, and establishing USDOL-recognized apprenticeship programs are other premium services provided. Job Center highlights and key accomplishments for Program Year 2015 include 1,043,895 online accesses of the ALEXsys system by 356,922 individual users; 184,976 Job Center visits by 36,375 individuals, who received 42,823 countable services; and 57,263 job listings in ALEXsys. Total services provided, including staff-assisted and online self-services, consisted of 1,189,767 this program year. The ALEXsys virtual call center was established to answer statewide calls and emails to the Job Centers so local team members have more time to serve walk-in customers. It provides assistance with registrations, resumes, passwords, and various workforce related questions.

The Alaska Career Ready program includes the WorkKeys® assessments, which allow job seekers to earn the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC). During the program year, 3,485 WorkKeys

assessments were given to job seekers in the Job Centers and partner agencies, leading to 915 NCRCs earned.

Upgrades to systems for PY 2015 include the redesign and simplification of the job order process in ALEXsys to make it easier for employers to enter and track their job orders. These improvements provide employers with new email notification options, a more intuitive layout, and the ability to save in-progress job orders for later completion. Additionally, Alaska's Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) online system is currently undergoing modifications to include the new Long-Term Unemployed Recipient (LTUR) target group. Once finalized, employers and consultants will have the ability to submit their certification requests online for all current WOTC target groups. The WOTC program issued 1,144 employer certifications for PY 2015, and, as a result, employers were eligible to claim \$3,461,000 in tax credits.

## **Veterans Services**

Alaska is home to over 70,000 veterans who make up 13 percent of the state's adult population, which is the highest per capita veteran population in the nation. The Division of Employment and Training Services (DETS), which oversees Veterans Services in Alaska's Job Centers, has a policy to ensure priority of service to veterans and covered persons; eligible veterans and covered persons are identified at the point of entry and are notified of programs and services available. Point of entry includes Alaska Job Centers, DETS websites, and other virtual service-delivery resources.

All veterans and covered persons pursuing employment through DETS resources are registered in ALEXsys, where a Virtual Recruiter can be utilized to notify veterans of job openings that meet their search criteria prior to access by the public. Job orders are open for 24 hours for veterans and eligible spouses to allow them to view and apply for the positions prior to being opened to the public.

Priority of service is delivered in various ways, including a regular monitoring of veterans' program activities by department leadership. Some Alaska Job Center resource rooms have dedicated computers for use by veterans, and priority preference is provided to veterans for workshops, training services, and other applicable resources.

Alaska Job Center employment and training staff receive training on the Jobs for Veterans Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and other legislation that impacts veteran priority, preference, and employability. Staff focuses on 1) the assessment of veterans to facilitate delivery of services; and 2) conducting outreach to employers to promote hiring veterans. Outreach is provided in places such as U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs medical and veteran centers, homeless shelters, civic and service organizations, Veteran Stand Down events, veterans' job fairs, and military installations.

Four Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists are housed in Alaska Job Centers located in areas with the highest veteran populations and provide in-depth interviewing and comprehensive assessments to identify employment goals, interim objectives, and appropriate services that will enable the veteran to meet his or her employment goals. If DVOP services are not available, referrals are made to appropriate partner programs such as Career Support and Training Services and Vocational Rehabilitation.

Alaska's Local Veterans' Employment Representative gave six presentations to over fifty employers, attended five job fairs, established or strengthened relationships with over 154 employers, and facilitated the placement of veterans in meaningful employment.

The annual Veterans and Military Spouses Job Fair was held in November 2015 and approximately 120 employers, education, training, and apprenticeship providers attended the event, which served nearly 900 participants. Employers collected 236 resumes, conducted 83 interviews, made 51 provisional job offers, and estimated that 210 hires would occur over the next year as a result of the job fair.

In PY 2015, Alaska's Job Centers and online labor exchange served nearly 11,000 veterans and over 500 of those were served by the four DVOPs in the state.

## **Adult Basic Education – Title II**

The Adult Basic Education (ABE) program provides adult learners with instruction in the basic skills of reading, writing, mathematics, English as a Second Language, or General Educational Development (GED) preparation. The intent is to prepare adults for transition into the labor market or higher academic or technical training. ABE and GED services are provided by multiple grant recipients located throughout the state.

During the program year, ABE admitted 3,515 students seeking educational assistance, and 57 percent (2,002) studied in the programs for 12 or more hours and were considered full-time students. Of the 2,002 full-time students:

- 1,103 (55 percent) tested as having reading and/or math skills at the 8<sup>th</sup> grade level or below.
- 210 (11 percent) tested as having reading and/or math skills at the 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade level.
- 688 (34 percent) tested on the Basic English Skills Test (BEST) and studied English as a Second Language.
- 1,009 were post-tested and 58 percent showed educational gain.

The State of Alaska awarded 714 GED diplomas during the program year.

## Unemployment Insurance

Alaska's Unemployment Insurance (UI) program remains one of the top in the nation to issue timely first payments of UI benefits and remains committed to implementing strategies to speed unemployment insurance claimants' return to work. To this end, the UI program continues to partner with Job Center staff to assist unemployed Alaskans in gaining employment.

Alaska launched the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program in January 2016. All full service Job Centers in the state now participate in RESEA with the UI Program as an active partner. Services are focused on two groups of unemployed workers: Unemployment Insurance claimants most likely to exhaust benefits and all recently separated military personnel. These two groups of job seekers stand to benefit extensively from the goal of this highly-individualized program.

UI highlights for Program Year 2015 include:

- total UI benefit dollars paid was \$132,142,755;
- total number of Alaska workers who received at least one week of benefits was 40,786;
- average weekly benefit amount paid was \$256;
- a total of \$2,460,558 in fraud overpayments, \$827,672 in fraud penalties, and \$1,964,440 in non-fraud overpayments were collected;
- 98% of all UI claimants used automated systems to file their bi-weekly claims; and
- UI claim centers responded to 164,677 phone calls.

## Waivers for Program Year 2015

In Program Year 2015, Alaska requested and received approval to allow the State Workforce Board to carry out the roles of a local board. Alaska's need to establish a single regional planning area is essential to offset excessive administrative costs, thwart inconsistencies in services, and the desire to improve overall performance. In an effort to include local participation and points of view, local elected officials from Alaska's boroughs and cities are consulted in planning efforts and invited to participate in the Regional Advisory Councils and were included in the state combined planning process. The quality of dialogue by the AWIB has been raised with more focus on statewide strategies and their linkage to regional economic and workforce development needs.

The impact of functioning as a single regional planning area has streamlined the process and timeliness of awarding grants by the elimination of multiple layers of administrative entities; established consistent eligibility standards across the state; and improved visibility and accountability of workforce investment programs.

Additionally, this waiver has a positive impact in regards to advancing the President’s Job-Driven training elements. It allows for the Alaska Workforce Investment Board to foster and create regional collaborations among Job Centers, education institutions, labor, and non-profits. Even though Alaska is a very large state geographically, it is certainly small when it comes to working closely with stakeholders. This provides opportunities to work with employers to determine local or regional hiring needs and design training programs that are responsive to those needs.

## State Evaluation Activities

During PY 2015, seven WIOA Youth grantees and the Job Center Adult and Dislocated Worker, Dislocated Worker Training-National Emergency Grant, and Sector Partnerships-National Emergency Grant programs were monitored and evaluated. A Program and Equal Opportunity review was also conducted. Public Law 113 Title I, Chapter 4, Section 183 Performance Accountability System, and 2 CFR 200.328 Monitoring and Reporting Program Performance, requires annual monitoring related to programs and activities authorized by Title 1-B to ensure compliance with federal laws and regulations, and to determine if performance expectations are being achieved. Monitoring activities were conducted by the Alaska Workforce Investment Board with assistance from Division of Employment and Training Services staff.

The following programs were evaluated:

March 30-31	AVTEC – WIOA Youth Grant
April 25-27	Anchorage and Mat-Su Job Centers – Adult, Dislocated Worker, Dislocated Worker Training-National Emergency Grant and Sector Partnerships-National Emergency Grant
April 28-29	Nine Star – WIOA Youth Grant
May 31	SERRC, Alaska’s Educational Resource Centers – WIOA Youth Grant
June 1	Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Juvenile Justice, Johnson Youth Center and McLaughlin Youth Center – WIOA Youth Grant
June 15-16	Kawerak, Inc. – WIOA Youth Grant
June 21-22	Fairbanks Job Center – Adult, Dislocated Worker, Dislocated Worker Training-National Emergency Grant and Sector Partnerships-National Emergency Grant
June 23	Adult Learning Programs of Alaska – WIOA Youth Grant

The goal is to identify how effectively the vision, strategies, and procedures of the USDOL Employment and Training Administration and the department are being achieved. The results provide the basis for making statewide and regional judgments regarding the effectiveness of the WIOA programs administered within Alaska’s workforce development system.

During PY 2015, monitoring efforts focused on ensuring information input into the management information and reporting systems was accurate for evaluation activities. Information extracted from the system included total enrollments, case load sizes, training and credential attainment information, literacy/numeracy rates, and employment and retention.

The on-site visits and desk side reviews afford opportunities to: ensure participant eligibility is being determined correctly; ensure participant services are delivered appropriately; evaluate internal policies and procedures that are used; gather information from staff that perform and supervise the work; compare all information gathered; and issue important feedback through a comprehensive final monitoring report to each grantee.

Evaluating processes ensures that grant recipients are in compliance with federal and state laws and regulations, grant agreements, division policies and procedures for the WIOA title I-B programs, and that core, intensive, and training services are being provided appropriately as specified under WIOA. Participant file reviews and in-person technical assistance help identify areas of program strength and those needing improvement.

Reports of evaluations conducted provide constructive feedback and encourage open lines of communication. They further identify planned technical guidance, assistance, training, and corrective actions. This leads to timely, individualized, and specific staff training; opportunities to fine-tune processes and procedures; and sufficient time for corrective action to be accomplished.

## **Customer Satisfaction**

The need to measure and improve customer satisfaction is an essential part of providing services. Information received allows for data-driven decision making, helps focus limited resources to where they are most needed, and drives process and procedure development. It provides an opportunity to learn about what is important to participants, what is working, and what can be improved.

WIOA recognizes the importance of customer satisfaction and incorporates this as a new indicator of performance. For the past few years, the department has gauged customer satisfaction by surveying participants at the time of their exit. The participant has the option of replying to the survey by email or using Survey Monkey via a hyperlink.

The customer satisfaction survey is a set of eight questions that gauge the level of satisfaction with the employment and training services received by the participants. The survey is broken into two parts: 1) satisfaction with services, including assessments and support services; and 2) satisfaction with training services. Along with the standard questions, participants are encouraged to submit additional feedback on the services received and provide ideas on improvements to the program.

In PY 2015, 602 surveys were sent to exiting Adult, Dislocated Worker, NEG and Youth program participants. The response rate was 18 percent, a decrease of five percent from the previous year. Individual survey results in Table 3 show an average of 88 percent of surveyed participants agreed that services they received met their needs and expectations. This is an increase of two percentage points from last year. Of the participants who attended a training program, 72 percent were satisfied with the training they received, a slight decrease from 73 percent in the prior year.

**Table 3: Customer Satisfaction Individual Survey Results**

Survey Question	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	N/A*
<b><i>Service related questions</i></b>				
Satisfied with the overall services I received	88%	3%	9%	
The services met my expectations	88%	4%	8%	
The services provided were ideal for my needs	88%	5%	7%	
<b><i>Training related questions</i></b>				
Overall, the training met expectations	72%	10%	6%	12%
The amount of training time was adequate	68%	15%	5%	12%
I received adequate support from the training organization	70%	12%	6%	12%
I'm confident the training will increase my employability	71%	10%	7%	12%
Would recommend this training to others	73%	9%	6%	12%

\*Not applicable when the survey respondent did not attend training.

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Division of Employment and Training Services

All comments received via the survey are reviewed, and the majority of the comments show appreciation for the program services. Other comments bring to light issues that are addressed by a Program Coordinator. Results of the customer satisfaction survey are also provided to the Alaska Workforce Investment Board, the Alaska State Legislature, and in this report.



## WIOA Funding

**Table 4: Summary of WIOA Program Funding Used and Year-End Balances for PY 2015**

Funding Breakouts		Available	Expended	Percent Expended	Available Balance
<b>WIOA Youth</b>	Current	1,650,499	1,456,177	88%	194,322
	Carry In	680,493	359,400	53%	321,093
<b>WIOA Adult</b>	Current	1,564,629	1,572,969	101%	-8,340
	Carry In	636,154	636,154	100%	0
<b>WIOA DW</b>	Current	1,690,508	1,124,100	66%	566,408
	Carry In	625,436	366,658	59%	258,778
<b>Local Admin</b>	Current	545,071	413,321	76%	131,750
	Carry In	0	0	0	0
<b>Rapid Response</b>	Current	87,365	63,330	72%	24,035
	Carry In	52,266	52,266	100%	0
<b>Statewide</b>	Current	615,341	302,238	49%	313,103
	Carry In	81,444	81,444	100%	0
<b>Totals</b>		<b>8,229,206</b>	<b>6,428,058</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>1,801,149</b>

*Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Division of Employment and Training Services*

## Cost Effectiveness

Workforce development resources are leveraged to achieve increased efficiency and effectiveness at all levels of the system. Programs are evaluated on an ongoing basis to determine cost effectiveness and achievement of desired outcomes. Efforts to prepare WIOA participants for employment in high-growth industries continued during the program year and these jobs require a higher degree of skill and training as well as aggressive planning and investment. The cost per participant identified in Table 5 includes all costs associated with program delivery.

**Table 5: WIOA Program Cost Analysis**

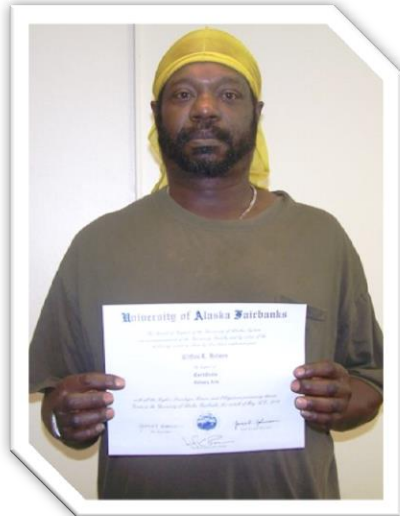
PY 2015 Cost Analysis			
WIOA Title 1-B Participants	Participants*	Costs	Cost per Participant
Adult PY 2015	387	2,209,123	5,708
Dislocated Worker PY 2015	290	1,490,758	5,141
Youth PY 2015	406	1,815,577	4,472
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1083</b>	<b>5,515,458</b>	<b>5,093</b>

\*Does not include self-service customers.

*Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Division of Employment and Training Services*

## Adult, DW, and NEG Success Stories

### Reducing Recidivism Through Retraining



In January of 2009, Clifton Holmes began taking classes toward his Culinary Arts Certification with the assistance of the Pell Grant and student loans. In March 2009, he had to face criminal charges, which prevented him from continuing his education.

In March of 2014, while a resident of the halfway house, he began working with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). DVR assisted Clifton with re-entry job placement and counseling sessions. DVR referred Clifton to the Career Support and Training Services (CSTS) team in August of 2014 to inquire about financial assistance to obtain his Culinary Arts Certification. Obtaining this credential would possibly lead to career advancement and increase hourly wages to assist Clifton in becoming financially self-sufficient.

CSTS staff determined he was eligible and suitable for the Adult Program and enrolled him August 11, 2014 to assist with achieving his goal. In May 2016, he obtained his Culinary Arts Certification, allowing him to gain employment with Denny's Restaurant as kitchen assistant at the hourly rate of \$10.00. Shortly after that he was offered full-time employment at Gambardella's Pasta Bella as a kitchen aide, where he started earning an hourly rate of \$12.00. Within 3 months, he was promoted to night shift lead cook earning an hourly rate of \$14.00.

Clifton was exited form the Adult program on May 12, 2016 and is happy at his new job. He appreciates the support he received and thanks the Department of Labor for believing in him and giving him another opportunity.

### Non-Traditional Employment Success

Having heard about the Adult program from fellow students, Rebecca Satathite came to the Peninsula Job Center to inquire about Career Support and Training Services (CSTS) in September of 2014. Resource room staff assessed Becca and referred her to CSTS for further assistance. Her goal was to become a Firefighter/Paramedic in the local area. CSTS staff determined Becca eligible and enrolled her in the Adult Program on September 5, 2014 based on her family size and income.

Becca had been attending the Paramedic Program at Kenai Peninsula College since August of 2014 and was doing very well in the program but needed assistance with training costs and clinical requirements that would take her 150 miles one way from her home. She would also need assistance with transportation to a very expensive internship that was required for her to complete her Associate's in Paramedic Technology.



Becca completed her paramedic program in September of 2015 and, of her own accord, went on to completed Firefighter I, a semester-long program that made her more employable as a Firefighter/Paramedic.

As a volunteer with the local fire departments, she had logged a slew of hours learning her trade and keeping her ears open for upcoming job openings. Her hard work paid off when she was hired by Central Emergency Services in April of 2016 as a Firefighter/Paramedic. Her starting wage of \$22.50 per hour was more than enough to make her self-sufficient. She receives medical and retirement benefits, but, most importantly, attained the non-traditional goal she originally set out to achieve.

### **Rural Training Provides for Self-Sufficiency**

Randall Nichaloi, a participant from the rural village of Napaskiak in Western Alaska, recently gained employment with the City of Bethel as a Driver. Prior to enrolling into the Adult program on May 15, 2015 with Career Support and Training Services (CSTS), Randall researched the transportation industry and took it upon himself to obtain his CDL-A Permit, a DOT Physical, and apply for funding through Calista Corporation, one of 13 recognized Native Corporations in Alaska under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.



During his CSTS assessment, it was determined that Randall had a clean driving record and was willing to relocate for employment opportunities. CSTS funded his CDL-A program at Yuut Elitnaurviat and provided support services for his meals while he stayed with family members in Bethel to attend training.

Once Randall successfully completed the CDL-A program through the Yuut Driving Academy, he worked with his career planner to update his resume and immediately started looking for employment. Randall was exited from the program on March 16, 2016 and is extremely happy to have gained full-time, permanent employment with a starting pay of \$18.90 per hour plus benefits.

## Partnerships to Reemploy a Dislocated Worker

Jonathan Larson had been laid off from a Federal job when the position was relocated to Washington. He was a single parent of three children and had been volunteering at Cook Inlet Tribal Council (CITC) with the Anchorage Realizing Indigenous Student Excellence (ARISE) Program.

He was hoping to gain full-time employment and worked with Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation (TVR) and enrolled with Career Support and Training Services (CSTS) on March 23, 2015 to develop an On-the-Job Training (OJT) for a Community Outreach Coordinator position with the ARISE program to be stationed at CITC. The OJT included training on-site as well as attendance and completion of classroom training on human services. Upon completion of the OJT, Larson was hired full time with ARISE earning \$23 per hour plus benefits.

Jonathan was exited on September 30, 2015 and appreciated our ability to help him through the OJT and the partnership services provided by CITC, TVR, and CSTS.



## From Displaced Homemaker to Registered Nurse

Jessica Mahurin came to the job center shortly after her husband had been laid off from his job. She had been dependent on his income and was determined, through an assessment, to be a displaced homemaker. She had worked in the medical field at a local clinic and was enrolled at Kenai Peninsula College working on her prerequisites.



Jessica was accepted into the RN program at the University of Alaska, Anchorage and successfully graduated in May 2015. During this time, she utilized funding through the Dislocated Worker and National Emergency Grant programs. Upon completion, she gained employment as a Registered Nurse at Central Peninsula Hospital earning \$30.53 per hour plus benefits. She was exited on August 27, 2015.

Jessica appreciates our ability to help her through her training, and stated, “I could not have done this without all the help you provided me. Thank you so much!”

## Youth Success Stories

Katrina was a low-income individual who required additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program and to secure employment. She had taken and enjoyed several welding classes while in high school and desired to enroll in a Welding Non-destructive Testing Program. With the assistance of her Youth Program Career Planner, Katrina was guided to Vigor Industrial Inc., a shipbuilding organization with 11 large shipyards in the Northwest.



Vigor is supportive of training young talent as welders and hired Katrina to work as welder/laborer at their Seward shipyard. To do this Katrina would need to relocate to Seward and was co-enrolled with the Adult program to assist with the transition. She was provided support services of transportation to Seward and housing and food for the first two months through the Adult program. The Youth program assisted with purchasing welding safety gear such as steel toe boots, welding jacket, and gloves; helped her obtain her driver's license, and assisted with math tutoring.

Katrina has now been employed nearly one year. She has received additional in-house training and obtained additional welding certifications through Vigor and continues to grow and develop her welding and employment skills experience.

## English as a Second Language Doesn't Have to be a Barrier

Peleiupu Lauolefiso sought services from Nine Star Enterprises in October 2014. She was 21 years old, had never worked before and was in need of employment assistance. Nine Star staff arranged a paid work experience at a local Subway Restaurant to help develop her employment skill sets. The work experience was key in getting her hired as her English skills were still lacking after recently moving from America Samoa. In spite of her developing English skills, she excelled in her position at Subway and after a year and a half, become a candidate for the assistant manager position.



Subway assistant managers are expected to drive to the district office daily for errands, and unfortunately Peleiupu did not possess a driver's license, which disqualified her from applying for the position. The WIOA Youth program made drivers training available to her and she successfully earned her driver's license in August 2016. Once she obtained her drivers license, she was promoted to an assistant manager position. The combination of WIOA Youth Services and the participant's



motivation to succeed resulted her being firmly placed on a path to sustained employment and independence.

## Veteran Success Story

### Job Centers Work!

Army veteran Christopher Coleman is a great example of a veteran who had a positive experience at an Alaska Job Center. When Coleman first entered the Mat-Su Job Center, he was homeless, depressed, and experiencing personal family challenges.

After going through an initial assessment, he was quickly determined eligible for and referred to the Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program. With the help of job center staff, Coleman was quickly connected with a local housing program to help him obtain permanent housing, rather than having to continue to live in a tent. He was also referred to a temporary position working as a skid-steer operator that led to long-term employment as a carpenter earning \$17.00 per hour. Upon accepting the carpenter position, Coleman contacted the job center to inform staff of his success. Through the course of the discussion, staff learned that Coleman was in need of basic carpentry tools and connected him with the Dislocated Worker program for assistance with obtaining the tools needed for the job.

Unfortunately, three months later, Coleman was laid off and again spiraled into depression. In an attempt to distract himself from his current circumstances, Coleman decided to volunteer to help fight a local wildfire. Coleman was rejected from the first two organizations he spoke with as they were fully staffed with volunteers. Feeling down and rejected, Coleman decided to offer his assistance to one more operation and spoke with the owner of a catering company called The Chocolate Gypsy, who was contracted to feed the fire fighters.

The owner reluctantly agreed to let Coleman volunteer but quickly noticed his superb work ethic and informed him she would compensate his efforts. The next day, when Coleman tried to work at the kitchen, he was rejected from the volunteer area, but was instead handed new-hire paperwork. He was hired as the Assistant Kitchen Manager at \$14.00 per hour. He continued to work for The Chocolate Gypsy throughout the fire season, showing his value to the company.



By the end of the season, the owner expressed a desire to open a new restaurant in Delta Junction and asked Coleman if he was interested in operating the new venture. Coleman quickly agreed and became the Kitchen Manager/Lead Chef at \$18.50 per hour.

When Coleman contacted job center staff to inform them of his latest opportunity, he conveyed the following message: “What I have to say about the Mat-Su Job Center and the wonderful people who work there is, it works! What a wonderful place with fantastic resources!”