

Connecticut Public Broadcasting Network

CT UNEMPLOYED TURN TO STATE CAREER CENTERS

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As the recession bites deeper, there's one enterprise in Connecticut that's never been busier – the business of helping job seekers. Around the state there are 14 CT Works Career Centers, one-stop shops that aim to provide free services to anyone who needs help finding employment. The centers are about to be boosted by millions of dollars in fresh funding from the federal stimulus package. WNPR's Harriet Jones went to the Career Center in New London.



Photo by Harriet Jones.

Chuck Jones of the Connecticut Department of Labor looked over a resume with a client.

“First review of the resume generally takes between five and 15 seconds. They do a scan across the top third, they do a scan down the left side, then they make a decision – am I going to read the details later, or am I going to toss it in the trash can right now?”

Resume writing is just one of the practical skills taught at this career center. Jobseekers can also learn how to make a great impression at interview, brush up their computer skills, and can even attend recruitment sessions run by local employers.

“There's always jobs listed on the board, there's jobs that aren't listed in the newspapers, you can always go on the computers anytime you like,” said Donna Bennett, a former bank teller who has been unemployed since she was laid off from her job in May 2007.

Since her benefits ran out, Bennett has been supporting herself with a crafting business, but said she really wants to get back into full time employment.

"I'm not getting any callbacks at all," said Bennett. "I have a good solid background in management, but there are so many people that are unemployed, that are putting in applications, that I'm not even getting callbacks on applications."

This center, run under the auspices of the Eastern Workforce Investment Board, is a partnership which brings together state services, federal funding and three non-profit agencies.



A computer class at the career center. Photo by Harriet Jones.

Roger Mason is regional director for employment services for TVCCA. He says the typical client has changed in the last year.

"There are people that have never had an experience like this in their life," said Mason. "They've always been employed, and suddenly they find themselves unemployed, and really not a lot of knowledge on what they can do."

Training is a key tool. Here, 10 new clients are introduced to a database of online courses which they can access and take from home, learning new software skills, or getting business or healthcare certifications. The career center also helps finance and place people with local community colleges with a special focus areas in healthcare and manufacturing.

Tim Murney is the Manufacturing Career Adviser – he's liaising with Three Rivers Community College in Norwich to set up a new pre-manufacturing course that he hopes will become a model for others in the state.

"What we're doing is taking this downtime as an opportunity to help people retool," said Murney. "There are a lot of people coming from jobs at the casino, other job categories, other industries. They may not know it but they have transferable skills."

One client who did opt for a new healthcare career is Elaine Brown. After seven years as a slots operator at Foxwoods, she was laid off in 2006. She retrained as a Certified Nurses Aide and went to work for a Haven Healthcare facility in Jewett City. Now she said, she's once again facing unemployment.

“First we were hearing rumors about it, and then actually we seen it in the papers,” said Brown. “Now they’re just laying off people week after week, and they’re supposed to be closing March 15th, March 21st, around that time at the end of this month.”

Brown said her dream is to be a fully qualified nurse – but for now, she’s using the services at the CT Works Career Center to try to find stable employment.



Elaine Brown, once again facing unemployment. Photo by Harriet Jones.

“They’re going to try to help me to get more funding to continue my education in the health field, and try to get in a better position that I won’t be laid off so easily,” said Brown.

The problem may be in efficiently getting the dollars and effort to where they’re needed. For example in healthcare, counselors say, there’s a pressing need for more community college courses in a wider range of disciplines.

Jobseekers will have to hope that dollars and effort are put behind solutions that really work. According to some counselors at the career center, there are already waiting lists for popular community college training courses in the healthcare field.

Counselors and clients alike must hope that dollars and effort are put behind the right initiatives. According to some at the career center, there are already waiting lists for popular community college courses.

Centers like this will get a big cash boost from money set aside in the federal stimulus package. They face the task of trying to retool Connecticut’s workforce for a future that few can fully foresee.