



Entering the Pipeline

ENGAGING DISCONNECTED
WORKERS IN OUR
REGIONAL ECONOMY

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CENTER *for* PLANNING EXCELLENCE



There are more than 2.3 million working age adults in Louisiana:

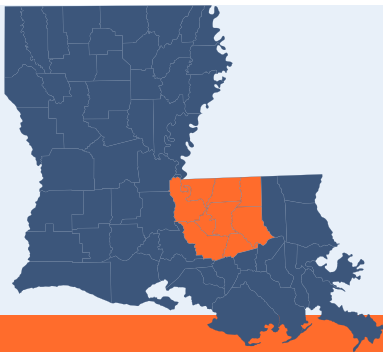


Almost **600,000** of those working age adults do not have a high school diploma

Another **525,000** high school graduates lack basic skills for employment



Nearly 50% of Louisiana's working adults are disconnected from employment opportunity.



Approximately 168,000 disconnected workers live in the 9-Parish Capital Region

TAXPAYER COST: \$235,680 per worker

Average cost to taxpayers over the lifetime of a disconnected worker.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 **Expand existing case management and wrap-around services.**
- 2 **Develop resources that empower disconnected workers to chart a course to sustained employment**
- 3 **Increase and deepen partnerships with employers**
- 4 **Provide multi-sector support for WIOA implementation**
- 5 **Continue to invest and strengthen our transit system**
- 6 **Expand access to transit and transportation vouchers**



INTRODUCTION

In efforts to realize the opportunities associated with the recent spate of economic growth and to meet the needs of employers, a number of programs and incentives have been developed to strengthen Louisiana's pipeline of skilled workers. The Baton Rouge Area Chamber's recent report, *Embracing Opportunity: An Analysis of Efforts to Meet Capital Region Workforce Demands*, identifies training programs that are certifying workers for many of the most in-demand jobs in the Capital Region, and quantifies the need for expansion of some of these programs if we are to close the gap between our local supply of qualified workers and rapidly growing demand for skilled labor.¹

The purpose of CPEX's report is to highlight the need for a similar expansion and enhancement of programs designed to help disconnected workers in the Capital Region who need assistance to become job-ready, access transportation that connects them to opportunities, and enter the workforce. Disconnected workers are those who are chronically under- or unemployed, often due to multiple barriers such as lack of education, health issues, homelessness, and financial and family instability, among others. Without more people moving into the entry-level sections of our workforce pipeline, efforts to expand training for skilled labor will eventually be constrained by a lack of workers who possess the basic levels of education required to begin additional training. Furthermore, the quality of life required to retain homegrown talent and attract new talent is compromised by widespread poverty and stark economic disparities. **Without targeted efforts to re-engage disconnected workers into our economy, poverty will continue to grow, disparities will widen, and growth will stall.**

According to CEOs for Cities and other leading regional economic development experts, "human capital is the single most important input for economic growth ... to have an impact, however, it must be properly deployed into jobs."³ The 2015 Manufacturing and Logistics Report Card produced by The Ball State University Center for Business and Economic Research cites human capital as "the most important factor in firm location decisions." Unfortunately, this is the one category in which Louisiana earns an F.⁴ If we don't connect those who need jobs to education, training and employment opportunities, our available human capital is being underutilized, too many families don't have what they need to thrive, and the entire region misses out.

"Poverty is not just an economic issue – it's a resilience issue. Low-income households struggle to bounce back from disasters and economic shocks." Moving more people into the middle class can "ultimately increase the resilience capacity of the region."²

The New Orleans Index at Ten, The Data Center





DISCONNECTED WORKERS: A GROWING PROBLEM

Of 2.3 million working age adults in Louisiana, about 600,000 do not have a high school diploma or equivalency certificate. This means that 26% of Louisiana's workers are not qualified for skilled work of any kind. An additional 525,000 working age adults across the state have a high school diploma, but lack the foundational academic skills needed to earn credentials for skilled trades.⁵ Together these two groups of disconnected workers make up 49% of Louisiana's working age population.

This means that nearly half of working age adults in our state cannot access jobs that pay family-sustaining wages. Louisiana cannot continue to grow its economy without addressing this dire issue.

The 9-parish region that comprises the greater Baton Rouge area is home to an estimated 88,822 of those 600,000 without a high school education.⁶ If we assume a corresponding percentage of the 525,000 high school graduates who are still lacking essential basic knowledge for the Baton Rouge area, that is an additional 78,750 people, totaling an estimated 167,572 disconnected workers our region. We need more of these workers to participate in the workforce, and they need basic educational services that will prepare them to train for skilled work that pays family sustaining wages.

OF THE 2.3 MILLION WORKING-AGE ADULTS IN LOUISIANA:

600,000	+	525,000	=	49%
do not have a high school diploma		lack basic knowledge		of the Louisiana workforce disconnected from opportunity

Nearly 168,000 disconnected workers live in the Capital Region

The current and projected job growth in the Baton Rouge region presents valuable opportunities to turn the tide on poverty, connect under- and unemployed residents with quality employment, and build the workforce pipeline our region needs for sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

However, with such a large population of disconnected workers, creating a ready pipeline of skilled labor will require coordinated efforts that go above and beyond traditional training programs.

ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM



Multiple Challenges & Big Opportunities

Many disconnected workers need multiple services and basic adult education programs to accompany or precede skills training. A lack of reliable transportation often presents additional obstacles. Healthcare, substance abuse treatment, housing counseling, family services, financial literacy, soft skills training, transportation assistance and basic academic skills can all be part of a strategy for achieving the stability and base line proficiencies needed to successfully train for a job. Programs serving these clients are oftentimes, by necessity, expensive, and it can be difficult to secure funding for programs that do not lead to a HSE (high school equivalency) certificate or job placement within a relatively short time frame.

Furthermore, many disconnected workers also need assistance and guidance to plan for the long term. The providers we interviewed reported that many clients do not stick with low-wage, low-skill jobs or are discouraged from taking steps to build job skills in the first place because they do not see a path forward to employment that will actually pay a living wage. Many who have little to no employment history also lack an understanding of the big picture – the incremental steps over a period of months and years required to achieve and sustain personal stability, maintain employment, and advance beyond intermittent, low-wage work. In the absence of ongoing coordinated support, such workers are unlikely to have the resources they need to develop a long-term strategy for self-sufficiency.

As The Cowen Institute in New Orleans and partners such as the Aspen Institute have demonstrated through Opportunity Youth programs, investing in those who are disconnected from school and work is not only the right thing to do – it is a sound financial decision. **The average cost to taxpayers over the lifetime of an individual disconnected from school and work is \$235,680. This number quickly multiplies into the millions and even billions of dollars when aggregated at city, regional and state levels.**

The Aspen Institute defines “Opportunity Youth” as young adults aged 16-24 not connected to school or work. By a wide margin, Louisiana has the highest rate in the nation of disconnected youth: 19.8% compared to the national average of 13.8%. **Accounting only for those who fall into this 16-24 year old age group, the Cowen Institute calculates Louisiana’s annual taxpayer costs at \$1.7B dollars.**⁷ Costs for programs serving disconnected workers and learners in Louisiana can range from \$4,500 to more than \$20,000 per client. Understanding the magnitude of negative financial impact associated with letting disconnected workers slip through the cracks makes the cost of supportive programs and wrap-around services seem much less daunting and more like common sense.

As the dedicated professionals who do this work on a daily basis in our region will testify, it is a worthwhile investment that enhances human dignity, improves quality of life, and is essential to economic development.

“Every case is different. We need the flexibility and resources to address a wide range of challenges.”

Michael Acaldo
CEO, Society of
St. Vincent de Paul

“Adult basic learners are often overlooked because many funders are looking for students who are closer to HSE attainment and job placement.”

Gary Robertson
Executive Director,
Adult Literacy
Advocates of Greater
Baton Rouge

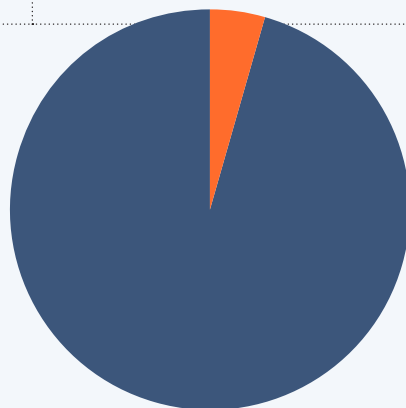
The challenges faced by those most in need of opportunity are not new. There are services in place and a great deal of important work being done by a range of institutions, organizations and agencies to address these needs. Organizations in the Baton Rouge area are providing adult literacy programs, HSE (high school equivalency) preparation and testing, and training for entry-level jobs that incorporates soft skills and life skills. Though all recognize the need for ongoing case management and wrap-around services, only a few organizations are able to provide comprehensive services. Most providers are also making efforts to leverage opportunities associated with the economic growth occurring in the region, respond to growing demand, better coordinate their services with partner organizations, and tailor programs to the specific needs of their clients and employers.

However, with funding constraints limiting capacity, service providers cannot keep pace with demand – and demand is growing while disparity is widening. A rough calculation of people served in the range of programs providing services to disconnected workers in the Capital Region shows about 12,400 unique clients in the past year. This constitutes 7.4% of the estimated 167,572 disconnected workers in our region. Though even in ideal circumstances, not every working age adult will be engaged in the workforce, there remains a huge gap to be addressed between the relatively few who are working with service providers to chart a path to employment and the tens of thousands who are not accessing these opportunities.

As of 2012, Louisiana had the 6th worst income inequality in the nation – ten years ago, our state wasn't even in the top 10.⁸ The consequence of not turning the tide on this troubling issue will be an exponential increase in the number of families living in poverty and decline in economic growth.

ORGANIZATIONS PROVIDING SERVICES FOR DISCONNECTED WORKERS IN THE CAPITAL REGION*

ORGANIZATION	SERVICES	PEOPLE SERVED†
Goodwill Industries	Job training and placement for women, ex-offenders and people with disabilities	177
HOPE Ministries	The Way to Work – Sustainable Workforce Solutions: full service education and case management; soft skills including behavioral skills and one-on-one career counseling	1,697
North Baton Rouge Industrial Training Initiative	Job training and placement, soft skills/ life coaching	45
St. Vincent DePaul	Shelter, case management, pharmacy and dental care, emergency financial assistance, home visits, life skills, basic job skills, money management	3,400 Number only incl. those receiving work-readiness services at St. Vincent DePaul
United Way – Income Stability grantees	Range from emergency financial assistance, money management, career and family counseling, housing assistance, life skills	916 Not incl. those represented elsewhere in this chart
WorkReady U (program of the Louisiana Community and Technical College System) and Baton Rouge area affiliates: UP Alliance, Adult Literacy Advocates, St. Paul Adult Learning Center, Baton Rouge Community College, & East Baton Rouge Parish School System Adult Education	Adult basic and secondary education; English as a second language; English literacy; civics; family literacy; digital, health & financial literacy; life skills; career pathways	6,177
TOTAL		12,412



Only 7.4%
of disconnected workers are receiving job-readiness services

*Every effort was made to identify all service providers in the Baton Rouge area and providers both large and small are represented here; however, this does not claim to be a comprehensive list.

† Most recent 12-month period for which data was available

Transportation

Investing in adult education and services to prepare disconnected workers for job training is only one part of the equation. During interviews with more than a dozen organizations providing services in the Capital Region, transportation consistently emerged as a top challenge facing their clients.

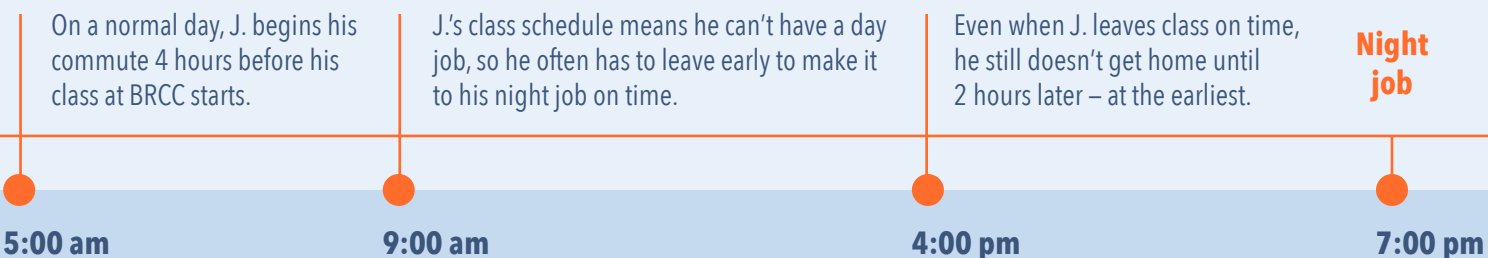
Residents who don't have access to an automobile are often stranded, and this applies disproportionately to disconnected workers in the Capital Region. According to 2010 data, Baton Rouge has a high percentage of households without vehicles – 11% compared to 9% nationwide. These residents, the majority of whom are low-income, have limited access to transit services that could connect them to the education, training and jobs they need to get ahead. **Of regions nationwide, metro areas in the South have the lowest transit coverage rate for zero-vehicle households, resulting in limited mobility and restricted access to economic opportunity.** Only 32.5% of jobs in Southern metros are available via a transit trip of 90 minutes or less.⁹ This figure doesn't include training centers, nor does it account for jobs outside urban areas, such as the thousands of jobs becoming available in the river parishes along the I-10 corridor in South Louisiana, which are not served by fixed route transit.

Data does not currently exist to quantify the availability of transit to connect disconnected workers in the Capital Region to the various services and programs they need in order to progress towards employment. However, representatives of all the organizations interviewed explained that existing transit service does not meet the needs of many clients who lack access to a personal vehicle, either because the service is too infrequent, the travel times are too lengthy, or the routes don't take them where they need to go. For persons with disabilities, it was reported that the lengthy paperwork and extensive documentation required to qualify for on-demand transit was a barrier to access, especially for those living in group facilities where administrative demands are high. Access to transit service even impacts funding for adult education because student attendance and accumulated hours play a large role in the amount of funding available. If students are struggling to get to class on a regular basis and exit exams are delayed, federal funding is reduced.

With the rapid expansion of industrial manufacturing and other key industries now underway, the need to improve connectivity between employers, training, services and the workforce is more pressing than ever. Prioritizing areas of greatest economic need for transit improvements and expansions is key to improving access to opportunity for disconnected workers. Further, a strong regional multi-modal transportation network doesn't only serve to connect low-income workers to education and training – it is a key feature of a healthy regional economy that benefits all players. A variety of mobility options attracts young talent; enables employers to reach a broader labor pool; makes workforce housing more affordable; enables seniors to age-in-place and reduces congestion on our over-crowded roadways. Improvements in a multi-modal transportation network must occur simultaneously with expansions of other services that are key to developing our workforce and ensuring access to opportunity for both workers and employers.

"Most of our students are taking two buses each way. For instance, J., a resident of the Gardere area, enrolled in our Accelerated Career Education classes, which allowed him to work toward high school equivalency and learn a skilled craft at the same time. The class met five days a week at BRCC's Acadian Campus, about a 25-minute drive from his house. However, without access to a car, J's commute began at 5:00 am. He had to take one city bus to the BRCC site closest to his house in order to catch the campus shuttle to the main campus, and then transfer to another shuttle that would get him to the campus for his 9:00 am class. When he could afford it, he would bypass the free shuttle and take a second city bus to the campus where his class met. The class ended at 4:00 pm – he usually couldn't make it home before 6:00 pm. Because he was in the accelerated, full-day class, J. was unable to work during the day, requiring him to get a night job. He often had to leave class early to get to work on time. Through tremendous determination, J. did complete the class, but it is easy to see how students, despite great potential and perseverance, can fall through the cracks."

Debbie O'Connor Executive Director, Up Alliance



Lessons Learned & Progress Underway

Despite resource constraints, nonprofit organizations and service providers have nonetheless been responsive to growing demand and new opportunities and have successfully innovated on their service delivery models. The innovations they've implemented and the lessons these organizations have learned along the way are key to guiding much-needed investment in expansion of services.

Capital Area United Way (CAUW)

The CAUW has recently re-organized its programming and grant-making to focus on what it has identified as four pillars of well-being: stabilizing individuals and families and strengthening the community through education, income stability and healthy living. CAUW's income stability strategy recognizes the multi-faceted needs of many prospective clients and thus seeks, through grants to local organizations, to "provide educational opportunities, job skills training, job placement services and career counseling to individuals who are looking for a family-sustaining career opportunity." Katie Pritchett, Vice President of Community Impact for CAUW, explained that updated performance measures are an important part of the equation. New performance measures place greater emphasis on material benefits realized over time, recognizing the importance of smaller, incremental gains towards self-sufficiency in addition to more standard measures of program completion and certificates earned.

Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS)

Leaders of the Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS), as well as managers of other training programs that culminate in job placement, have also discovered that job placement cannot stand alone as a measure of success. Maintaining employment and securing a family-sustaining wage are essential to building self-sufficiency and achieving a healthy standard of living – the ultimate objectives of job training and education. LCTCS is now tracking its performance not just by number of graduates, but by the increases in annual income for those graduates over time.

LCTCS is one of the fastest growing community college systems in the nation in terms of both enrollment and graduation rates – this despite the fact that state funding has been cut drastically. In recent years, LCTCS has implemented a number of measures designed to create more on-ramps to training and education for a broader segment of Louisiana's potential workforce and provide the continued support necessary to help students chart a path from education and training to sustained employment. In order to engage adult learners at an earlier point and help transition them to more advanced learning and training opportunities, LCTCS has assumed management of all state-approved adult education programs administered by partners such as the East Baton Rouge Public School System (EBRPSS), Up Alliance and others, and is helping to create clear pathways that lead to family-sustaining jobs.

WorkReady U

WorkReady U is the division of LCTCS that encompasses adult education and is designed specifically to address the 600,000 disconnected workers in Louisiana who do not have a high school diploma or equivalent or may be underemployed. In partnership with EBRPSS, the Up Alliance and other networked service providers, WorkReady U courses offer basic skills remediation, secondary credential preparation, and post-secondary dual enrollment. Importantly, the program also provides wrap-around services to help students navigate LCTCS courses, external services and transit to chart a course to family-sustaining employment. Recognizing the need for additional capacity, WorkReady U has also established regional centers to provide professional development resources for Louisiana's adult education provider network.

"Prior to this time, the focus was on getting a GED. Now the model has shifted and the end goal is sustainable employment that breaks the cycle of poverty."

Sean Martin,
Executive Director, WorkReady U

UP Alliance

Founded in 2005, the UP Alliance began as an organization dedicated to promoting literacy. In 2011, the organization expanded its focus to include preparing adults for entry into the workforce. UP Alliance has since developed a network and coordinated service delivery system designed to prepare adult students for high-demand jobs by offering a full continuum of services and “acting as a hub that recruits, screens and refers students, ensuring that they are connected with programs that fit.”¹⁰ UP Alliance provides student support that improves retention and eases transitions by helping students manage other issues that threaten to interfere with their course participation. Ranging from basic education courses for those who test below an 8th-grade level, high school equivalency and job training opportunities for those who test above an 8th grade level, to industry credentials and college credit, UP Alliance meets people where they are and provides the guidance needed to move through programs progressing towards gainful employment. Importantly, UP Alliance maintains a database that is housed with LCTCS and populated with information from each of its network partners. **This enables service providers to share information and track individual student progress over extended periods of time as well as network outcomes extending beyond the impact of a single organization.** UP Alliance and its partner training providers have also fostered relationships with employers that facilitate referrals and high placement rates.

Society of St. Vincent de Paul and HOPE Ministries

Organizations such as Society of St. Vincent de Paul and HOPE Ministries offer case management services and are seeking to expand them, recognizing that **the ability to address multiple issues concurrently, track progress and provide ongoing support is critical to success beyond the short term.** St. Vincent de Paul provides support that continues beyond the length of an individual's stay at the shelter in the form of home visits. One of 400 St. Vincent de Paul volunteers checks in on former clients at their residence to help them continue to progress toward their goals and mitigate risks of slipping back into homelessness. HOPE Ministries' Going Beyond class provides individual coaching that helps participants formulate strategies and develop an action plan to take the steps necessary to achieve goals of family, financial, housing and employment stability. Both organizations emphasize the need for much greater case management capacity.

North Baton Rouge Industrial Training Initiative (NBRITI)

An industry-driven place-based pilot program, the North Baton Rouge Industrial Training Initiative (NBRITI) hinges on a collaborative effort between industry, LCTCS, and the nonprofit sector. NBRITI provides fast-track hands-on training for industrial certifications that now includes life skills coaching and workforce preparation at no cost to participants. The program focuses on recruiting participants from underserved communities where access to opportunity is limited. **Employer engagement in the training program is key – employer sponsors participate in the training process and are invested in the students' success.** NBRITI also streamlines interviewing by bringing multiple employers together to interview graduates on-site. In their inaugural cohort, NBRITI managers found that a significant number of participants were unable to complete the training due to substance abuse, issues of family instability, and major soft skills deficiencies. In efforts to improve outcomes, NBRITI hired a life coach to provide support to program participants in all these areas throughout the course of the training. This extra layer of support is expected to substantially improve completion rates, and has already had a positive impact on the current cohort.

“The North Baton Rouge Industrial Training Initiative is a strategic response to the need we’ve observed to connect underserved communities with opportunities and demystify the path to well-paying jobs.”

Charlie Freeburgh,
Sr. Vice Chancellor for Workforce Dev.,
Baton Rouge Community College

“We need robust communications with more area employers to understand what they are looking for and what we can do to help meet their needs and connect our clients to job opportunities.”

Michael Acaldo,
CEO, Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Workforce Development Board

The area Workforce Development Board (formerly Workforce Investment Council) is another key player in addressing the needs of disconnected workers. Workforce Development Boards are the local conduits for federal funds administered by the Louisiana Workforce Commission and governed by the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (the 2015 update to the Workforce Investment Act of 1998). The business and career solution centers operated by the Baton Rouge area board strive to serve as one-stop shops for all types of job seekers. Baton Rouge's Workforce Development Board is committed to prioritizing those whose needs are greatest and has recently strengthened its case management service model to be more individualized and more intensive, recognizing that **for many disconnected workers, a long-term plan broken down into small increments is essential to guiding progress towards sustained employment.** Baton Rouge's Workforce Development Board also offers soft-skills training and peer-led workshops targeting groups with specific needs, such as youth, veterans or the formerly incarcerated. However, managing online profiles and other web-based processes which are central to the employment tools established by the Louisiana Workforce Commission present significant challenges to those in need of literacy skills, and transportation is a persistent challenge for many clients. Though the business and career solution centers are able to make transit vouchers and other transportation arrangements available for a limited period of time, once that benefit has been exhausted, clients are likely to find themselves back where they started.

Capital Area Transit System (CATS)

CATS has undergone transformative improvements over the past few years. A successful ballot measure in 2009 reflected a growing recognition that quality transit is key to economic development. The vote secured a dedicated source of revenue that was an essential first step toward improving inadequate service and stabilizing a troubled agency. CATS has since put new leadership in place and is in the process of expanding and improving the transit service in the city of Baton Rouge. Importantly, CATS has made efforts to work with major providers in the area to ensure that more people can rely on transit to access essential services. Continued expansion efforts are needed along with additional improvements in service for communities and residents who need it most. Strong leadership and continued investment will be required to bring the transit service to a level that is commensurate with the needs of the Baton Rouge area.



NEXT STEPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to ensure that the Capital Region is able to deploy our human capital to its fullest potential and create a workforce pipeline that will support healthy economic growth over the long term, stakeholders such as LED, LWC, industry associations and large employers must include the organizations and agencies working to engage disconnected workers in their strategies for workforce development. Beyond the obvious need for increased funding, our research and interviews with leaders of these organizations have suggested the following strategies for strengthening the existing network of service providers and increasing access for disconnected workers.



1

Expand availability of long-term case management and wrap-around services to assist disconnected workers facing multiple challenges such as financial instability, legal issues, substance abuse, access to childcare, healthcare needs, family instability, disability, access to adequate housing and nutrition, and reliable transportation. Case management should encompass multiple organizations in order to facilitate access to the full network of services and provide guidance and support in navigating programs and formulating and following a plan for achieving employment and self-sufficiency.

2

Develop resources that empower disconnected and low-wage workers to chart a course to living-wage employment by explaining the full range of requirements for job-readiness, from health and personal hygiene, soft skills, money management, to literacy, computer skills and other basic knowledge; offering a step-by-step guide to meeting those requirements; and helping to develop a long-term vision for ongoing management of one's personal affairs, skill-building, job performance and other factors required to maintain employment and increase income over time. Additionally, The Data Center maintains that such efforts to better prepare workers "must be coupled with stronger job creation and quality standards in the state's economic development subsidy programs; policies and regulations to ... ensure that work is fairly ... remunerated; and support for safety net programs that boost incomes for the ... poor."¹¹

3

Increase and deepen partnerships with employers and industry to expand and improve opportunities for mentorship, training and work experience. Options for participation in employer programs that are concurrent with enrollment in adult education courses should also be expanded. Employer partners should have an in-depth understanding of the constellation of challenges facing disconnected workers and the benefits to be derived from engaging them in the workforce, and should be committed to providing additional support to promote the success of these workers.

4

Provide multi-sector support for implementation of new WIOA provisions. The Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA) that replaces the Workforce Investment Act went into effect July 1, 2015. Provisions of this legislation include prioritization of services to those with the lowest skill levels, new "skill gains" performance metrics, an expanded definition of homelessness, and incentives for integrating training and education. These measures, among others, create new opportunities to expand access to services for disconnected workers. It is therefore essential that the Baton Rouge Workforce Development Board continue its robust partnerships with Capital Area service providers and strengthen its relationships with area employers to implement WIOA provisions. Especially since a number of Louisiana's Workforce Development Boards (formerly known as Workforce Investment Councils) – Baton Rouge's included – have had longstanding capacity challenges, the statewide comprehensive planning process mandated by WIOA has a critical role to play in strategizing and resourcing improvements and strengthening the entire service provider network by coordinating and streamlining services to align with new performance metrics.

"The new WIOA plan process will re-write the book for the workforce training system with new partners coming together to address the needs of the underemployed, low-wage and low-skilled population. Transportation is a huge barrier that needs to be considered and addressed in this plan."

Sean Martin, Executive Director, WorkReady U, Louisiana Community and Technical College System

5

Continue to invest in and strategically strengthen the transit system, prioritizing the needs of low-income communities. The mobility needs of those living in low-income areas or without access to personal vehicles should take priority until adequate service levels are achieved, connecting these neighborhoods to job and training centers. Recognizing that transit expansion will take time and can't meet all needs, exploring more flexible mobility solutions such as shuttles, van pools, traveler and trip planning technology, and ride share is an important concurrent strategy for increasing access for disconnected workers. The Data Center points out that place-based initiatives designed to bring opportunity to areas of concentrated poverty can help "reduce the cost burden of commuting for the working poor and increase access to employment"¹² – such strategies could serve as effective complements to transit expansion.

6

Expand access to transit vouchers. Currently, vouchers are available to students enrolled in for-credit community college courses and to Employ BR clients for a limited period of time. For disconnected workers, transit costs can be prohibitive and vouchers can make the difference between completing a program and keeping a job or having to drop out or quit. They should be available for longer periods of time and to a wider range of students and job seekers. For those whose needs are not best met by the fixed route transit system, vouchers should apply to other modes of on-demand transportation.

7

Program Remaining JARC funds. Local planners and service providers should work with DOTD to program remaining JARC (Job Access Reverse Commute) funds to develop a voucher program that would assist disconnected workers living in rural areas with transportation options that would enable them to access the training, services and employment opportunities they need to get ahead.

8

Explore other innovative and successful models. Other regions have developed promising new programs and highly effective models with established success for addressing the needs of disconnected workers, and much good work is happening in our state as well. Key to the concept and success of most of these programs is a collective impact approach to case management and wrap-around services that recognizes the primacy of multi-sector collaboration, alignment and investment.

MODELS FOR SUCCESS

The New Orleans Downtown Development District, in partnership with the Urban League of Greater New Orleans and SEEDS of Change has just launched a place-based project, New Paths, that coordinates affordable housing and a low-barrier homeless shelter with life-skills support, training and job opportunities for ex-offenders and homeless people in the downtown area.

The United Way of Houston's THRIVE initiative has demonstrated impressive success in the six years since it has been implemented. A multi-sector collaborative among nonprofit organizations, employers, financial institutions, community colleges and government agencies, THRIVE coordinates the full suite of wrap-around-services and cases management that disconnected workers need to build life-long self-sufficiency. Notably, the Capital Area United Way is taking steps toward adopting this model in the Baton Rouge region.

Recognizing the central role of their underperforming public schools in lifelong struggles for economic self-sufficiency, the **Strive Partnership in Cincinnati** is a collective impact initiative with a "cradle-to-career" approach that has achieved positive outcomes at every level from kindergarten readiness to college enrollment and technical training.

Capital Area stakeholders should be aware of these and other models of success and explore opportunities for implementing them in our region.

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