

My name is Hugh Bradshaw and I am the Employment Services Manager for the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, based in our Central Office which is currently located in Williston. I have also been closely involved in the development and ongoing operations of an Agency of Human Services initiative called Creative Workforce Solutions, or CWS. CWS was created to coordinate AHS-funded employment services across the state. Employment programs working with AHS customers all fall under the umbrella of CWS. CWS is comprised of Employment Teams in each of the 12 AHS districts, each of which is facilitated by a Business Account Manager. Business Account Managers spend the majority of their time working with local businesses to identify opportunities for AHS candidates being served by Vocational Rehabilitation, ReachUp, Corrections, the Office of Child Support, General Assistance, housing programs, Mental Health and Substance Abuse programs, Developmental Disability programs and others. These individuals need case management and other supports in order to successfully obtain and retain employment. In many cases, what these Vermonters need most is help connecting directly to employers, as their work histories and other barriers are often red flags for hiring managers.

I was asked to provide information on methods we use to assess employer needs, both currently and in the future. CWS utilizes a Customer Relations Management (CRM) tool called **Salesforce** to track employer outreach, identify current and future openings, and capture information on businesses willing to engage in Progressive Employment options such as work experiences, job shadows, On-the-Job Training and other low-risk, no-risk options. Salesforce is a robust tool used by many companies around the world to manage information on their customers. CWS uses this tool to provide local, timely labor market information to CWS Team members. This information is based on direct interactions with supervisors, hiring managers and owners and is transparent to all users of the tool. In just the past 6 months, **1,247 new business contacts** were established, **3,270 opportunities** were identified and in the same period the **CWS Business Account Managers logged 2,431 “calls”** with Vermont businesses, the majority being face-to-face meetings. For reference, I have included handouts that show sample reports generated by Salesforce.

The information gathered and stored in Salesforce is used regularly by employment staff to identify options for Vermonters that are both relevant and local. Business Account Managers can also use Salesforce to share openings and opportunities as soon as they are identified, forwarding them to team members and allowing for a quick response to the needs of businesses in the local labor market. Salesforce captures information on the businesses themselves, as well as information on the individuals in those businesses who are responsible for recruitment and hiring.

In addition to the outreach activities of the Business Account Managers, CWS Employment Teams also regularly invite employers to visit team meetings to share their hiring needs, anticipated areas of growth and industry-specific skill requirements. Information is also shared regarding their application process, types of jobs available and other details relevant to AHS candidates interested in working for that company. Team members often join the Business Account Managers as they visit businesses, while also tracking their own outreach activities in Salesforce. CWS also supports Job Fairs and other events geared to meet the recruiting needs of businesses.

Lastly, in several areas of the state, CWS has partnered with local businesses, tech centers and community partners to develop training programs to meet the identified needs of local business. Some examples of trainings developed in response to business input have been Hospitality Industry Training (customer service, food handler safety, dining service etiquette, housekeeping), computer skills classes, CNC (Computer Numeric Control) operation, retail customer service/cash register operation, janitorial/maintenance, Personal Care Assistant certification, forklift certification and small engine repair to name a few. All have all been developed to address shortfalls identified by the business community. This sector-based approach has been well received by businesses statewide, and has led to broader workforce discussions including a recently developed transportation initiative in the Northeast Kingdom in partnership with VTrans and Jay Peak Resort.

While we value aggregate employer data and labor market information, we also know that for many of the candidates served by CWS partners, ongoing relationships with local businesses can illuminate opportunities where perhaps they are not easily captured through data analysis. Direct and consistent contact with the business community provides a wealth of information on skill requirements, anticipated growth, hiring practices and emerging trends. Sometimes a quality relationship with a local business can lead to a job where no job existed, or to a success for a Vermonter that nobody thought was possible. This has been our experience time and time again.