



Partnerships between Outstationed Adult Education Coordinators and MassHire Career Centers

Introduction

This brief provides an overview of local partnerships between adult education (AE) outstationed staff and the MassHire Career Centers (MHCC), whose purpose is to effectively serve shared customers, supporting them to meet their education and career goals. (The term “shared customer” refers to the AE student or MHCC customer receiving services from both partners.) The brief highlights the work of outstationed staff across the state, successful partnerships within the workforce areas, and resulting student success; the brief also identifies best practices for these partnerships.

The goal of this brief is to familiarize all AE programs, advisors, and instructors with the many ways partnerships between outstationed AE staff and MHCCs can benefit students, and how AE programs can make effective use of outstationed staff in their local area. At the heart of these partnerships is the intention to mutually support shared customers. These outstationed AE staff work to build and strengthen relationships with MHCCs, paving the way for the success of all AE students in their local area.

Outstationing in Massachusetts

The Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS) unit of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE), which established outstationing policy,¹ provides funding for the position of an AE staff person, known as an Outstation Coordinator (OC). The OC acts as a liaison between ESE-funded AE programs and MHCCs within their assigned local area to facilitate two-way referrals. The policy is well-aligned with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which seeks greater integration of services, cross referrals, and shared customers between core WIOA partners.

ACLS provides funding for outstationing services in each of the 16 workforce areas. Each local area is allocated \$15,000 for outstationing, except Boston, which receives \$60,400 to enable a full-time OC. These funds are awarded to one or more AE providers in each area through a competitive process. Local area OCs are assigned to each of the 25 comprehensive MHCCs and are stationed in each center for a set number of hours each week, which varies by local area.

The Role of the Outstation Coordinator

Although the OC title may vary by local area — including Career Navigator, Outstationed Education and Career Advisor, or ESE Referral Counselor for Adult Education — the primary role is consistent: to help current and potential AE students access services by assisting MHCC staff with intake, assessments, and referrals to local AE programs. In addition, the OC is responsible for connecting eligible AE students looking for employment and/or training opportunities with MHCCs. Many OCs are or have been instructors or

¹ <http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/OutstationingPolicy.html>

advisors in AE programs. Their knowledge of adult education runs deep and wide, making them strong advocates for students.

AE programs receiving outstationing funds are required to develop a process mutually agreed to by the AE program and local MHCC. In some local areas, these partnerships were underway prior to WIOA and provided a solid foundation for strengthening existing collaborations between MHCCs and AE programs.

While OCs across the state provide a prescribed set of services as noted above, the form of implementation varies. All 16 Workforce local areas have a part-time OC, except Boston, with one full-time OC. With the exception of Lowell, each OC serves multiple AE programs, and, often, more than one MHCC.

Two-Way Referrals

Facilitating two-way referrals between AEs and MHCCs within a local area is a key goal of these partnerships. A referral from the MHCC to the OC may occur when an MHCC customer meets with an employment counselor and expresses interest in a job, but needs a high school equivalency (HSE) credential or improved English skills to expand employment options. The OC assesses the referral for AE classes, reviewing classes available at the various AE program locations. In addition, an AE advisor may refer an AE student interested in employment or training directly to the OC. After the student's meeting with the OC to learn about services at the MHCC, the OC may refer the AE student to MHCC staff for further assessment to determine available employment and training opportunities.

OCs track the referrals of participants between AE programs and MHCCs, sharing and updating referral information on a regular basis with both MHCC staff and AE programs. In some local areas, MHCC customers are given priority on AE waitlists. Tracking referrals makes it easier for AE programs to know if a waitlisted MHCC customer has enrolled elsewhere, and MHCCs value knowing if and when the customers they referred have been enrolled in AE programs.

Building and Supporting Relationships between Adult Education Programs and MassHire Career Centers

In each local area of the state, OCs regularly visit AE programs to inform staff about MHCC services available to their students. These services include job search and placement; occupational skills training; workshops on resume writing and interview skills; and assistance securing child care and other wrap-around services. OCs also distribute flyers about career fairs or skills training programs, MHCC workshop schedules, and other MHCC services directly to AE programs in their local area. They attend meetings in their local area of AE advisors, local AE partnerships and consortia, and other WIOA partners, such as the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) and Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission.

In addition, OCs facilitate the connection between AE programs and MHCC staff for the delivery of Career Center orientations on-site at AE programs. This provides an opportunity for AE students to learn about MHCC services in a familiar and comfortable environment, and to get to know MHCC staff. The workshops

are also a means for enrolling students in the MHCC, which is required to access additional MHCC services at a later date. Some AE programs prepare students for the orientation sessions by incorporating MHCC orientation vocabulary and content into their classroom lessons.

OCs cultivate strong working relationships with MHCC staff through consistent and timely communications. This can involve attending MHCC staff meetings to inform them of AE testing, the status of AE classes and enrollment, and referral updates. When AE waitlists are full, many OCs assist MHCC customers to find other opportunities, such as distance learning or tutoring, to keep moving forward with their education and employment goals. This can include developing needed skills through distance learning or tutoring

Examples of Effective Partnerships

In developing this brief, the SABES Program Support PD Center identified and interviewed five OCs and their MHCC partners, representing five local workforce areas across the state, about their partnerships and resulting participant successes. (See *Appendix B* for a list of key informants.)

Finding Creative Solutions

There is a strong working relationship in Hampden County between the OC and the Disability Resources Coordinator (DRC) at the Springfield MHCC. The DRC position is funded in four workforce areas in MHCCs by the Massachusetts Disability Employment Initiative VII (DEI).

In one successful collaboration, the DRC and OC developed outside-the-box options for an MHCC customer with autism and social anxiety who did not have a high school diploma. This combination of factors made it difficult for this young man to find work. While speaking with the customer's mother, the DRC learned that her son had had success as a math tutor in high school. Since the DRC did not have a good set of job referrals for this customer, he conferred with the OC about employment opportunities in adult education. After speaking with the mother and MHCC customer several times, the OC secured a volunteer tutor position for him at a local AE program. This not only provided him with a means for building a resume, it also fulfilled his disability work requirement. The MHCC customer was able to secure a letter of recommendation from the AE program, which he took to a school district to get on a list for a paid tutor position. In addition, while tutoring at the AE program, staff recognized that the MHCC customer had a low reading level and encouraged him to enroll in a reading class where he was tutoring; his anxiety had previously kept him from doing this.

Another successful outcome resulting from the OC/MHCC partnership involved a Springfield MHCC customer of the DRC who had recently arrived from Morocco, speaking limited English and fluent French. The French-speaking DRC was able to identify support services needed by the customer. He referred the customer to the OC, who also spoke French, to help the customer enroll in ESOL classes. Since customer needs and goals often unfold over several meetings as trust and comfort levels increase, close communication among staff is essential. Over time, the OC learned that the customer also wanted a job

and relayed this information back to the DRC. In the follow-up meeting, the DRC learned that the customer was a cook and found a local restaurant with a French-speaking owner, who hired him. To support the goal of improving his English skills, the OC enrolled the participant in ESOL classes at night, allowing him to continue working at the restaurant during the day. Subsequently, his two daughters also enrolled in ESOL classes at the AE program.

Through closely coordinated communication, the OC and DRC succeeded in helping both shared customers navigate a way forward toward their education and career goals. According to the DRC, neither of these customer outcomes would have been achieved without the support of the OC.

Finally, co-location provided the foundation for the OC and a Business Specialist at the North Central MHCC to build trust that enabled them to quickly problem-solve when a shared customer experienced the inevitable curve ball on her career journey. The OC had helped enroll an MHCC customer in a contextualized ESOL certified nursing assistant class at a local AE program. Six weeks into the class, this shared customer, now the class's star student, showed up at the OC's office because she had been sanctioned by DTA and her parents were sick. Needing to help her find a job immediately, the OC contacted the Business Specialist at the MHCC. The MHCC was already planning a job fair on-site in Devens, where the classes were held. Together, the OC and Business Specialist arranged for the end-of-class celebration to take place at the job fair, where the shared customer, and her fellow students, interviewed for jobs. All the students were offered at least one job, and this was before they had even completed the certified nursing assistant certification test.

Well-Coordinated Partnerships to Retain Public Assistance Benefits

Clients receiving cash benefits from the DTA, who are subject to a work requirement, may lose their benefits if they are not participating in approved activities that meet for the required number of hours per week. AE classes alone do not typically meet the intensity of 20–30 hours per week that is typically required, depending on the age of the children.

The partnership between the OC and MHCC staff, while central to supporting AE students in achieving their goals, may require additional collaboration with other WIOA partners, such as DTA. In the Merrimack Valley local workforce area, a DTA client referred to the MHCC was in need of a letter verifying enrollment as an MHCC customer in order to preserve her cash benefits. During intake, the MHCC staff learned that she was interested in a job in health care, but needed an HSE credential and childcare. The MHCC staff referred her to the OC for an assessment in Spanish, with the goal of enrolling in a Spanish HSE class. They also referred her to the DTA Full Engagement Worker stationed at the MHCC that day, who arranged childcare and a referral for a voucher to pay for it. After enrolling in a Spanish HSE class with the goal of taking the HSE test, the customer attended a forum on non-clinical healthcare career opportunities. Upon obtaining the HSE, the customer's next step will be to look for a job in healthcare while taking ESOL classes.

Close coordination and timely communication among the three partners made it possible for the shared customer to quickly and effectively receive needed services to maintain enrollment in AE classes, continue receiving cash benefits, and begin exploring career opportunities.

Accessible Presentations for English Language Learners

With a preponderance of Spanish-speaking participants in the Merrimack Valley MassHire local area, the MHCC staff, in close collaboration with the OC, adjusted the language level of its orientation workshop presentation and materials to be more accessible to English language learners, and also conducted an orientation workshop in Spanish. To further support these changes, AE teachers prepared students ahead of time with related vocabulary and language content.

In addition, some MHCCs will come on-site to an AE program to introduce students to Career Center services. AE advisors and teachers seeking to better incorporate resume writing and interviewing skills into their advising and classes are encouraged to attend those workshops at the MHCC.

Supporting the Career Planning Process

A North Shore MHCC customer received the long-term support needed to successfully navigate an anticipated lay-off. The customer worked at a major manufacturing firm expecting lay-offs in a year. After an orientation to MHCC services, he continued in his job until the official lay-off, at which time the MHCC provided rapid-response services available to workers before a lay-off at a large company.

While receiving unemployment, he started working on his resume and investigating training for a commercial driver's license. However, his primary career goal was to work for another large local company, so he began working toward both goals. The company to which he applied uses an electronic onboarding system requiring documentation of HSE, other credentials, and W-2s to demonstrate previous employment. The customer was not sure if he had ever completed an HSE and had no documentation verifying that he had. The company rescinded the job offer because of the lack of HSE documentation. While continuing to work with him to navigate the hiring process, the MHCC counselor referred him to the OC for AE classes, noting that the lack of HSE documentation would continue to pose an obstacle to employment and that this was an opportunity to rectify that issue. With the OC's help, he enrolled in HiSET classes at North Shore Community College (NSCC). The company then indicated they would hire him if he obtained his HSE. The customer focused on his classes and received tutoring at NSCC for a semester. Having received reasonable accommodation to take the HiSET tests due to a learning disability, he obtained his HSE. Ongoing effective communication between the MHCC counselor and the company resulted in the company holding the customer's candidacy for the position, meaning he did not have to fully reapply for the job. By talking with the hiring recruiters about the customer's situation, the MHCC counselor paved the way for a smooth hire.

Benefits for AE Advisors

Because of ongoing sharing of information and close working relationships, a Career Advisor at an AE program, the OC, and the WIOA Program Manager at MassHire Downtown Boston succeeded in providing timely and seamless services for a student recently arrived in the United States. The student enrolled in ESOL classes at the AE program. The Career Advisor was knowledgeable about training options at MHCCs because of information provided regularly by the OC to AE programs. When the student meeting with the Career Advisor indicated that she needed a job to survive, the Career Advisor shared information on local job training options and arranged for her ESOL class to visit the MHCC for an orientation. The Career Advisor then informed the OC that this student would be in attendance and outlined the student's goals for training. The OC greeted the students and conducted the class orientation at the MHCC. The OC then referred the student to the WIOA Program Manager, who helped her obtain a WIOA training voucher and enroll in a computerized office skills training program.

Summary of Effective Practices for Partnerships

- Co-location allows for on-site coordination and timely communication, which helps build trust and relationships among partners.
- It takes time and persistence to build the relationships and trust. Even OCs with long-standing roots in a local area may need to start from square one in building the relationship.
- Creative problem-solving across multiple agencies and systems relies on solid relationships and a foundation of trust.
- Sharing updated AE program information and clarifying the waiting list process with MHCC staff helps set expectations for them and their customers.
- The ability of OCs to connect ESE-funded AE programs in their local area directly with MHCC staff for on-site orientations at AE programs enhances the experience of students and assists AE staff in understanding MHCC services and facilitating MHCC connections.

Conclusion

These are just a few examples of positive outcomes for shared customers because of effective partnerships between OCs and MHCCs. Complex challenges were resolved by utilizing creative combinations of resources. This approach is cost-effective, efficient, and successful, and should be continued and enhanced.

Appendix A: Key Informants

- Richard Berrena, *Disability Resources Coordinator, MassHire Springfield Career Center*
- Shiu Yip Cheung, *WIOA Program Manager, MassHire Downtown Boston Career Center*
- Julie Crowley, *Community Outreach Counselor, Mount Wachusett Community College — serving MassHire North Central Career Center*
- Mark Gaudet, *DESE Referral Counselor for Adult Education, Valley Opportunity Council — serving MassHire Holyoke Career Center and MassHire Springfield Career Center*
- Matthew Herd, *Boston Career Navigator, Asian American Civic Association — serving MassHire Boston Career Center and Downtown Boston Career Center*
- Staci Johnson, *Operations Manager, MassHire North Central Career Center*
- Kate Jordan, *Employment Counselor, MassHire North Shore Career Center*
- Judith Lilienfeld, *Career Advisor/Math Instructor, Asian American Civic Association, Boston*
- Olien Lu, *Outstation Coordinator, Lawrence Public Schools — serving MassHire Merrimack Valley Career Center*
- Susan Merullo, *Outstationed Education and Career Advisor, North Shore Community Action — serving MassHire North Shore Career Center*
- Lisa Remington, *Career Pathways Manager, MassHire Merrimack Valley Career Center*