

SOLUTIONS

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Making the Transition

Opportunities opening up for workers seeking to make a change to skills-oriented careers

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On the cover: Anwar Ali sits in the cab of an 18-wheeler truck. Ali launched his own trucking company with help from Workforce Investment Act-funded training he received. *Photo by James A. Johnson*

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Tom Pauken
TWC Chairman

As we begin this new decade, America finds itself in the midst of the most serious national recession facing our nation since the time of the Great Depression. Nationally, unemployment has risen to double-digit levels, while businesses have been forced to cut costs as they seek to navigate through these troubled economic waters.

While Texas remains the number one place in America to do business, we are not immune from these negative trends. I do believe, however, that Texas is best positioned to lead the rest of the nation toward economic recovery.

Let me just cite a couple of reasons:

First, our Texas state government remained fiscally responsible when the economy was booming. While other large states, like California and New York, went on spending sprees during the economic good times thanks to Gov. Rick Perry and our legislative leaders Texas kept state spending at sensible levels. Texas balanced its budget in the last legislative session and even set aside money in a "rainy day fund" in case the economy got worse – which it has. Meanwhile, states like California and New York are insolvent. It will take years for those states, and other taxing entities that overspent to dig their way out of the financial mess they find themselves in today.

Secondly, our Texas community college system is an underappreciated asset for Texas. Even in difficult economic times, the demand for skilled workers remains strong. The community colleges in our state do a fine job in working closely with local economic development officials and the Texas Workforce Commission to provide students with the necessary career training for the demands of the workplace at a reasonable cost.

We Texans can't control what Washington policymakers do to help get Americans back to work. But, we can continue to follow the course that is working successfully in Texas and be prepared to lead America back as national economic prospects improve. ■

Change Can Work: Workers find that career transition can be smart a move

By James A. Johnson

Transitioning from a salaried or degree-required position into a hands-on or skilled trade can turn out to be a positive move, said Debby Kratky, director of Capacity Building and Training for Workforce Solutions for Tarrant County.

Job seekers who limit their employment search could be missing opportunities found in jobs better suited for them, she said.

Job hunters seeking flexible schedules, outdoor or independent work, or opportunities to explore life beyond an office setting may choose among emerging skilled trade occupations such as welders, truck drivers, and in the renewable energy field, Kratky said.

“Job seekers should see this economic downturn as a time to go after a position in a completely different area,” Kratky said. “Tools are available at workforce centers, and they can look within themselves to ponder what they would like to do, not necessarily what they used to do.”

Shifting from a management job has meant less stress and responsibility for 49-year-old Steve Michalsky.

When a company he managed closed, Michalsky recognized it as an opportunity to pursue a new career. After earning his structural welding mastery certificate through Skills Development Fund training at Texas State Technical College, Michalsky enjoys working full-time as a welder at Capitol Aggregates in Marble Falls.

“I’ve expanded skills in something I enjoy, and I’m happier being part of a team again,” said Michalsky, who anticipates earning



Anwar Ali examines the tire of an 18-wheeler truck. Ali completed a four-week WIA-funded training program at a Fort Worth trucking school, obtained his Commercial Driver’s License, and launched his own trucking company. Photo by James Johnson

\$50,000-plus a year.

After eight years in restaurant management, Jeffrey Sanderson of Austin was searching for a career with more earning potential. By taking advantage of a scholarship administered by Workforce Solutions Capital Area, Sanderson is close to earning his Associate of Applied Science in Renewable Energy degree at Austin Community College.

He’s already landed a job monitoring residential and commercial utility usage for Austin Energy.

“I’ve gained electronics skills I’ve always wanted and I’m more financially secure,” Sanderson said.

Fifty-four-year-old Frank Stuart of Waco spent 23 years teaching, which lacked the flexibility he sought. He now works in the restaurant industry in which he prepares food, maintains inventory, and benefits from the record-keeping and organizational skills he honed in teaching.

“I can now adjust my schedule around family commitments and in an environment that is less stressful for me personally,” he said. “That also means bringing less pressure home.”

The economic downturn caused 37-year-old Anwar Ali of Fort Worth to lose his lucrative 12-year airline pilot job. A frequent Workforce Solutions for Tarrant County customer for eight weeks, Ali realized retraining could be the answer to his job search.

Ali found success after completing a four-week Workforce Investment Act-funded training program at a Fort Worth trucking school, obtained his Commercial Driver’s License, and launched his own trucking company.

“In this economy, I had to look at all career options,” said Ali, who now owns three trucks that generate about \$30,000 monthly. “I learned the importance of being solution-oriented and positive.” ■

13th annual conference held in Grapevine

Education sessions, board and employer awards highlight event

By Shannon Thomas

Positioning the Texas workforce for further growth and prosperity even in challenging economic times was a big theme at the 13th Annual Texas Workforce Conference held in Grapevine in December. During the conference, 'Texas Workforce Solutions: Leading Texas Forward,' numerous workforce boards were recognized for their efforts to help Texas employers and workers, especially with their training goals.

Keynote speakers, breakout sessions, and awards ceremonies



TWC Commissioner Representing Labor Ronny Congleton (far left) and Chairman Tom Pauken (far right) flank executives of G3 Eateries-Arby's Restaurant Laredo who received the 2009 Texas Workforce Employer of the Year Award at TWC's 13th Annual Texas Workforce Conference. In the wake of a devastating fire at its new Laredo Arby's Restaurant franchise, G3 Eateries acted quickly to ensure that 42 recently hired workers remained employed. Photos by TWC staff



TWC Commissioner Representing the Public Andres Alcantar speaks at the 13th Annual Texas Workforce Conference in Grapevine. "Texas employers that use valuable services available from their local workforce development boards have a distinct advantage in the marketplace," he said.

were among the many highlights of the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) conference, attended by 1,530 Texas employers, educators, and workforce professionals.

"Now more than ever, Texans depend on the Texas Workforce Solutions network and the services we provide," said TWC Commissioner Representing the Public Andres Alcantar. "We must focus on assisting Texans to find and retain good jobs, in addition to upgrading their skills and providing our businesses with a skills-ready workforce that bolsters economic opportunity in our great state."

The conference kicked off with keynote speaker Neil Howe, who spoke on *Generations: Lifestyles and Workstyles*. Howe is a best-selling author, national speaker, and renowned authority on generations in America.

"Howe examines what motivates today's generation as consumers and

workers, and how they will shape our national future," said TWC Chairman Tom Pauken.

Along with a slate of other nationally recognized speakers, the conference also featured dozens of workshops aimed at helping participants focus on issues affecting the workforce and attaining economic development goals.

"We have no greater challenge as a country than getting everyone back to working good, meaningful jobs," said TWC Commissioner Representing Labor Ronny Congleton. "It is going to take every single one of us working together to get it done."

Another highlight of the conference was the exhibit area, where dozens of companies, organizations, and different TWC departments set up booths and exhibits. The information-sharing event gave participants the opportunity to network with

Agency Focus

organizations and learn about new and innovative products and services available to best serve customers.

Businesses and boards were recognized for their outstanding contributions to the Texas workforce system during the past year. In total, TWC awarded \$2 million to various boards for their efforts. The monetary awards will be used to enhance board service programs during the next year.

Mark your calendars for the 14th Annual Texas Workforce Conference, to be held November 17-19, 2010, at the Hyatt Regency – Dallas.

TWC's Skills Development Fund program booth was one of more than 100 displays at TWC's 13th Annual Texas Workforce Conference in Grapevine. TWC encourages Texas employers to take advantage of \$90 million appropriated by the Texas Legislature for the 2010-2011 biennium .



EMPLOYER AND BOARD AWARDS

Employer of the Year

G3 Eateries LLC – Arby's Restaurant Laredo
Workforce Solutions for South Texas

Current Workforce Award

Memorial Hermann
Workforce Solutions Gulf Coast

Transitional Workforce Award

Project WISH Employer Consortium (Workforce Innovative Solutions to Homelessness)
Workforce Solutions for Tarrant County

Future Workforce Award

Port Arthur Industry and Community Leaders Advisory Group
Workforce Solutions Southeast Texas

Service to Business Award

Workforce Solutions for Tarrant County – \$50,000

Service to Workers Award

Workforce Solutions Heart of Texas – \$50,000

Service to Community Award

Workforce Solutions of West Central Texas – \$50,000

Industry Sector Outreach Award

Workforce Solutions of the Coastal Bend – \$50,000

Summer Youth Employment Award

Workforce Solutions Gulf Coast – \$50,000

WIA Exemplary Awards

(First) Workforce Solutions Central Texas – \$100,000
(Second) Workforce Solutions Capital Area – \$75,000
(Third) Workforce Solutions Texoma – \$50,000

Performance Incentive Awards

Claimant and Youth Performance Measures

Workforce Solutions Alamo – \$200,000
Workforce Solutions South Plains – \$100,000
Workforce Solutions Deep East Texas – \$100,000
Workforce Solutions Texoma – \$100,000

Choices Participation Rate Measures

Workforce Solutions Alamo – \$200,000

Workforce Solutions

Capital Area – \$100,000
Workforce Solutions of Central Texas – \$100,000
Workforce Solutions Golden Crescent – \$100,000

Lowest Overall Percentage of Child Care Expenditures Spent on Administrative/Operating Costs

Workforce Solutions Gulf Coast – \$100,000
Workforce Solutions South Plains – \$50,000
Workforce Solutions for South Texas – \$50,000
Workforce Solutions Texoma – \$50,000

Most Improvement in Percentage of Child Care Expenditures Spent on Administrative/Operating Costs

Workforce Solutions Alamo – \$100,000
Workforce Solutions South Plains – \$50,000
Workforce Solutions Panhandle – \$50,000
Workforce Solutions Texoma – \$50,000



Katie Edmondson (right) is working towards her GED with the help of Ann Goode in her math class at the Waco Workforce Center. *Photos by Joe Anna Haydon*



Ray'Anna Booker plays in the child care center at the Workforce Solutions Heart of Texas workforce center in Waco while her mom uses the resource room to look for a job.

Facing the Challenge

Workforce system expands services to meet growing demand

By Ann Hatchitt

During 2009, the demands on the Texas workforce system reached unprecedented levels. As the system's most challenging year came to a close, the largest number of job seekers and claimants in the system's history had received Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits, utilized workforce services, and benefitted from training in new careers. Thousands of agency, workforce board, and contractor staff can look back with a sense of accomplishment at the

challenges they faced and the obstacles they overcame.

The first evidence that the national recession had reached Texas came in the form of the swiftly escalating number of unemployment benefit claimant calls to the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) Tele-Center system. The record number of calls placed heavy demand on call center staff and phone capacity. TWC increased the number of call center workers to 1,100 by year's end — nearly doubling the number of staff handling

the Tele-Center phone lines. TWC opened an additional call center in San Antonio, expanded capacity at other call centers, added phone lines, and increased the hours and days of the week that the Tele-Center phone lines were available.

TWC added 349 Employment Services (ES) staff during 2009 to serve the increased numbers of individuals searching for employment during these tough economic times. In three metropolitan areas of the state, new workforce centers were created to focus specifically on the delivery of re-employment services to unemployed individuals. Texas served 1.8 million Employment Services (ES) customers between September 2008 and August 2009, an additional 400,000 ES customers compared to the same period a year ago. Of these ES customers, 831,644



Carleen Stafer, a former client of Workforce Solutions Heart of Texas, now works as a receptionist at the workforce center in Waco.



Job seeker Craig Thomas (sitting) receives help from Workforce Solutions Heart of Texas employee Tracy Breitreutz as he navigates the computer in the resource room at the workforce center in Waco. The number of job seekers using the center's resources has risen markedly in the past year, according to Heart of Texas officials.

Texas Workforce Commission added 349 Employment Services staff during 2009 to serve the increased numbers of individuals searching for employment during these tough economic times.

were UI claimants, an additional 352,204 claimants receiving services through the workforce system over the last year.

Funds made available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) allowed TWC to expand existing Workforce Investment Act, Wagner-Peyser Employment Services, and other programs. Nearly 20,000 youth participated in summer youth employment programs during the summer of 2009 funded by ARRA.

More than 18,000 additional children per day will be served with ARRA funds allocated to workforce boards for subsidized child care programs.

Job growth in Texas during the end of 2009 offers positive signs for the upcoming year, but the Texas Workforce system recognizes that many people continue to depend on the services we provide. ■

Employer federal tax savings program expanded

Two new groups added to Work Opportunity Tax Credit program

By Debbie Pitts

Texas employers are leaving millions in federal tax credits unclaimed and the opportunity for tax savings is now greater for those who choose to participate in the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) program. Employers who hire unemployed veterans or eligible 16- to 24-year-olds are now entitled to receive up to \$2,400 in tax savings for each member of those groups added to their payrolls in 2009 and 2010. As part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, these groups are now included with the existing 10 targeted populations eligible for WOTC.

WOTC is a federal income tax benefit, administered by the U.S. Department of Labor and the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), for private employers who hire from certain groups. Tax credits range from \$1,200 to \$9,000. WOTC reduces a business' tax liability, serving as an incentive to select job candidates who face barriers in their efforts to find employment.

"We want Texas employers to earn valuable tax credits while benefitting from the skills of these often untapped groups of qualified workers," said TWC Chairman Tom Pauken. "It's particularly encouraging to me that unemployed veterans now are included in this program."

TWC certifies which newly hired employees make an employer

eligible for the tax credit based on applications received from the new employer. Although TWC was able to identify more than \$200 million in tax credits for Texas employers in FY 2009, there were many more credits available that went unclaimed through the underutilized program because applications were not submitted. WOTC offers employers a way to address workforce shortages while reducing hiring costs and gives job seekers a way to overcome some employment barriers.

For the newly added groups to qualify their employers for WOTC, new hires who are unemployed veterans must have been receiving unemployment benefits for at least

four weeks and youth must not have been regularly employed or regularly attending school for six months prior to being hired.

"Our company saved \$114,000 on our federal income taxes last year by hiring 85 qualifying employees to work in our restaurants," said Joseph Hicks, Certified Public Accountant for Wright Foods, which owns several restaurant franchises in the McAllen area.

Within each employee group, specific eligibility requirements apply. All forms and WOTC information are available online at: www.twc.state.tx.us/svcs/wotc/wotc.html, or by calling the TWC WOTC unit at 1-800-695-6879. ■

Eligible WOTC Groups

Groups eligible for a WOTC of up to \$2,400:

- SNAP benefit recipients (formally known as food stamps)
- unemployed veterans*
- eligible disconnected youth*
- veterans receiving food stamps
- ex-felons
- residents living within empowerment zones, renewal communities or rural renewal counties
- vocational rehabilitation referrals
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Family (TANF) benefit recipients

Group eligible for a WOTC of up to \$1,200:

- youth who live in empowerment zones or renewal communities and are hired for temporary summer work

Group eligible for a WOTC of up to \$4,800:

- disabled veterans

Group eligible for a WOTC of up to \$9,000 over two years:

- long-term TANF benefit recipients

*New group added as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009

Experience Works program helps link older workers to training, employment services

By Joe Anna Haydon

It is a tough job market, even tougher for older workers as they compete with younger applicants for the same limited pool of jobs.

“On the phone, employers can’t tell what your age is, but once you are in the interview, they change,” said 67-year-old Claudia Bowden, who was laid off from her call center position. Bowden spent five months job searching before finding the Experience Works program through Workforce Solutions Northeast Texas.

Bowden participated in work-based training at the Weatherford Workforce Center and secured full-time employment as the center’s account manager.

Experience Works is funded through the U.S. Department of Labor’s (DOL) Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP), which funds state and national organizations that assist low-income unemployed seniors with work-based training opportunities and employment services. Experience Works participants earn minimum wage during training.

“Almost 100 percent of our participants believe age and lack of updated skills are the reasons they are not finding jobs,” said Garnette Blanton, Experience Works coordinator for the North Texas, North Central Texas, and Texoma workforce boards. The Texas Workforce Commission Civil Rights Division enforces the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, protecting individuals who are 40 years of age or older from employment discrimination based on age. But age discrimination is often hard to prove.



Graham Workforce Site Manager Roger Mooney, left, accepts the Outstanding Host Agency Award for Workforce Solutions North Texas from Experience Works’ Employment-Training Coordinator Janice Boase. Photo courtesy Experience Works

When 58-year-old Mary Rippstine moved to Texas, she only brought with her nine years of formal education and was unable to find employment. Rippstine enrolled in Experience Works last summer and gained the confidence to look for a job after completing computer training. She recently obtained a full-time custodial position with the Whitehouse school district, which includes some computer work.

“I used to be afraid of computers; I didn’t want to touch them, not even to dust, but I am more comfortable with them now,” said Rippstine. “The training and people at Experience Works are wonderful.”

The Texas State Data Center’s statistics suggest Texans age 65 and over will grow over 200 percent by 2040. The poor economy has put financial pressures on many seniors. “In the past year, Experience Works applicants in my area increased 25 to 50 percent,” said Blanton. “Many search for months without

success. They are exhausted and disheartened.”

“Participants complete job assessments that show their inclinations and we match them with a host agency,” said Janice Boase, Experience Works coordinator who works with the Vernon, Graham, and Wichita Falls workforce centers.

Divorced and with no financial support, 58-year-old Loretta Blain, a former secretary, moved in with her parents. Blain was laid off from a cleaning position. At the Wichita Falls workforce center, she was guided to Experience Works. A job assessment determined Blain’s skills were best suited for light production and office work.

Blain applied for a cleaning position at Rolling Meadows Adult Living Center and was hired as the receptionist.

“Without this program I’d either still be laid off or working part-time for minimum wage,” said Bowden. “Experience Works has given me the job of a lifetime.” ■



Workforce Solutions Upper Rio Grande Board Chair Patricia Villalobos is joined by Workforce Solutions CEO Lorenzo Reyes, Jr. (second from left) and Workforce Solutions Board Member Luis Enrique Chew (sitting) for the ribbon cutting of Career Connection 2009 in El Paso. Photo courtesy Workforce Solutions Upper Rio Grande

Upper Rio Grande job expo attendance nearly doubles

Workforce Solutions Upper Rio Grande recently sponsored the Career Connection 2009 job expo that provided 88 employers the opportunity to meet with more than 5,000 interested job seekers.

Responding to a turnout nearly double that of the 2008 job fair, Upper Rio Grande expanded computer access on-site for job seekers and added a fast-track entrance lane for attendees with their www.WorkInTexas.com identification cards.

Employers had more than 1,600 jobs to fill in fields such as customer service, health care, engineering, and science. The event resulted in 2,886 referrals, which included job seekers with master's degrees and Ph.D.s.

San Antonio satellite center helps dislocated workers, jobless vets

To support the growing volume of dislocated workers and unemployed veterans filing unemployment claims, Workforce Solutions Alamo opened a new re-employment center at 4800 Fredericksburg Road in San Antonio using funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

In its first three months, the center served more than 3,500 customers by providing workforce center services ranging from job counseling, job leads, and employment preparation workshops to Workforce Investment Act (WIA) training and resource room services.

Eighty-five customers found employment and 54 were referred to WIA training programs. The center is expected to remain open through fall 2010.

Southeast Texas summer youth program nets 24 full-time jobs

Workforce Solutions Southeast Texas' summer youth employment program, "Growing Our Own Destiny," engaged 515 youth, 124 employers and eight partnering organizations.

The youth were exposed to high-demand jobs in fields such as math and science.

The program was funded with \$900,000 in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds which paid the youth wages or stipends. Twenty-four participants were hired full-time upon program completion.

The program encouraged alternatives to drugs and crime, and provided short-term training in construction and trades through on-the-job experiences and college courses. Southeast Texas distributed marketing materials at schools, local participating partner locations, workforce center recruitment events, and job fairs to encourage youth to participate in the program.

Annual job fair in East Texas attracts record attendance

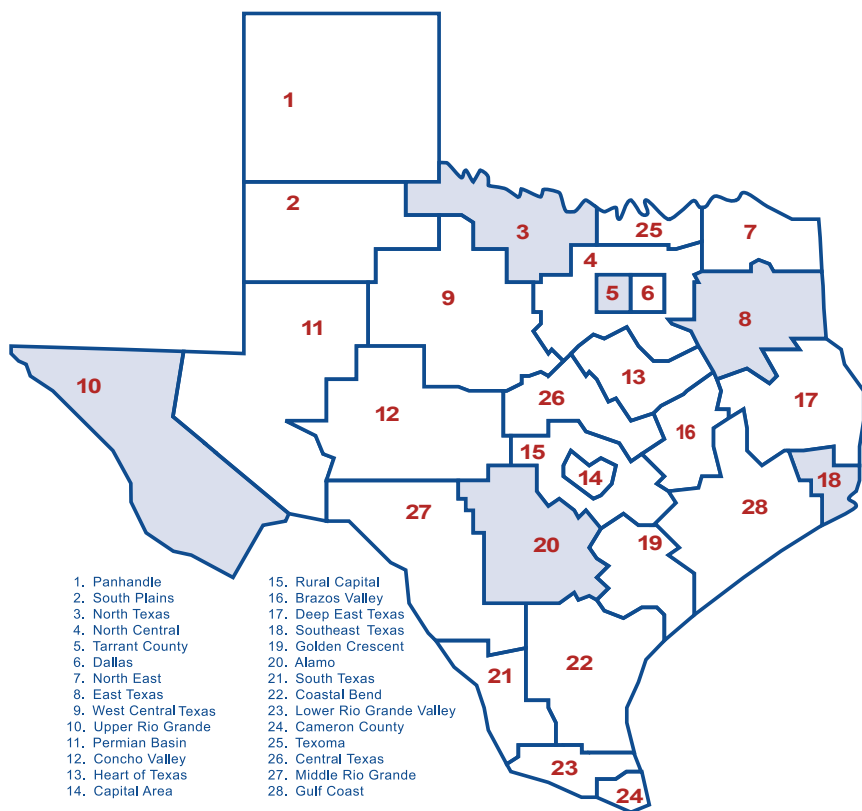
A record number 1,800 job seekers attended Workforce Solutions

East Texas' annual job fair at the Maude Cobb Activity Center in Longview. Approximately 70 employers were hiring.

The event attracted employers from oil and gas companies and government agencies, and more jobs in the service and medical industries than in past years. A variety of companies brought vehicles, equipment, and simulation models for job seekers to see companies' operations firsthand.

The job fair was broadcast live by three radio stations, and drew a large volume of applicants for each job.

Workforce News Around the State



development system customers.

In a collaborative partnership among the local workforce board, the City of Fort Worth, the City of Arlington, and homeless service providers and businesses, Project WISH offers job preparation, placement, and retention for homeless individuals.

Johnson met with homeless shelter residents to determine job skills needed, devised curriculum, and held workshops that helped approximately 450 of the program's 1,200 participants find work.

The Project WISH employer consortium was the 2009 Transitional Workforce Award Winner at the 13th Annual Texas Workforce Conference in December.

Program links veterans with health care careers in North Texas

A Workforce Solutions Greater Dallas partnership is addressing a health care worker shortage by connecting military veterans with area hospital jobs through the North Texas Veterans Connecting with Healthcare Careers Project.

Using a \$190,725 Workforce Investment Act grant, Greater Dallas workforce center staff and Veterans Resource and Referral Specialists have referred 56 eligible veterans to the DFW Hospital Council Education and Research Foundation's workforce center for program assistance and job consideration.

El Centro College and Tarrant County College match veterans to training programs, and Hospital Corporation of America (HCA) North Texas Division, Texas Health Resources and other health care employers link qualified veterans to jobs in fields such as nursing, surgical technology, and medical transcription.



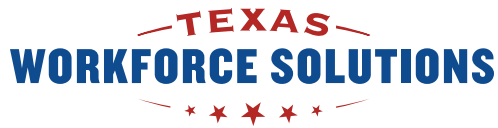
Workforce Solutions for Tarrant County staff celebrate Andre Johnson's (center, holding award) service recognition award from the National Association for Workforce Development Professionals. *Photo courtesy Workforce Solutions for Tarrant County*

Tarrant County worker honored with customer service award



Andre Johnson, special projects manager for Workforce Solutions for Tarrant County's

Project WISH (Workforce Innovative Solutions to Homelessness) program, received the Jodi Spiegel Enhancement of Customer Service Award from the National Association for Workforce Development Professionals for providing quality service to workforce



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forms Texas Workforce Solutions.*



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