Advisory Board Meeting Minutes
State of CT Department of Labor
NHE DWG Phase II: Dislocated Worker Grants to Address the Opioid Crisis
Dec. 10, 2019

In attendance from: CTDOL: Rob Bongiolatti, Operations Coordinator; Mark Polzella, WIOA Unit Director; Dante Bartolomeo, Deputy Commissioner; Todd Berch, Apprenticeship Unit Director; Mark Stankiewicz, OWC; Michael Kordowski, WIOA, Lisa Sementilli, WIOA, Lyn Lawrence, WIOA; DMHAS: Lauren Siembab, Opioid Services Coordinator; Ellen Econs, BH Program Manager; IOUE - Local 478: Kyle Zimmer, Health and Safety Coordinator; CT Certification Board: Jeff Quamme, Exec. Dir. (phone); DPH: Deborah Pease, EEOH Occupational Health Epidemiologist; DSS: Christine Weston, Program Manager; Angelique Pearson; USDOL OSHA: Steven Biasi, Area Director, Bridgeport OSHA Office; Judicial Branch: Brian Delude, Employment; DOC: Sandra Violette, Director of Addiction Services; WDBs: Cathy Awwad, NRWIB (phone); Carol LaBelle, EWIB; Virginia Sampietro, EWIB; Jill Watson, Workforce Alliance; Kim Staley Capital Workforce Partners; Adrienne Parkmond, The WorkPlace (phone); Career Resources: Sami Hajrula, Certified Recovery Specialist, AJC Waterbury/ NW region.

Minutes: Requests were made to make corrections in the Nov. 8 Meeting Minutes; individuals agreed to submit corrections to Rob. Corrected minutes will be reviewed for approval during next meeting.

Updates from agency representatives:

EWIB is presently contracting with Thames Valley Community Agency and TVCCA will hire a Recovery Peer Navigator position. EWIB meetings with locals have not begun yet.

Workforce Alliance is in the process of posting for the position; other work has not started yet.

Career Resources: Sami Hajrula, Certified Recovery Specialist, works with NRWIB and AJC Waterbury and throughout the NW region; has researched clinics providing medication-assisted treatment (methadone, suboxone) and tests with test results that variously do and do not identify use of marijuana; has been visiting all the WDBs, making presentations, and has 25 down the line. He is asked for how long a candidate must have established recovery before becoming a resource for others in recovery and becoming a Coach. He discussed WD training proposal to serve a specific number of training participants per WDB. NRWIB / Cathy put 30 people through the training, and if participants are determined WIOA-eligible, then there would be “no cap out” on the number of training participants. Apprenticeship is in process of certifying ETPL. Recruitments are projected to be large numbers, set up ready to go. His appointments are to start in January and involve reaching out to employers in addition to contacting training participants.

DSS: Christine Weston can provide information about Medicare and Community Health Services.
IOUE - Local 478 and CTDOL: Dante, DOL, and Kyle, IOUE, both discussed the partnership with CT Construction Industry Association (CCIA) to address the opioid crisis in the construction field. A building alliance includes trade unions and employers through which to raise awareness and inform how to get help and get back to work. “The word is out there” with the message being conveyed to 4,000 to 5,000 workers,

DOC: The Department of Correction is encouraging DOC’s Re-Entry Unit to participate on the statewide advisory council.

DPH/ CTDOL: Deborah Pease along with Rob and the Governors Alcohol Drug Policy prevention sub-committee is working to develop Employer Recovery Friendly Toolkit, and will be contracting with state approved vendor to produce the toolkit. Rob and Deborah Pease met with CTDOL attorneys, (who currently provide information on Drug Testing to employers), to explore the possibilities of creating a Recovery Friendly employer policy template.

DMHAS: is actively participating in the state’s Alcohol and Drug Council, a legislative group co-chaired by DCF Commissioner and DMHAS Commissioner. Lauren Siembab serves on the Recovery Health Management Sub-group; 50% of its membership is comprised of people in recovery/ DMHAS consumers. The group helped to define “Recovery Friendly Communities” and the towns of Danbury and Bristol are designated as such. After DMHAS shared its logo for Recovery Friendly Community, CTDOL / Rob incorporated its logo into the logo for Recovery Friendly Workplace designation. More information about DMHAS initiative is available on websites of Danbury and Bristol, towns that are providing leadership in the Recovery Friendly Community initiative.

DMHAS and Dept of Rehabilitation Services: Ellen Econs, Employment Systems Manager, asked about the posting of Recovery Peer Navigators to the public as she has information on individuals who may qualify for the AJC positions. Jill Watson of the Workforce Alliance, indicated that the posting in her region does appear on CTHires so that interested candidates may apply.

It was suggested that for the Employer Recovery Friendly initiative a possible tool to reach employers might be found in Chambers of Commerce. Most WDBs have representation from their respective Chambers of Commerce and it was agreed that this idea would be pursued.

CWP: Currently, CWP has posted the position they are seeking to fill, hopefully with new hires by January. Update will be provided during next meeting.

CTDOL Apprenticeship Program is developing specifications for Recovery Peer navigators. A career pathway is being developed for the Alcohol and Drug Counseling Apprenticeship (ACA) that includes entry level Recovery Specialist and advancement options that ultimately lead to a certificate or licensure exam (LADC). Once completed, related instruction providers will meet with Todd to potentially be added to the WIOA ETPL list of approved programs.

CCB: Jeff addressed CCAR training in the absence of a representative from CCAR in attendance today. Some individuals received CCAR training but still needed to complete five
additional hours of training, and when they reached out to Jeff, he provided additional training resources such as Advocacy Unlimited in New Britain. CCB is working to help Sami earn a peer supervisor certificate so that he could supervise other peers in the field.

Corporation for Supportive Housing: “Working with Peer Specialists” Training session of 1½ hours duration is available for a $60 fee.

Project name: The currently suggested name for the state’s NHE DWE grant-funded initiatives is “CT Works to Recover.” At least one member offered to contribute additional names as options to consider.

Reporting activities: For reporting purposes, all activities for the opioid emergency grant include both the Dislocated Worker codes which are already in the system and in addition those special grant related codes which were reviewed in the previous meeting. The CTHires system is now available to begin tracking individuals immediately and Peer Navigators should be entered into the system as participants.

Apprenticeship application forms are available and have been distributed. Remaining tasks to complete: identify all functions of the position and all skills to be learned through on the job training. A specially developed tool to capture Apprenticeship requirements was distributed and discussion regarding its completion and its format ensued. Advisory group members are asked to review the suggested format and return to Rob by 12/20/19. Jeff suggested that the CCB-approved job description of the Certified Recovery Support Specialist position is also available for reference. Kyle suggested that there may be variations in training functions due to specifications of the industries in which the peers are employed. During second phase of this grant, specifics of job duties of Peer Navigator for health care and Peer Navigator for construction industry will be crafted and will, in part, be tailored to the respective industry, while core functions of the position remain the same regardless of industry.

DMHAS: In response to postings of the Recovery Peer Navigator position, applications have been received from three other WDBs. “SUD” stands for Substance Use Disorder. An excel spreadsheet was distributed by CTDOL of the DMHAS-funded providers of substance use disorder (SUD) treatment, listed by workforce development region. Ellen Econs has access to providers by county and will get map to Rob to distribute for the group. Lauren shared her perspective on two most important points:

1. Align the definition of “Recovery Friendly Workplace” (RFW) with the Recovery Friendly Community definition (RFC), so the terms line up directly; at a minimum, vet the proposed definition with the community of people in recovery; use rubrics that are informed by people in recovery; and designate a Champion of the initiative. With the Recovery Friendly Community, the Mayor or the Mayor’s designee is the champion of the initiative.
2. Ensure that the language of the RFW becomes recovery friendly.

DPH: Deb Pease noted that recovery friendly language will incorporated in the toolkit for employers.
Probation and Parole. Brian from judicial indicated that the toolkit should have information about the specific issues faced by individuals who are in recovery and experiencing re-entry. Rob asked whether re-entry employment initiatives have pursued anything specifically for employers that are recovery friendly. Lisa explained that there are several ongoing different conversations related to reentry and recovery in terms of employer engagement, concerns, training and identification. CBIA is working on an employer guide. These conversations are evolving.

Probation and Parole set limits on the ability to work, with restrictions such as requiring re-entry job seekers to return to half-way houses by 6pm, thus interrupting job seeking and work schedules. Toolkit should inform employers of restrictions placed on individuals in recovery and those who are re-entering. Employers have varying degrees of comfort with re-entry circumstances such as when the individual’s release from incarceration to re-entry coincides with the same individual’s pre-trial phase. How do other grant-funded states handle the challenges faced by re-entering individuals and by employers who are considering whether to become involved? What are lessons learned elsewhere about “how to be approachable”?

It was discussed that a half day seminar for potential employers and interested parties will be scheduled for February 29th. The seminar provides an opportunity to discuss what employers want or need in relation to creating Employer Friendly Workplaces. A draft of what an Employer Recovery Friendly employer policy might contain was distributed to the group. The seminar’s goal will be to elicit recommendations on the policy development and other components of the Toolkit.

Lauren, DMHAS: Important during emergency situations is keeping a recovery focus. Through either the Toolkit or the Navigators, the workplace can be impacted.