

# The Connection

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Welcome to the Employment Connections (EC) Division's newsletter - The Connection! This newsletter focuses on sharing information to support, connect, engage and excel.

Read regular updates on projects and programs, and messages from Director Jairus Rice. Please share comments or ideas you have with [Jordyn Johnsen](#) or [Anne Goranson](#), or submit your feedback via [survey](#).

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## Message from the Director



Hello, Employment Connections team!

I hope you are all enjoying Spring. For my family and I, it's the part of year we start getting very busy. It is a season of frantically chasing three kids to conflicting baseball and softball practices. We are busy getting the garden planted, sheep and lambs cared for and this year we're bringing pigs to the Rice Ranch too! Whatever time is left is spent fishing in local lakes and rivers and shrimping in Hood Canal. Anything we can do to be out soaking up that Vitamin D. I hope this Spring brings you equal enjoyment and fulfillment.

Last month we focused on the "Supporting Staff" section of the EC Recovery Plan. This month I want to share another priority of the that plan: **"Focus on Equity"**.

I want to start by talking about what we mean by equity. We often hear the terms diversity and inclusion along with the word equity. Here's a quote by Cynthia Olmedo that may be helpful:

"Diversity is being invited to the dance. Inclusion is being asked to Dance. Equity is allowing you to choose the Music."

It is important to remember that equity is NOT about treating everyone the same. We are not all the same, so it stands to reason that we all have unique needs. Equity IS about considering those individual needs and giving people the space to create what works for them. It is all about opportunity and ensuring that opportunities are available for ALL people.

Our Governor and our agency have made equity a top priority, not just because we're hearing about it in the media, but because being more equitable will mean a better workplace for all of us and better support for our customers and thriving communities. Our agency strategic plan prioritizes equity for both ESD employees and our customers.

The EC Recovery Plan carries that priority and further specifies the communities who we want to do a better job of serving. Those groups include:

- People of color & communities that have been historically marginalized

- People with limited English proficiency
- People with disabilities
- People with low digital literacy or who are impacted by poor digital access
- People experiencing poverty or homelessness and
- Veterans & military families

We will do more to ensure that those customers know about our services, experience fewer obstacles when accessing our services and enjoy the highest level of service throughout their time with us.

It is our responsibility to serve all those who need and qualify for our services. We must move away from a mindset that expects our customers to adapt to a single and often rigid process that may or may not work for them. Instead, let's make it our responsibility to ensure that our services are available to everyone, regardless of their unique needs. And since a one-size-fits-all approach rarely does, we can focus on adapting our processes to better serve our customers in ways that are as unique as they are.

Fortunately, through our commitment to Lean and Human Centered Design, we have tools already in our tool belt to leverage immediately. We will continue to ensure more training opportunities are offered to deepen our awareness, knowledge, and skills to advance this critically important work.

I also want you to know that I am also 100% committed to supporting our EC employees, particularly those who have not had opportunities in the past. Your voices are important, and I invite you to contact me directly to share your ideas.

Finally, I want to ask each of you to participate fully as we learn together. I am not an expert on this subject in any way. I will be learning alongside you. It's likely that I will make mistakes, and when that happens, I hope you will let me know. This isn't easy work, and it will require us to look closely at the ways we support each other and our communities. Maybe most importantly, it will require us to really listen to one another. In the long run, we'll all be better for it!

Thank you all for your support of this work.

*Jairus Rice*

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## Project updates

### ***Training: Public Use Computers and Printers***

The ESD ITSD training unit will deliver virtual training to all WorkSource partners beginning April 19th. Training will include an overview to public-use computers, setting up new customer online accounts in Google or Microsoft, and familiarization with the public-use computers and printers. The [training material](#) is posted and available online on the WPC website. WorkSource employees can use them now. If you haven't already signed up for the training, you can access the Staff Development calendar in [WPC](#). Please contact Lynn Aue if you have questions.

## ***Remote Work Opportunity Job Fair***

A statewide team of Virtual Job Fair (VJF) administrators led by Alyssa Joyner, Mike Robinson and Jordyn Johnsen have been hard at work preparing for our first statewide Remote Work Opportunity Virtual Job Fair, to be held on April 22, 2021 from 10 am until 2 pm. This is our first VJF that is being coordinated across workforce development areas and lessons learned will help us with future events. It's not too late for employers who have remote work opportunities available to sign up! Job seeker flyers are also being developed for local marketing. Please check in with your [local VJF administrator](#) for your area's version and help us to spread the word!

## ***Create a Record in ETO***

Some time ago, a team of WorkSource ETO experts gathered to solve a problem. Job seekers who do not create personal accounts in WorkSourceWA.com are not tracked in our Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) system. As this effort neared implementation last fall, key issues were identified that required additional consideration such as the alignment of ETO data with federal reporting requirements and how to approach the legally authorized to work question. These issues, while important, caused a significant extension of the time needed to complete the project. This project is now back on track after the completion of a Charter and Statement of Work that clearly communicates the scope of this work, as approved by the Executive Sponsor, Jairus Rice. The new anticipated completion date is 6/30/2021. If you have questions, please reach out to [Alberto Isiordia](#) (project sponsor) or [Anne Goranson](#).

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## **Employment services**

### ***CAT & TB recorded training is now available***

We heard you! We received many requests from staff to learn more about Commissioner Approved Training (CAT) and Training Benefits (TB). In February, members of our TB unit and EC team hosted a CAT/TB workshop. This collaborative event was intended to provide an in-depth look at the two programs and insight on how we can use these benefits to support our customer's journey to re-employment. The recorded session is posted on the [EC Phased Transition SharePoint](#).

A big thank-you to our presenters Carol Young, Christopher File, Jacqueline Perry and Tracy Martin!

*Story submitted by TAA Program Operator Michelle Griffith*

### ***Team member presentation at the (virtual) 2021 Workforce Conference***

Rebekah Wilkes will present at the virtual 2021 Workforce Conference on April 15 and 16, discussing the new "normal" created by the pandemic. In her session, participants will explore some of the effects of the pandemic; learn about Daniel Kahneman's research about fast and slow thinking in terms of COVID-19, and be encouraged to share their experiences, thoughts and suggestions for helping job seekers adapt to changes and new expectations in the workforce. Kudos to Rebekah and thank you for wonderfully representing ESD and the Employment Connections Division!

*Story submitted by Administrator Manny Aybar, WorkSource Pierce*

### ***Measurable Skill Gains and Credential Attainment***

There has been a lot of talk lately about Measurable Skill Gains and Credential Attainment, and how the work you do makes it to the reports we send to the DOL (Department of Labor). Recently, the System Performance Team met with our partners and some EC team members, to review the technical side of how the performance in these areas gets calculated. System Performance has put together some technical assistance handouts for the 5 DOL PIRL (Participant Individual Record Layout) Job Seeker Performance Measures, which does not include the Employer measure. You can find them and other reporting tools on the [Workforce Professionals Center - Reports \(wa.gov\)](https://worksource.wa.gov/workforce-professionals-center-reports) webpage, on April 15.

If you need assistance with any of them, or have other WorkSource reporting related needs/questions, please reach out to [System Performance](#).

*Story submitted by WIOA & UI Research Manager Brian Mark*

### ***Governor's office article about the Washington Service Corps foodbank response***

*Article from the Office of the Governor*

Last year, [Serve Washington](#), the state's service commission, the Washington State Department of Agriculture and the [Schultz Family Foundation](#) created the Response Corps to respond to unprecedented levels of food insecurity across the state.

[New findings](#) reveal just how successful the partnership was to help make the AmeriCorps program more accessible to its members and, in turn, help address food insecurity for Washington families during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Response Corps invests in nonprofits and for individuals who want to serve as AmeriCorps members. It was a first-of-its-kind program where philanthropic funds were combined with federal funds to support multiple AmeriCorps programs across the state.

"Washington communities have faced countless challenges this past year, and food insecurity has been one of the most pervasive," Gov. Jay Inslee said. "The Response Corps is a perfect example of the impact public and private partnerships can have in taking care of our communities."

Already planning for a [second year](#), the partnership will continue to leverage new funding from federal, philanthropic and local partners to address even more COVID-19 impacts in Washington.

Since November 2020, AmeriCorps members in the [Washington COVID Response Corps](#) collectively completed 61,099 hours of service, providing more than 23.8 million pounds of food to Washingtonians and serving them more than 4.7 million meals.

Read the rest of the story on the governor's [Medium page](#).

*Story submitted by WA Service Corps Director James Trujillo*

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## Ask away: A regular column supported by a pack of experts

Last month, we introduced a [panel of resident experts](#) on a range of topics . We received some great question and topic submissions that we're excited to share with you!



Juliette the Cat, communications and customer service expert:  
**How have you changed your customer service style since switching to virtual work?**

Patience and grace are two of the biggest changes in my customer service style since switching to virtual services: patience and grace with myself as I learned the telework environment, and patience and grace with our customers as they navigate this new environment \*meow\*. I'm also practicing patience to better handle the highs and lows that come with working from home and lockdown.

As many of us have experienced and know far too well, our customers have been thrust into this situation with us. I remind myself to slow down and help the customer understand their situation fully \*purr\*. It's easy to get wrapped up in the workload but now more than ever, it's important to focus on one call, one case, one person, one experience at a time. Focusing on the individual "in front of you" will better address their questions and concerns \*meow\*.

I've also started asking open-ended questions, allowing for transparency and easy flow to the conversation. This really allows me to connect with the customers and helps them feel heard \*purr\*. If bandwidth allows and the customer is able, using video or screen sharing in the appropriate situations helps build that relationship. Finally, I feel it's also important to connect with customers by allowing some time for chit chat \*meow, meow\*, just like we would in the in-person world!

[Submit a topic or question to our experts.](#)

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## Advice for a previous version of you

The last year has been a new, confusing, and turbulent time. Everyone has struggled with some facet of this pandemic and the effects it has had on us all — from health and safety, to community and the longing for connection with family and friends. A group of EC folks were asked, **"Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give to yourself a year ago?"**

The overwhelming sentiment was patience: patience with yourself, your family, your work, and technology.

Some shared how they tried to find their inner peace. Many have leaned on their faith. Others shared ideas like finding out your local store's toilet paper delivery schedule,

getting good lotion for those frequently washed and dry hands, and investing in stocks. Many team members describe the stark difference in the types of calls they have received, acknowledging the difficulties of navigating those calls, and applauding our team for handling this year with such empathy and kindness.

**Here's more of what our team members would have told themselves a year ago:**

- *Learn how to compartmentalize work and home life in this telework world. At the end of the day, whenever that is, close the lid on the laptop and go 'home.'*
- *We are human, and no person is the same. Seek help if needed and take advantage of tools and benefits to have a healthier and less stressful life.*
- *Stay connected to your team, co-workers and colleagues for support. We won't be able to see each other in person for a while.*
- *It's going to be OK. Don't worry about things you cannot control; just do your part in keeping yourself and others safe and well.*
- *Be patient and be prepared to play a significant role in your kid's education.*
- *Take situations day by day; they will be there tomorrow. Do your best!*

*Story idea submitted by Administrator Manuel Aybar, WorkSource Pierce. Written by Communications Consultant Jordyn Johnsen.*

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## Kudos

We have a hearty kudos section this month. Thank you for recognizing your team members!

### **For Employment Connections**

Thank you once again, Employment Connections!

In March 2020, Unemployment Insurance Customer Support needed all the help it could get to help claimants navigate uncertainty during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. EC stepped up and provided that relief, helping Washingtonians receive critical benefits when they needed them most.

It was a Herculean effort: In September, we reported that you contributed 220,049 hours of assistance to UICS over six months. That's the equivalent of 239 full-time staff working from March through August.

But it turned out UICS needed more help, and again EC staff were there to help.

During the past few months, Employment Connections staff again worked closely with our claims center agents. Along with your UICS counterparts, you adapted to changes in federal programs and helped patiently explain these significant changes to our claimants.

A total of 113 EC staff – including 69 answering UI calls, 38 doing non-phone work and six leads – have greatly helped Unemployment Insurance Customer Support over these past few months.



We truly appreciate the support Employment Connections – including your leadership – have provided to assist Washingtonians impacted by this pandemic receive the benefits they so desperately need!

*From UICS Director Julie Lord*

***For EC staff assigned to UI non-phone work***

Hi team. I felt it a great privilege to be the functional supervisor for the EC staff assigned to UI NPW (non-phone work). The team consisted of very thoughtful and hardworking individuals from all over the state. They were really flexible with the different tasks they shifted to over the months. They enjoyed being a part of the critical unemployment work to help Washington citizens receive their much needed benefits to aide them through the pandemic. NPW staff did what was needed with a positive attitude and caring spirit. It has been an honor to be a part of this team.

*From Supervisor Susan Brown, WorkSource Pierce*

***For Southwest Coastal UI support team (including Central Sound Staff)***

I appreciate all that you have done! It's not the hours you put into your work that count; it's the work you put into the hours. Be proud of the fact that you have the power to rise above any situation and deliver the best results no matter the circumstances. Excellent work! Facing challenges with strength, determination and confidence is what matters, and you all have done it. It has been enjoyable to work with you all. Working with employees like you is a matter of pride and honor for me. Thanks for the support that you have shown toward our customers. It's something great. Thanks once again for working hard!

*From Supervisor Sean Wiley, WorkSource Mason*

***For Central Region UI support team***

I'd like to personally thank the Central Region UI Support team for stepping up to help unemployment claimants across the state during this past year. They come to us from Moses Lake, Okanogan, Sunnyside, Wenatchee and Yakima offices. I'm so proud of the work they did and to have served as their functional supervisor during this time. They taught me so much about hard work, dedication, and teamwork! During this pandemic, they received many compliments for doing outstanding work. They also learned so much about the UI world and this knowledge will help them as they return to re-employment services at WorkSource. I also want to thank our UI leads Nodari Pantsulaya and Elva Serrano for attending our team huddles and always being there for us.

*From Supervisor Becky Day, WorkSource Okanogan*

***For Eastern/Central Sound Region EC UI support team***

Thank you from the bottom of my heart for all of the hard work you have done over the past year! Not only were we all sent home to work in the blink of an eye, but you took on this new and very challenging roll. With grace and tenacity, each and every one of you dove in wholeheartedly to help people who needed it most. The services you provided,

your desire and willingness to assist our claimants, and your dedication has left me and everyone in utter amazement.

Over this past year, I have been lucky enough to build relationships with some caring people and I am so very grateful for you!

*From Supervisor Brooke Menter, WorkSource Columbia Basin*

***For North Sound Region EC UI support team & Timely Claiming Adjudication Team***

Wow!!!! Looking back at the last 12 months it is hard to capture everything that you should all be proud of accomplishing. I want to thank you all for your dedication, commitment, and flexibility. Your grit and determination to keep moving forward and make things happen during uncertain times was and is amazing!!! As a Supervisor I couldn't have asked for a better team. You all showed what teamwork and commitment to a team truly means. In the darkest hour as some felt they were never going to make it and were truly at wits end, others stepped in to encourage and work alongside them to get them through the battle. You learned to lean into each other for support and never gave up. It is not every day that a group of people from different teams can come together and stay committed to a common cause under good conditions, much less during times like 2020 presented to everyone.

It was an honor to work with all of you. The words Thank You do not seem large enough to express the appreciation I have for each of you as you return back to your home teams to relearn and refocus on the work that you came to ESD to accomplish. You come back stronger than you thought you were, more capable than you ever imagined, and forever changed for helping so many people, hearing their stories and walking with them through the temporary support until things return to our world's new normal.

Thank you with all my heart for all that you have done in the last 12 months and all you will continue to do in your work with ESD.

*From Supervisor Deanna Gillis, WorkSource Lynnwood*

***For EC UI functional supervisors***

Kudos to Becky, Brooke, Dee, Susan and Sean. This team has come together and formed a great relationship. They were able to advocate for their team. Whenever they found concerns, they were the first ones to speak up and find solutions. They streamlined information up and down the chain of command. The staff you helped supervise had nothing but great things to say about you. You were approachable, served with kindness, collaborated with everyone and were innovative. It has been an honor to work with you. Keep up the great work team.

*From Supervisor Jesse Diaz, WorkSource Sunnyside*

***For Jesse Diaz***

Jesse (Jesus) Diaz was tapped to provide resource manager level support in our COVID-19 response by supporting the 180 staff answering the 833 line. He was then asked to serve as the resource manager providing support to the EC UI functional



supervisors and the nearly 120 staff trained in UI intake and supporting multiple critical workstreams.

Jesse has done an incredible job in managing resources, solving problems, advocating for staff, providing updates, and ensuring strong and timely communication for these teams to be successful. Thank you so much for your exceptional leadership, Jesse! We appreciate you!

*From Strategic Operations Manager Nona H. Mallicoat & Management Analyst ashley olson*

I just wanted to thank Jesse Diaz and let him know how much I've enjoyed working with him these past few months in the UI world. ESD made the right decision by having him lead our EC UI teams across the state. He has always been there for us functional supervisors and demonstrated positivity and modeled and encouraged mutual trust. He treated us fairly and is extremely ethical. He also cared enough to gather various points of view before making important decisions. He challenged us to do better and learn more. An example of this was when he took us on a deeper dive into ACD data and taught us how to customize reports using analytics to help drive team goals.

ESD has a great leader with Jesse. He will go far and do great things! He taught me so much about myself and how to be a better supervisor. Thank you, Jesse!

*From Supervisor Becky Day, WorkSource Okanogan*

***For Employment Connections staff and ashley olson***

Over a year ago, something unprecedented occurred that resulted in WorkSource offices closing suddenly, staff being displaced to work out of their homes, businesses stopping operations, toilet paper and hand sanitizer flying off the shelves, and Employment Connections staff doing what we always do...stepping up to help the citizens of Washington State. At the height of the pandemic, we had over 500 EC staff supporting the Unemployment Division in a myriad of different roles in part time, full time, and overtime capacities. I wanted to once again thank all of you who stepped up to assist whether it was last spring – fall, or again this winter, or a combination of both! I also wanted to give a special kudo to an Employment Connections team member:

ashley olsen accepted the challenge, coming on board last spring to assist with the massive deployment of EC staff, monitoring and updating STEAS, working with other divisions on all the volunteer efforts, supporting the resource manager and EC UI Supervisors, and basically helping with anything I asked. As the original deployment was ramping down, she had the opportunity to take an interim position as the Regional Operations Manager for Central Sound, but never stopped supporting the staff deployed to UI. ashley kept everything organized, and we could always count on her to have everything documented and be able to answer questions on a moment's notice! During the past 11 months, her assistance has been invaluable, and I wanted to publicly thank her for everything she has done behind the scenes. Thank you, ashley!

In closing – thank you to everyone who was a part of this. We couldn't have done it without you.

*From Strategic Operations Manager Nona H. Mallicoat*

***For Nona Mallicoat***

Nona has been behind the scenes making the UI assistance transitions possible from day one—back in March 2020! Her attention to detail, regular communications, and ability to move swiftly made a very challenging process workable. Thank you, Nona, for your quick decisions and all of the extra hours you've put in to make these transitions successful. We appreciate you!

*From the Employment Connections Strategic Leadership Team*

***Kudo submissions***

If you'd like to submit kudos to be shared in The Connection, send them to [Jordyn Johnsen](#).

Make sure to also submit your kudos to *ES-tounding!* to be shared in the all-staff NewsNet newsletter. You can do so by emailing [NewsNet@esd.wa.gov](mailto:NewsNet@esd.wa.gov). To find all newsletter stories, go to the [NewsNet home page](#) on InsideESD.