The Connection

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 us by emailing the EC Communications inbox.

Message from the Director

Greetings, Employment Connections team,

It's that time of year again! As summer comes to a close and we welcome fall in the next few weeks, back to school is in full swing. After the hecticness of back-to-school prep passes and we get our households ready for summer's end, we can start to hopefully welcome a switch in our schedules. This time of year generally welcomes a more structured and organized calendar. Although, I do appreciate the carefree nature of summer, the fall transition is welcomed….and its football season! Hopefully you and your families were able to unplug and do something fun this summer! I particularly enjoyed taking a road trip with my kids over Independence Day weekend to Provo, Utah. We got to see Tim McGraw (huge fan) perform at the Stadium of Fire concert and then took the kids of to hike the trails at Sundance.

Speaking of the end of summer, this last Monday, September 5th, we celebrated Labor Day. For many, Labor Day weekend symbolizes the end of summer and is celebrated with parties, barbeques, and gatherings of the like. Labor Day was created by the labor movement in the late 19th century, becoming a federal holiday in 1894 to pay tribute to the contributions of American workers. At the height of the Industrial Revolution, the average American worked 12-hour days, seven days a week in order to support a basic living. Many children as young as 5 or 6 worked as well, earning a fraction of their adult coworkers, just to assist their families at home. I hope you and your families were able to celebrate this holiday by resting and spending time doing the things you enjoy. It's well deserved! You all work so hard, especially these last few years, and I continue to be grateful for our amazing team here at Employment Connections.

This past month has been filled with a lot of travel for me, and other members of the agency leadership teams. It's been wonderful to continue visiting offices, introducing other Divisions to our work, and chatting with many of you in person. I feel it is vital for the other Divisions to see the WorkSource offices in action as it allows them to better understand and support our business needs. Thank you for making them feel welcome! We are also beginning to get a lot of feedback from the Professional Pathways listening sessions. As we review it, there are some simpler recommendations we can implement

immediately, and others that will take longer. I'm looking forward to seeing how significant changes will be rolled out based on your meaningful feedback and recommendations. Thank you for sharing your insight and experience, and thank you all for supporting each other, our customers, and our communities!

Jairus Rice

Project updates

A little bit about WIT

Submitted by Nona H. Mallicoat, Deputy Director, Employment Connections

It's busy over here on the WIT side! In the past few weeks, we received all the bids, had dedicated teams of evaluators score the bids, and selected the top bidders to move forward into the demonstration phase. Demos will be held September 12th – 14th and information on how to sign up was sent out a couple weeks ago.

If your schedule doesn't allow for you to attend the demos, never fear! There will be several opportunities in October to attend workshops. These will be interactive sessions with the top 2 bidders and information will come out later how to sign up and participate. There are also other ways for you to be involved as much or little as you want. If you have feedback you want to make sure the WIT replacement team gets, questions you want answered, (or you just want to give someone a Kudos!) please use the input and questions form located on the Workforce Professional Center site. We review that information often.

I missed the last WIT town hall held Friday, August 26th, but I understand that Michael did a great training on Agile, and Anne Buchan facilitated like a pro. Nice job, team! As a reminder, the next WIT town hall will be Friday, October 28th, and we hope to see you at either the morning or afternoon session for the latest updates.

As always, we encourage you to continue interacting in the WIT replacement process – don't forget to check out the Workforce Professional Center, which is the best place to get updates on the different facets of this project, and you can also find the most recent recordings from the town hall, Q&A documents, project status updates, and the link to submit ideas and questions. Until next month…that's a little bit about WIT!

2022 Blueprint for Success

Monthly pillar wrap up

We concluded the fourth month of rotating updates on our four pillars in the Weekly Update Rollup! Here's the summary of this last month's pillar movement.

The four pillar teams:

- Are continuing to assist with the implementation steps of Zoom.

- Are looking for ways that offices have increased outreach to underserved populations and share local WorkSource office tools that are being used to market more effectively, provide services and reach more customers.

- Submitted a collective recommendation for a standardized hybrid work model.

A big thank you to all of the pillar team members who are doing this work and making the movement happen!

Is Digital Literacy a significant (and silent) barrier to Employment?

Submitted by Aletha McGee, Statewide Virtual Trade Act Case Manager

In 2020, the National Skills Coalition reported that **1 in 3** workers lack foundational digital skills **(1).** We have all had customers who struggle with technology, *including ourselves*! With 80% of middle skill jobs requiring basic digital literacy **(1)**. **Digital Resilience** - the ability to adapt to new technologies – has become an essential job skill in this post-pandemic job market. How many customers are slipping through the cracks due to digital barriers to employment not being identified, or mis-identified?

Digital Equity, Digital Literacy, and Work Readiness on the Front Line
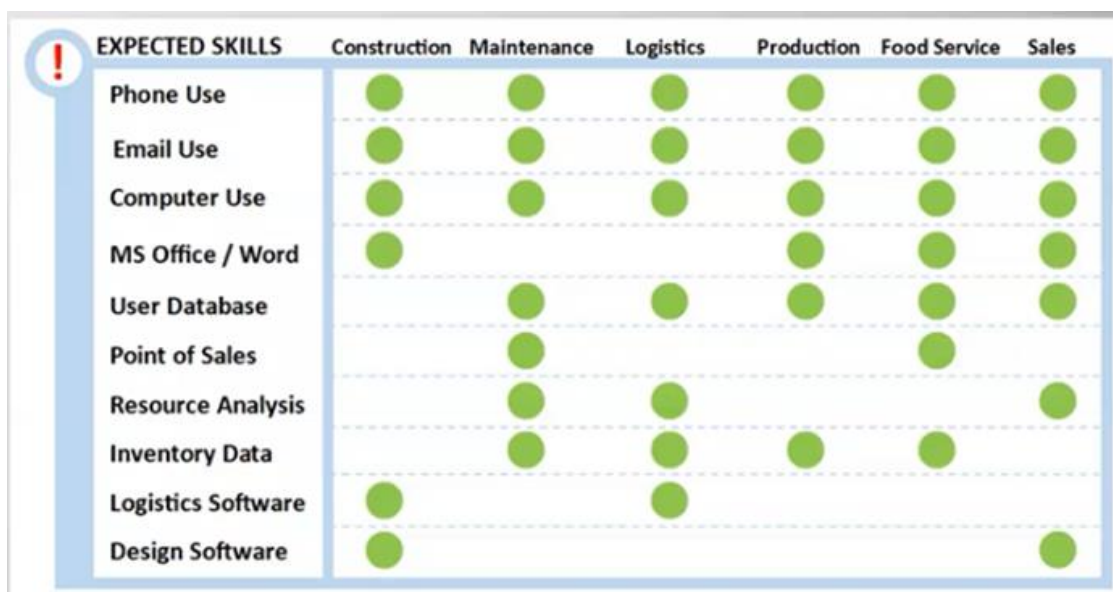
On the Statewide Virtual Team, we've witnessed the impact that lack of Digital Inclusion and Readiness has upon our customers, and how easily this barrier is mis-identified. One Boeing-layoff customer I worked with struggled for months to meet program deadlines, and I was concerned he needed outside mental health support or lacked motivation. During a screenshare, I happened to notice that his internet browser favorites weren't organized, so I quickly taught him how to create digital files, rename links, and do the same for his documents, emails, etc. I also pointed him to self-directed assessments and tutorials through Northstar Digital Literacy. Literally overnight he started speaking with more clarity and confidence, he sat taller, and suddenly began

submitting materials and resumes without delay! He was quickly approved for training and proactively re-entered the workforce.

> *I missed this silent SBE (Significant Barrier to Employment)*
> *for critical months because I wasn't looking for it.*
> *When it comes to Digital Literacy, we don't know what we don't know.*

Washington Service Corps supports Digital Literacy services directly in some offices, but I've also heard internal customers say they haven't heard of Northstar or other library offerings. We know that many of our customers require in-person services to support their job search, but is this percentage the same people who need additional support with digital literacy? We want to meet them where they are at; however, we must ask these questions:

- Are these customers being given ALL the tools they need to be successful in this post-pandemic world?

- As more jobs are requiring Digital Resilience, how are we supporting WA workforce to be prepared for this next job, and for the future? How?
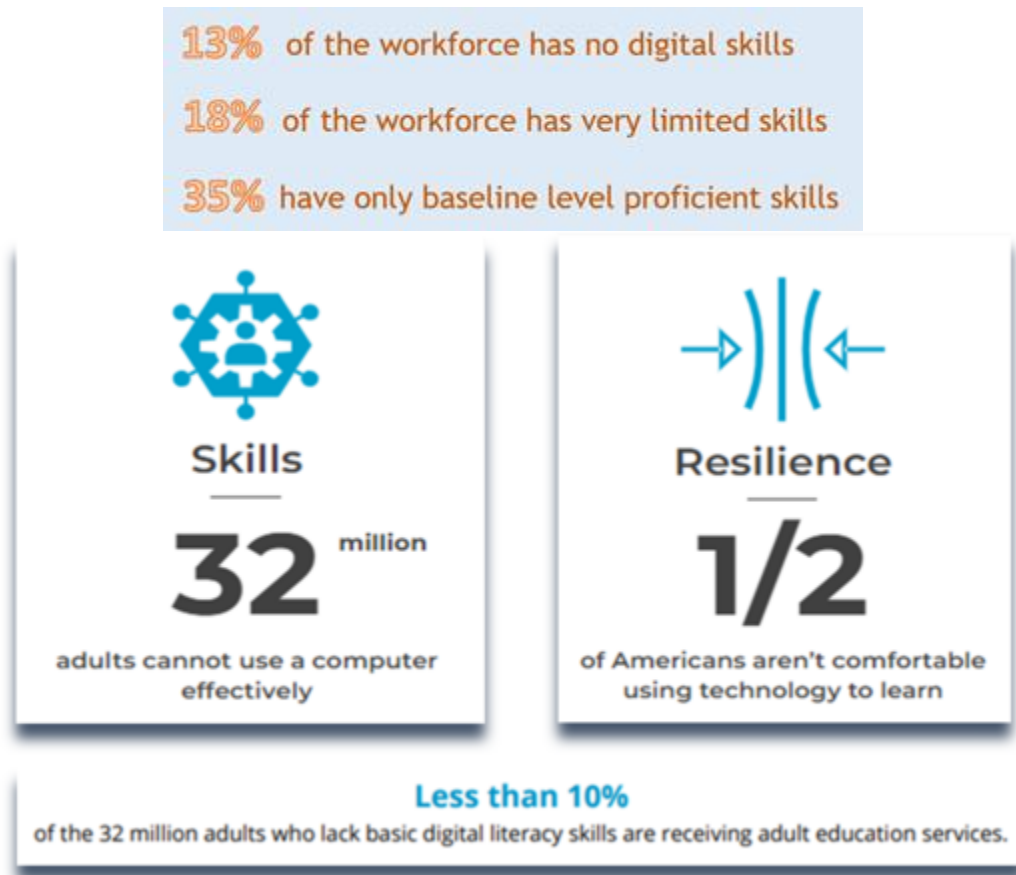

(Graphic from Refining a Diamond Reentry Presentation)

Where's the data?

I shared my concerns about Digital Literacy not being assessed or broadly addressed with a WorkSource mentor and he had one question: Where's the data?

What I discovered shocked me. According to Pew Research, half of Americans aren't comfortable using technology to learn **(1),** which means job seekers may struggle to upskill to meet changing workforce expectations. In Washington, these individuals may not begin to compete for an estimated **75.8%** of job openings which require digital skills**.** The level of federal dislocated worker funding available to Washington in FY22 supports only an estimated **2.4%** of unemployed workers **(2).** And, whereas 11% of White adults

are digitally illiterate, this rate increases to 22% for Black and 35% for Hispanic adults **([3](#)).**

13% of the workforce has no digital skills

18% of the workforce has very limited skills

35% have only baseline level proficient skills

Skills

32 million

adults cannot use a computer effectively

Resilience

1/2

of Americans aren't comfortable using technology to learn

Less than 10%

of the 32 million adults who lack basic digital literacy skills are receiving adult education services.

Statistics regarding [lack of broadband and equipment](#) is extensive, but did you know the library has [an extensive list of organizations](#) supporting everything from free internet to devices?

As we embrace Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI/EDI) [across the agency](#), it is vitally important that digital training and development is assessed and de-stigmatized at all levels of customer interaction.

What are we doing?

This article is the first in a series to support expanding the Digital Equity conversation so we can all adopt the same [language](#) and data, and to share resources and solutions already implemented within WorkSource offices.

Digital Literacy is the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills.

Digital Equity is a state in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy and economy.

Digital Inclusion refers to activities necessary to ensure that all individuals and communities have access to information and communication technologies, and the literacy and resilience to use them. Digital inclusion ultimately leads to digital equity.

Digital Resilience refers to the awareness, skills, agility, and confidence to be empowered users of new technologies and adapt to changing digital skill demands.

Digital Divide refers to the gap in access to and use of the Internet and other information technologies between different population groups.

This year the [Washington Service Corps](#) has implemented the IT Service Corps in collaboration with the State Library to expand digital literacy services and provide multiple placements within WorkSource offices!

The Statewide Virtual Team is developing a Digital Literacy Resources virtual workshop to support customers and employees engage free digital literacy tools to impact job seekers.

Free Digital Literacy resources are available through the [State Library](#). These services are also listed on this [WorkSourceWA.com page](#) and are listed in this [resource document](#), with links to additional articles.

What are you doing?

Some offices are well-versed in Digital Literacy services while others don't know where to start. **We would LOVE to hear what your office is doing to share in the next newsletter! Email aletha.mcgee@esd.wa.gov.**