

# North Shore Workforce Investment Board and Career Centers

Profile of an Early Adopter of Career Ready 101

## Overview

The following is a summary of an interview given in November, 2014 with Mary Sarris of the North Shore Workforce Investment Board and Mark Whitmore of the North Shore Career Centers.

Describe the setting, participants, programs, and tools used. What was your goal in using the tools?

At North Shore Career Centers we use KeyTrain and the job profiling data base from ACT. We are also using the career exploration with other tools, such as [MASSCIS](#).

We have used KeyTrain in a variety of ways, depending on the group and their needs. We use the pre-test in all three subjects: Reading for Information, Applied Math, and Locating Information, and look for a score of 4, in most cases.

We are starting to use the tools with our Adult Career Pathways groups. We have 2 groups here on the North Shore:

- Health Care @ North Shore Community College

- Manufacturing @ North Shore Community Action Program

We also did a pilot with a group of veterans and found a lot of mutual, informal learning took place within the groups. For example, participants planned time to come in together. We watched it grow organically, but would like to replicate this practice with the help of a facilitator.

How were the tools integrated into the program design?

When we incorporate KeyTrain in the health care component, for instance, we use the modules on job search, work habits, workplace effectiveness – critical aspects that will be incorporated into the work readiness of the career pathways piece.

With the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) customers we have found that a lot of people are capable and disciplined to utilize the self-paced learning components of the tool, but many others are more comfortable having the structure of a learning environment and a facilitator. So we have incorporated a facilitator into our learning lab to offer assistance.

Right now, the facilitator is only available in the face-to-face learning lab. We haven't figured out how to facilitate learning for people who are working independently and remotely (via email, etc.).

We see a learning lab as a good option for participants. The people who come to the lab sessions don't have lower skills, but they prefer a face-to-face session that better suites their learning style.

The lab facilitator uses the tracking tools. If we found someone who wasn't progressing on



WORLD EDUCATION

their own, we might reach out and recommend they come into the lab (after finding out what the issue is that's keeping things at a standstill).

The DTA folks had to have set contact hours so it worked in that case to have the learning lab, but bringing the cohort together also helped the esprit de corp. Sometimes people even become mentors for each other. So we have also begun to look at paired learning approaches.

We've have offered KeyTrain to students at North Shore Community College who are also customers of our career center. These students also had the option of coming to a learning lab, or working on their own. Some of the noncredit instructors made time in their classes for using the tools.

Although KeyTrain was not formally built into the curriculum, where there was crossover, the instructor referenced the curriculum. Some students used some of the nonacademic and career-focused tools, depending on what their needs were.

#### What are the strengths and limitations of the tools?

During the latter part of FY 14 and this year, we moved away from TABE as our assessment for Individual Training Account eligibility. We now use the KeyTrain™ pre-test and found a huge advantage for the Career Center and our customers. For the customer, the TABE results were not meaningful and unless we could find them a slot in an ABE program, we were powerless to provide options to help them improve their scores and their opportunities for training. Customers felt discouraged by TABE. They'd be referred elsewhere and give up.

However, the KeyTrain™ pre-test identifies the foundational skills the customer needs to improve and it identifies and places them in a starting module with KeyTrain, we can keep them engaged. They might not be ready for a particular program, but they can use these tools in a facilitated way or on their own. It empowers them to stay on track and remediate applied math, reading and using information skills where necessary.

Another key strength is the contextualization and making the learning concrete and practical. Career Center staff have been really excited about how that helps them make the learning real. The correlation between the skills and the occupation profiles makes a lot of sense to the customers as does the building-block approach utilized in the ACT approach. And what's great about the assessment system is that it's based in the students' interest and relevant to their goals.

Do you have any thoughts about how you might expand the use of the tools?

We're working on our internal structure to make the computer lab more accessible to customers. Right now they are embedded in our conference rooms, limiting availability. We're also consolidating Lynn and Salem centers into a hub with a dedicated learning lab. As we move into the hub, we want to get a larger group of staff cross-trained. We'll need to staff the learning lab for more hours.

We have been talking with North Shore Community College over the past 18 months about ways to build the cohort of people with National Career Readiness Certificates (NCRC). If you don't have a cadre of job-seekers you don't have anyone to demonstrate the value of

the certificate to businesses, but if you don't have employers signed-on, then there's not as much incentive for students to pursue the certificate, so we were trying to work with the college to expand the number of people who are moving through. The general college student is a little resistant to take on another exam without knowing the value.

A cornerstone of our regional steering committee work has been to consider whether it's best to get people through the National Career Readiness Certificate before we have employers signed on, or should we get employers to sign-on before we promote National Career Readiness Certificate to give incentive to participants. We have focused on offering National Career Readiness Certificate in the NSCC transitional programs, e.g. project GRAD, so they could earn something portable and stackable.

We have incorporated Adult Education partners in to that coordination effort. We'd like to incorporate some of the Community Action Programs and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) as well. We're expanding our regional steering committee and reaching out and looking at how the career center could support and enroll clients of other CBOs.

What sort of training or other assistance would you recommend for staff incorporating the tools into coaching and/or instruction?

There have been a couple of things we've struggled with. We are trying to help staff connect the relevance of the tools and the workplace. It resonated for the case managers, but we need to make the connection and help them to be better facilitators of learning in this type of setting. Many will need help making the connection to employment.

We also need to help the job profilers to make a connection to the customers and the other staff so they all can use the information that's gleaned.

A big issue is how to make the connection to employers and promote their recognition of the value-add from meeting job seekers that have earned a National Career Readiness Certificate. So we all could learn more from regions, states, and the communities who have been most successful with this.

Related to this issue, we created an addendum to a workshop entitled, *National Career Readiness Certificate – Now What?* This was created to help people speak more about the credential and what it demonstrates – in the absence of employer outreach and recognition. This came out of the work with North Shore Community College. (See more information from ACT about [using the certificate](#).)

What suggestions do you have for other sites getting started?

- Create a sense of shared vision
- Market the skills that will benefit the customer and the business
- Build a big tent when creating an advisory group. Who could benefit and how can we get them engaged? Think beyond the three key institutions - CBOs, NSCAP, K12
- Create a consistent theme for a regional marketing campaign – CBOs, ABE, college, career center
- Find local business champions

For more information, contact Mark Whitmore at 978-825-7200.