

SPOTLIGHT ON LOCAL WORKFORCE INNOVATIONS

Experience Works!

During the economic recovery after the 2008-2009 Great Recession, the Mountain Area Workforce Development Board and NCWorks Career Centers noted that adults who were age 50 and above were experiencing longer periods of unemployment and bigger challenges in finding meaningful work. Unfortunately, the coronavirus pandemic heightened the unemployment strains for this specific population. The pandemic has exacerbated inequality across the age spectrum and has made North Carolinians near retirement particularly vulnerable – especially if they are not yet ready to leave the workforce.

With a diverse workforce, having experienced workers as part of the demographics allow for two-way exchanges of ideas, leading to more enriched mentorship opportunities and on-going learning for everyone working in a multi-generational setting. I am personally fulfilled in engaging with experienced workers and assisting them in finding employment that matches their needs. Experienced workers are a vital part of our community and I encourage other companies to consider seeking talent from this segment!"

NATALIE SHAFT

Payroll and Benefits Administrator, Biltmore Farms LLC

The Experienced Workforce Initiative (EWI) was developed in 2017 by a working group of community partners to reach out to adults 50 and above in Western North Carolina, and particularly in the Asheville metro area. EWI aims to support and promote the engagement of adults aged 50 and above in both the volunteer and workforce continuum, from volunteer work to stipend-based training, part-time and full-time employment, and entrepreneurship.

► **EWI accomplishes its mission by:**

- Educating employers and organizations about the benefits of hiring and engaging older workers and volunteers;
- Providing networking and skill-building opportunities for older adults, through job and volunteer fairs; and
- Holding periodic "lunch and learn" events to build capacity for collaboration in support of EWI's mission.

► **EWI partners include:**

- NCWorks Career Center Asheville
- Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College
- AARP – NC Mountain Region
- Mountain Area Workforce Development Board
- Age Friendly Buncombe County
- Buncombe County Health and Human Services
- Council on Aging of Buncombe County
- Hands-On Asheville Buncombe United Way
- Area Agency on Aging at Land of Sky Regional Council
- Foster Grandparent Program
- Four Seasons Hospice
- Home Instead
- Land of the Sky Association of Volunteer Administrators
- YMCA of WNC
- Senior Companions Program
- Skyheart Consulting, PLLC
- Small Business Association WNC
- Silver to Gold, UniTeWNC.io Initiative for Tech Jobs in WNC
- RN Patient Advocacy of North Carolina

PROGRAM REVIEW:

Age brings experience, experience brings efficiency.

Program Highlights

EWI believes it is important to find employers who are committed to interviewing and hiring workers aged 50 or older. "Ageism" (prejudice or discrimination on the grounds of a person's age) in the workforce continues to be very prevalent, according to a 2019 survey by AARP, which states that approximately "3 in 5 older workers have seen or experienced age discrimination in the workplace." The EWI work group has developed several age-friendly events, including job fairs and the **NCWorks Experienced Worker Talent Jam**. Additionally, EWI has worked to educate experienced workers about hiring practices and help them develop job search skills for success through programs such as **Back to Work 50+**.

- **NCWorks Experienced Worker Talent Jam** is a one-of-a-kind pitch event where jobseekers and employers connect through one-minute, open-mic elevator pitches, followed by informal networking. Talent Jams are a great way for jobseekers to connect with potential employers and for employers to connect to local talent.
- **Back to Work 50+** is an AARP Foundation program that assists individuals 50 years or older who are seeking full-time employment. Participants learn about and apply current job search strategies for "today's" job search. The program covers "7 Smart Strategies" for experienced workers and includes opportunities to connect with employers and upgrade their computer skills. The Back to Work 50+ program has successfully completed five cohorts with an average of 30 attendees in each information session. Roughly 40% of those participants enrolled in the program and just under half accepted full-time employment within 2 months of completion.

Many experienced workers have well-developed communication skills. They understand workplace politics, know how to diplomatically convey their ideas, and can mentor less-experienced employees. They add value to organizations due to their high levels of engagement, stability, productivity, and experience. Thirty percent of Western North Carolina's population is aged 60 or older, and a business whose workforce matches its customer base can have a competitive advantage.

Interested in creating an experienced worker initiative in your area? Check out EWI's best practices:

- Identify a champion who is an advocate for experienced workers.
- Collaborate with community partners to reduce duplication in services and to better utilize resources.
- Develop knowledge of other services offered in the community.
- Maintain frequent contact with jobseekers and businesses to ensure success.

Program Contact

For more information, contact Irene Canivet at NCWorks-Asheville at (828) 251-6200.



► About the Series

Brought to you by the NCWorks Commission, the Spotlight on Local Workforce Innovations series showcases local innovations in collaborative, employer-led workforce development partnerships across our state. The series will highlight promising practices that can be replicated across North Carolina.

The NCWorks Commission is the state's Workforce Development Board. Led by a private sector chair, the 33-member, Governor-appointed commission includes representatives from the business community, heads of state workforce agencies, educators, and community leaders.

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