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Now is the time to invest in local workforce solutions for Washington's economic recovery

By Miriam Halliday, Chief Executive Officer, Workforce Southwest Washington

Despite working two part-time jobs, Cynthia, a single parent could not make enough to support her family. Connecting with a case manager at WorkSource allowed her to learn about careers in healthcare and to pursue training to become a dental assistant.

Making time for training, however, made it impossible to maintain both jobs and Cynthia fell behind on her rent payments. Transportation was also challenging and finding money for scrubs and other supplies for her training was daunting. With support services through WorkSource to pay for her training, help out with rent, transportation and other needs, Cynthia earned her Dental Assisting Certificate and was hired to a full-time position.

The help Cynthia received was made possible by investments in the local workforce system—your tax dollars at work empowering a network of community-based organizations, nonprofits and other organizations that serve on the front lines of economic recovery. This [state-wide collaboration](#) of local workforce development boards, which has existed in some form for more than 80 years, serves thousands of Washingtonians every year and helps businesses fill vacant jobs. [Workforce Southwest Washington](#) (WSW) is the local workforce development board serving Clark, Cowlitz and Wahkiakum counties.

Right now, tens of thousands of people are still on the sidelines of the labor market for various reasons—lacking affordable childcare, fearing COVID exposure for themselves or their families, and many needing assistance to participate in the local and regional labor force. These communities—including many Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian and other people of color, women, immigrants and refugees, and rural residents—are in real danger of being left behind and excluded even further from the labor force and without support to meet even their most basic needs.

At the same time, businesses are struggling to fill nearly 200,000 vacant jobs across the state, including thousands in critical industries like healthcare, education, manufacturing, and hospitality services. This is impeding our state's economic recovery and hampering the ability of businesses of all sizes to fully recover and grow.

Serving businesses, job seekers and youth in Clark, Cowlitz and Wahkiakum counties.



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As lawmakers in Olympia debate critical measures for Washington’s economic recovery, now is the time to invest in local workforce solutions. Workforce Southwest Washington and our peers in the statewide Washington Workforce Association recommend a [\\$50 million state Workforce Innovation Fund](#) to empower local [solutions](#) with flexible funding. We recommend lawmakers take advantage of the infrastructure that already exists—established funding, network of providers, community partners, [WorkSource job centers](#), and industry relationships—and build on it to produce better results for workers and businesses, and to maximize scale and impact.

There have been no designated workforce investments through the Federal CARES Act or the American Rescue Plan. Existing federal funds are not flexible, not nearly enough to meet the needs, and ill-equipped to meet the “just in time” demands caused by our new pandemic economy, which would leave behind 90% of those in need.

Our state cannot afford to leave people like Cynthia behind. By investing in these local solutions, legislators can put a down payment on equitable economic recovery for better and stronger communities and businesses.

Miriam Halliday is Chief Executive Officer of Workforce Southwest Washington (WSW) the local workforce development board for Clark, Cowlitz and Wahkiakum counties. Reach her at mhalliday@workforcesw.org.

About Workforce Southwest Washington

Workforce Southwest Washington (WSW) is the Local Workforce Development Board (LWDB) designated by federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) legislation to oversee the public workforce system in Clark, Cowlitz and Wahkiakum counties. WSW is a nonprofit organization and funds community prosperity by investing in services that help individuals gain skills to obtain good-paying jobs or advance in their careers and help companies recruit, train and retain workers. Since 2003, WSW has invested more than \$120 million in Southwest Washington businesses, adults and youth. Learn more at www.workforcesw.org.

WSW is an equal opportunity employer/program.

Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities. Washington Relay 711.

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