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Giving Guide

## **Giving Guide: Skills training firms shift focus to aid displaced workers**

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Back before Covid-19, workforce development organizations found themselves working with companies and their teams to hone and elevate existing workers' skills. With less than 3% unemployment across South Florida, companies were keen to train their workforce and keep them loyal.



Then the pandemic hit. With furloughs and layoffs, regional unemployment spiked to 14%. In a matter of months, South Florida went from an employee's market to an employer's market. Career development organizations were forced to pivot fast to prepare workers to find new jobs.

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Job fairs were scheduled. With Covid-19 lockdowns, they went virtual, as did the career training that job candidates needed to improve their skills, earn the certifications employers were seeking or transfer their skills to change their career path, said Michael Corbit, VP of business development with CareerSource Palm Beach County.

But first, they had to have the job interview. For many, this wasn't easy.

"We had to quickly prepare people for virtual interviews: how to dress, how to look at the camera, how to do an online interview,"

said Corbit, whose team also worked with job candidates to create or improve their LinkedIn profiles.

For those who landed work, only to be asked to work remotely, training was needed for that, too.

“Companies had job orders with us, but they didn’t want people in the office. They were going to set people up to work remotely,” Corbit said.

CareerSource is also working with people being offered gig work – short-duration, per-diem or contract assignments.

In the pandemic market, the struggle is to get people back to work. Organizations have stepped up to meet what’s become a dynamic workplace.

For its part, CareerSource saw needs for hospitality and airlines fall, while the region’s role as a logistics, distribution and warehousing hub grew. New training was designed to help people in hospitality pivot into similarly aligned customer service and tech support for the growing health care sector, Corbit said.

It’s about honing transferable skills.

“If somebody has good qualifications and skills, a health care provider will hire them,” he said. “People have to open their minds to another industry.”

An open mind might require some formal training, Corbit admitted. Local universities and state colleges have revised their curricula and delivery to meet employers’ current needs. Since the Great Recession, some schools have changed courses, degrees and certificates to meet both student and employer workforce training needs, and have delivered more programs online.

It’s a fine balance, said Mildred Coyne, senior VP of workforce education and innovation with Broward College. Loss of jobs means hopeful students have less discretionary income to invest in career training. But the need remains.

Anticipating layoffs, Broward College started “next-level webinars” to expose people to what’s available virtually to improve their skills

and training, she said. It aligned with CareerSource and tapped CARES Act funds for rapid credentialing.

The college's Broward Up program works with almost two dozen employers to offer free educational opportunities, workforce training and support services in at-risk neighborhoods throughout the county. It's also working to help those without technology beyond a smartphone become more versed in and have access to the devices needed to work in the digital workplace.

Worker response was slow at first. Then, people realized how retraining and certifications could boost their chances at a lasting career.

"There's disillusionment about people's careers," Coyne said. "People need solutions to reinvent themselves to recession- and pandemic-proof their income, and protect their wages."

A region stepping up to provide training and support to displaced workers speaks volumes about community-focused caring. Employers, workforce and career development organizations, and educators each play a role, said Michael Finney, president and CEO of the Miami-Dade Beacon Council, the county's economic development organization.

Working with its digital partner, the Beacon Council created the BizHelp.Miami portal for resources, jobs, training and Payroll Protection Program advice, and partnered with the small business division of the county tax collector's office to reach some 90,000 businesses. To date, some 8,000 businesses have checked into the website.

Its Miami Community Ventures program helps connect low-income workers, particularly women with young children, with "living-wage jobs," Finney said. The Florida International University Construction Trades Program trains and finds work for returning ex-offenders. An automotive apprenticeship program with Miami Dade College, now in its early stages, hopes to train people for customer service and lucrative technician jobs.

"We're aggressively promoting these programs with organizations on the front lines of readying workers for employment

opportunities that are there at every skill, from unskilled to high value and knowledge intensive,” Finney said.

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