

**HAWAII COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD UPDATE REPORT  
(February – August 2020) TO THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL MEETING**

Thursday, August 13, 2020

The deadline for the One-Stop Infrastructure Funding and Memoranda of Understanding was January 31, 2020. Hawaii County WDB had set a goal of having all the IFAs signed no later than February 29, 2020. What is the status?

*Hawaii County had asked for an extension as two of the partners had not signed by the original deadline. We worked on negotiations with Workforce Development Division and Unemployment Insurance to come to terms. The IFA was signed by the final partner and was completed as of June 2, 2020.*

Hawaii County WDBs last report stated completion of WIOA AJC certification by March 15, 2020, around the same time that COVID shut down the state. What is the new reasonable deadline to submit certification?

*Hawaii County anticipates the certification being completed and submitted to WDC by August 31, 2020.*

Please summarize the overall impact that the COVID pandemic has had on the overall operations of the WDB and American Job Center. *The American Job Center is shut down to the public with the exception of appointments, phone calls and emails. We are following Unemployment Insurance's lead and not opening our doors officially until UI removes the National Guard and opens their doors to the public.*

*The AJCH is working on policies to finalize its reopening to the public. We have ordered Plexiglas, face shields, and masks for the AJCH staff. The partner programs are purchasing additional protection gear.*

*We are serving more program members and less general public at this time. We continue to provide limited support for UI claimants and work with those that are looking for training and skills upgrades along with job searches. Many people on the Big Island need to work so they can feed their family and are interested in finding jobs rather than taking the time to gain new skills or training in another field.*

*The furloughed employees that were laid off due to COVID-19 are still collecting unemployment and waiting to be recalled to their jobs. Unfortunately we have any more businesses who are filing WARN letters or closing without notice without others reopening. We anticipate an influx of eligible dislocated workers contacting the AJCH once the UI benefits run their course.*

*We will continue to serve the public as best we can within the restrictions of COVID-19 and continue to find innovative ways to meet their needs.*

Please explain how services are being delivered at the American Job Center. What is the staffing level, hours of operation, accommodations made for COVID?

*We are open M-F 7:45 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. We are at full staff. The accommodations made for COVID are we are only open to the public via email, phone support for HireNet requests (UI claimants), by prearranged appointments and virtual (video conferencing) appointments as requested.*

*The Resource Room is not currently open to the public as program staff are using it to meet with clients who have set up appointments. We have reconfigured our space to accommodate for the six foot “social distancing” in the Resource Room and everyone must wear a mask at all times. We also require that only one person come in per party (unless an interpreter is needed) to avoid overcrowding.*

*Those that have appointments may use the Resource Room computers if they need to apply for a job or update their resume. For those calling in, support is being provided over the phone and updates and changes to the accounts, missed questions, etc. are identified and assistance is delivered.*

What actions have been and/or being planned to overcome the challenges/barriers as a result of COVID?

*We are finalizing our American Job Center COVID-19 Action Plan which provides guidance for AJCH Staff. All staff will receive a copy and as new mandates are added or removed, the policy will be updated to reflect any changes.*

*The AJCH staff meets on a regular basis to see how things can be done more efficiently while keeping safety at the forefront. We screen visitors prior to entering the AJCH with the following questions and directions: Have you traveled off island within the last 14 days? Are you experiencing a cough, sneezing or a fever? Are you feeling ill? If they answer yes to any of the questions we turn them away. If they answer no to all of the questions we let them know we need to need to take their temperature prior to entering.*

*As a final precaution we also have them fill out a form with their contact information for contact tracing purposes - in the event that a situation involving COVID-19 arises at the AJCH.*

Please share accomplishments/success stories from your organization.

*On the Big Island, since March, we have worked with 35 employers who have filed WARN notices regarding Big Island layoffs and in that time, received notice that 4,306 employees were being affected.*

*In March there were 1,541 people impacted. In April through June 30<sup>th</sup> there were a total of 2,006. In July there were 759 layoffs between 3 companies, Fairmont Orchid, Big Island Candies and Hilton Grand Vacations. In August Hawaiian Airlines filed with anticipation that layoffs would occur in October – this WARN is being handled at the state level as all of the islands were affected.*

*We have reached out to each of the employers in order to try and reach their employees. We had success with Flying Food Group, they actually provided a list of 34 employees and the WIOA Dislocated Worker program reached out to each and every one of them, enrolling over 10% of the employees affected. We continue working on outreach and providing AJCH and partner program information through direct and indirect channels.*

*Effective June 1, 2020 Rapid Response has a contracted Rapid Response Assistant working out of the American Job Center – he is assisting with any dislocated workers who come or call into the AJCH, working on outreach and partner referrals.*

*Effective July 1, 2020 Workforce Development took over the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) and is now providing the program out of the American Job Center.*

*Workforce Development secured 7 employers for the RUDDER program which allowed for 102 new hires in Hilo and Waimea.*

*The WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs have been working on outreach during the COVID-19 Pandemic and as a result, in the month of July alone, WIOA has signed up 25 Adult participants and 13 Dislocated Workers. And here is a success story about Birolena who was dual enrolled due to her situation which arose out of the COVID-19 pandemic.*

## From Hardship to Hero



On July 9, 2020, one of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Employment Counselors housed at the American Job Center Hawaii (AJCH) was taking a stroll through one of Hilo's parks and came across a former classmate Birolena who was distraught as she and her husband Vili, had been furloughed from the Waikoloa Hilton, she as a housekeeper for 5 years and Vili as a landscaper. They had been commuting from the east side of the Big Island from the Puna Region to the west side where the hotel was located.

They had issues filing for unemployment benefits and after 3 months of no income were concerned for their one year old son's well-being. She was discouraged, and very disheartened by her financial situation and was tired of waiting for the possibility of being called back to work. She needed to find work and soon.

Amanda, the WIOA Employment Counselor and classmate, spoke to her about the features and benefits the WIOA program offers and handed Birolena her business card. Amanda told Birolena to call her at the American Job Center Hawaii (AJCH) so they could schedule an appointment to continue their discussion and enroll Birolena in the WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker programs.

Birolena scheduled an appointment and came into the AJCH with her husband. Unfortunately Birolena and Vili's enrollment was delayed as they did not have all their required documents on hand which postponed their enrollment into the WIOA Program. Though the process may have seemed daunting, Amanda continued to encourage Birolena and Vili to not give up in obtaining the necessary documents.

Birolena and Vili continued to come to the AJCH and work with Amanda, while waiting for the required documentation to arrive. They scheduled appointments to work on creating HireNet accounts, updating their resumes and discussed interests and goals prior to WIOA enrollment.

Finally, on July 23, 2020 both Birolena and Vili received their required documentation and were enrolled into the WIOA program. The clients did not want to obtain occupational training, but wanted immediate employment, to help boost their family's income and living situation. Amanda worked with the duo on interview preparation by conducting mock interviews during that week. Birolena was very nervous about the whole process but expressed gratitude for Amanda's hard-work and diligence in career services, soft skills and spending quality time preparing her for her future employment opportunities.

Siniva, the WIOA Program Coordinator received notice from Goodwill's Director of Workforce Development that their First-to-Work program was seeking to hire an Administrative Assistant. Siniva informed Amanda of the job opportunity and asked if she had anyone right for the job. Amanda quickly reached out to Birolena to see if she was interested.

Birolena expressed a strong interest and came into the AJCH to work with Amanda on tailoring her transferable skills in her resume to the position's job description. Once finalized, Amanda submitted Birolena's resume to Goodwill's Workforce Development Director. Goodwill's Director was very impressed with Birolena's resume and work experience and immediately scheduled an interview. Birolena was so excited with the news of an interview that she contacted Amanda and immediately requested an appointment to freshen up her interviewing skills - right before her interview. After the interview, Birolena called Amanda to thank her for working with her on her interview skills and building up her confidence level. She felt she answered each question completely, with confidence and was calm in her demeanor, making her the right person for the job.

Less than two days later, Amanda received another call from Birolena stating that she had “got the job!” Birolena said, “Thank you so much for helping me, it means the world to me. Thank you for taking the time to talk to me that day at the park, and for going through the hoops with me. I am forever grateful.”

Out of all the interviews that were conducted that day for the Administrative Assistance position, Birolena secured it with calm, confidence, and a foundation that was built on preparation and guidance from her Employment Counselor Amanda.

Siniva, the WIOA Program Coordinator even received positive feedback on the client’s referral from Birolena’s new boss, the First to Work Program Coordinator, stating: “Birolena was such a sweetheart and displayed a confident and genuine desire to learn, and to perform meaningful work.”

Birolena has been in the WIOA program less than two full weeks, and as of August 5, 2020, she is a full-time Administrative Assistant, earning a starting pay of \$15.47, with full benefits. Birolena told Amanda and Siniva, “Because of you all, I am employed and will be able to provide for my little family. You ladies and this program are a blessing!”

As for Vili, he is very happy with Birolena’s success and is looking into occupational training to secure a guard card. We won’t be surprised if he too becomes a WIOA success story.