

**Omaha Workforce Collaborative  
Evaluator Report  
Fourth Quarter, 2009**

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**Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce**

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# Omaha Workforce Collaborative Evaluator Report

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## I. Executive Summary

### A. Overview of Goals

Omaha Workforce Collaborative (OWC) requires an independent evaluation of the impact of its workforce development efforts. The goals of the program include:

1. Create achievable career pathways for job seekers
2. Create a positive return on investment for partner employers
3. Create system change regarding:
  - a. Partnerships between business and community-based organizations
  - b. Public policy workforce development

This Q4 2009 report reviews strides toward these goals by looking at quantitative evidence of participant progress.

### B. Overview of the Methodology

This report evaluates the quantitative data from the first four cohorts collected through December 31, 2009. The cohorts are:

- Financial Services Sector: Customer Service Representative (CSR) program – updates on employment status for Cohorts 1 and 2
- Healthcare Sector: Ophthalmic Assistant (OA) program – updates on employment status for Cohort 1.
- Trades Sector: Pre-Welding program – from application through end of training for Cohort 1

Quantitative data have been collected via a standard format from employers and community-based organizations. Initial quantitative analysis is descriptive in nature. As the number of participants grows, a statistical approach will be applied.

### C. Major Observations and Findings

1. According to the Omaha Chamber of Commerce, unemployment in Omaha is very low. There is a concern that those people who are unemployed – particularly those chronically unemployed – may be unemployable due to personal attributes and life circumstances. There is also concern about the underemployed – those who may be working several unskilled or low skill jobs but have the personal ambition to learn new skills.

The Collaborative is now reaching out to the underemployed to assist them in upgrading their skills and find career-path jobs with family-sustaining wages. The assumption is that as these individuals move up and out of the lower jobs, it leaves room for the unemployed to gain a footing. The initiative then would have a multiplier effect. .

2. The challenging economy that has impacted construction, along with the seasonality of the work, stalled the hiring plans of the partners in the Trades program. Neither partner was able to offer any jobs this quarter, but they do anticipate some hiring in the in first quarter 2010.
3. After nine months on the job, employment for the CSR employees appears to be stabilizing. No Blue Cross/Blue Shield employees were terminated this quarter. Mutual of Omaha released one employee, but this was expected, as the individual was at the end of his/her contract.
4. Employers are asked to rate the participants' performance relative to that of a traditional hire.

Employees retained by Mutual of Omaha continue to improve performance. Since program inception, Mutual of Omaha has retained employees whose performance is worse than that of a traditional hire, with a mixture of performance ratings of "Below" and "Same." This quarter, three of the employees have improved their performance rating from "Below" to "Same." One of these employees has been enrolled in advanced training.

Blue Cross/Blue Shield chose to maintain the performance criteria established for a traditional hire. There were no terminations of program participants this quarter, so those remaining are on par with traditional hires.

5. The Omaha Chamber of Commerce is diligently working with the local community to forge new workforce partnerships.

#### **D. Lessons Learned**

As the program moves into its second year, there is more data available to consider broader questions. Are the right programs being offered? Are the right applicants being selected? Is it scalable? Will the participants be persistent in both the training and the employment?

Choosing applicants who will most likely thrive in these programs is particularly challenging. By design, the OWC is reaching out to the un- and under-employed with the goal of moving individuals up to a more sustainable wage.

Current participants have stated that "determination and persistence" were crucial in completing their training and then in getting integrated into their new job and its environment. They cite those who don't make the cut as lacking in these areas.

OWC has noted "Persistence" as a characteristic to be understood and identified in prospective program participants.

##### **Learner Persistence**

For OWC, completion of the training program is the first key. Persistence is a widely studied concept in all levels of education, and particularly so in adult education programs. Learner persistence is a complex issue that is affected by life factors, personality styles, and prior education.

## **Employment Persistence**

The ultimate success, for the participant and employer alike, comes from the hiring and then performance and retention with the employer. Employment persistence is similar to learner persistence, with previous work considered as *employment education*.

### **Persistence Defined**

One study defines persistence as “adults staying in programs for as long as they can, engaging in self-directed study when they must drop out of programs, and returning to programs as soon as the demands of their lives allow” (Comings, J. P., Parrella, A., & Soricone, L. (1999). This same study identified two key aspects that influenced persistence:

- Adults who had been involved in previous efforts at basic skills education, self-study, or vocational skills training were more likely to persist than those who had not.
- Adults who had a specific goal were more likely to persist than those who either mentioned no goal or said they were doing it for themselves.

Additionally, social support, goal setting, and regular progress towards the goal are critical in maintaining persistence.

### **Factors Influencing CSR Persistence**

For a preliminary view of some of the factors that influence persistence, the data for the CSR program is examined. Motivation for success is certainly related to persistence, as is self-efficacy. Extended or chronic unemployment can negatively impact motivation for those with low self-esteem or lack of social support. However, it can also be a very strong positive driver. The latter appears to be a factor in the CSR program when the following are considered:

- ALL of the participants hired who were unemployed for a year or longer at the time of application remain employed.
- Just over one-quarter of the previously unemployed were terminated.
- More than 40% of those employed at the time of application were terminated.
- The one participant that noted no previous employment was terminated.
- None of the participants voluntarily resigned the employment positions.

There is not yet enough data to tell if there are strong statistical correlations, but the trend fits with the research literature.

### **Finding Candidates with Persistence**

For OWC, finding the right candidates starts with the recruiting. While the numbers are still too small to draw conclusions, the data is showing higher retention among recruits coming from Employment First, Workforce Development and Word of Mouth (see page 8). It is possible that the source of candidates may prove to be an important variable.

Once candidates are found, OWC is looking for potential screening techniques that focus on persistence. It is strongly recommended that any such effort include appropriate data collection

so the predictability and reliability of such techniques can be measured within the OWC environment.

Examples of approaches from the California Adult Literacy Professional Development Project are offered in the Appendix.

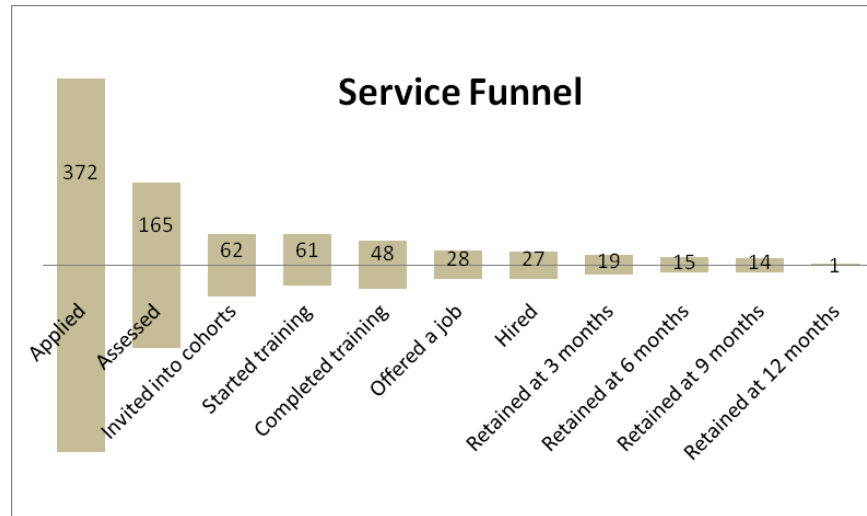
## E. Summary of Quantitative Results

### The Service Funnel

The concept of the Service Funnel is to illustrate the OWC steps an individual will go through on the way to family-sustaining wages. It further depicts the narrowing of the served population as the funnel narrows after each step.

The following represents to number of individuals remaining in the process at each step. Cohorts from Financial Services (CSR), Healthcare (Ophthalmic Assistant), and Trades (Pre-Welding) are reflected here.

- The first CSR cohort is represented through “Retained at 12 months”
- The second CSR cohort is represented through “Retained at 9 months”
- The OA cohort is represented through "Retained at 3 months"
- The Trades cohort is represented from “Applied” through “Offered a Job”



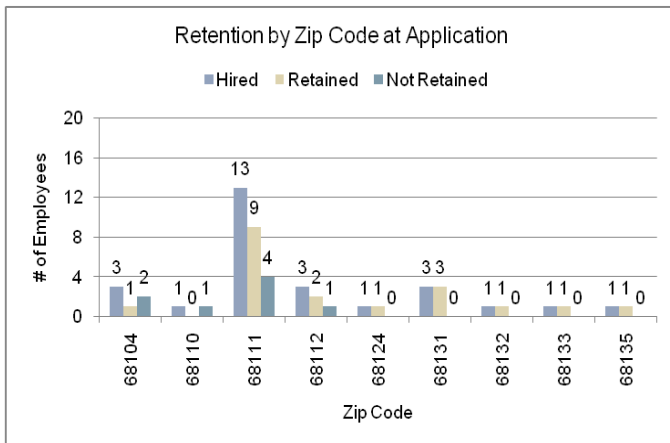
	Cohort	Applied	Assessed	Invited	Started Training	Completed Training	Offered a Job	Hired	Retained at 3 months	Retained at 6 months	Retained at 9 months	Retained at 12 months
Financial Services	1	240	108	27	27	22	17	16	14	11	12	1
Financial Services	2	N/A	N/A	15	15	9	8	8	4	4	2	TBD
Healthcare	1	37	23	8	7	6	3	3	1	TBD	TBD	TBD
Trades	1	95	34	12	12	11	0	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
<b>Total Population</b>		<b>372</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1</b>

Notes:

- CSR “Assessed” data is only for those students ultimately accepted into a cohort.
- The Cohorts are each at different points in the application through employment cycle at the time of data collection (12/31/09), as noted by the “TBDs” in the above table.
- Seven of those assessed with CSR cohort 1 were placed in the remedial program and ultimately became part of training cohort 2. They are reflected in the table as part of cohort 1 through “Assessed” and part of cohort 2 for all subsequent numbers.
- One person in the CSR program applied as part of cohort 1 but did not start training until cohort 2 (s/he was not part of the remedial program). This person is included in cohort 1 through "Assessed" and in cohort 2 in subsequent figures.
- One of the three Healthcare students employed out of the program has been on the job for three months; the other two were hired later.

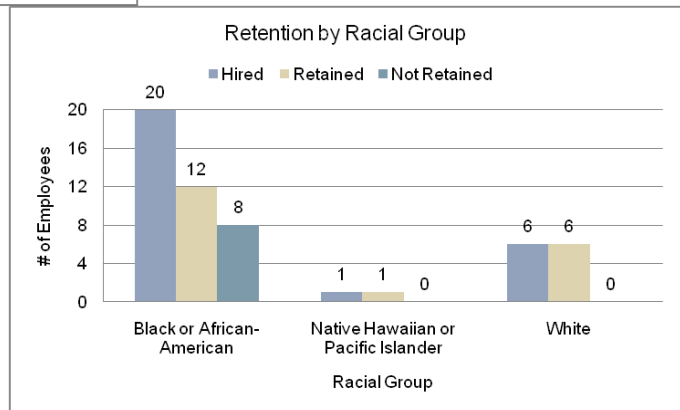
### Employee Demographics

This section focuses on employee retention as of 12/31/2009 based on demographics.

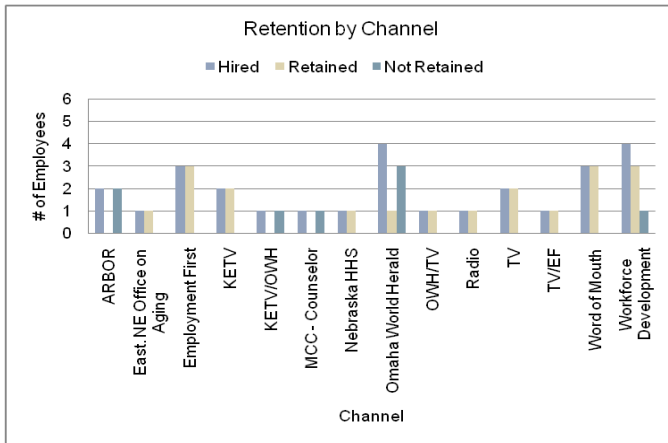


Zip Code	Hired	Retained	Terminated
68104		3	1
68110		1	0
68111		13	9
68112		3	2
68124		1	1
68131		3	3
68132		1	1
68133		1	1
68135		1	1
Grand Total	27	19	8

Racial Group	Hired	Retained	Terminated
Black/African-Amer	20	12	8
Nat. Hawaii./Pac. Island.	1	1	0
White	6	6	0
Grand Total	27	19	8



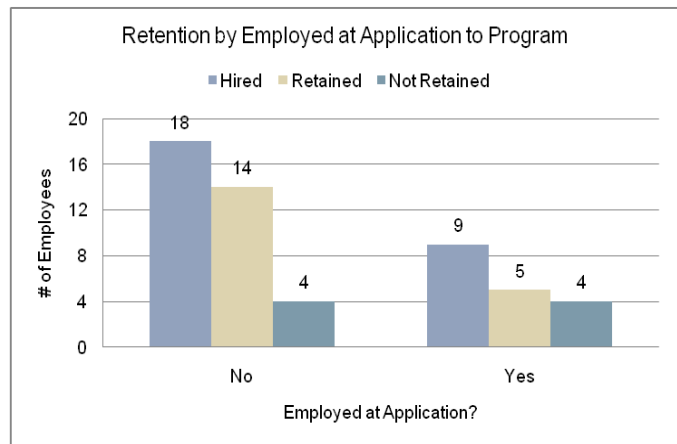
All turnover is amongst Black/African-Americans.



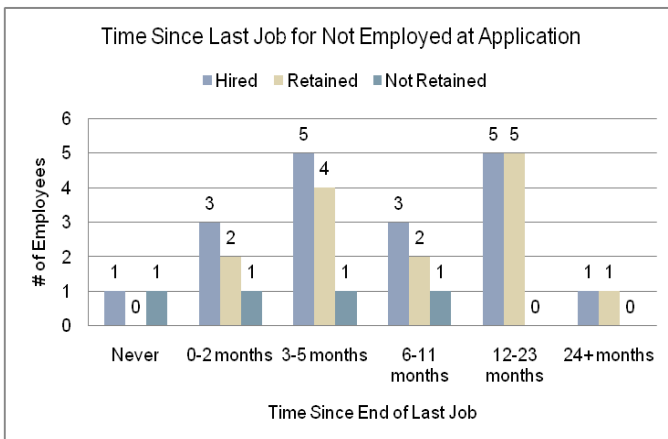
Channel	Hired	Retained	Terminated
ARBOR	2	0	2
East. NE Office on Aging	1	1	0
Employment First	3	3	0
KETV	2	2	0
KETV/OWH	1	0	1
MCC - Counselor	1	0	1
Nebraska HHS	1	1	0
Omaha World Herald	4	1	3
OWH/TV	1	1	0
Radio	1	1	0
TV	2	2	0
TV/EF	1	1	0
Word of Mouth	3	3	0
Workforce Development	4	3	1
Grand Total	27	19	8

Retention of employees is higher for some channels.

Employed at application	Hired	Retained	Terminated
No	18	14	4
Yes	9	5	4
Grand Total	27	19	8

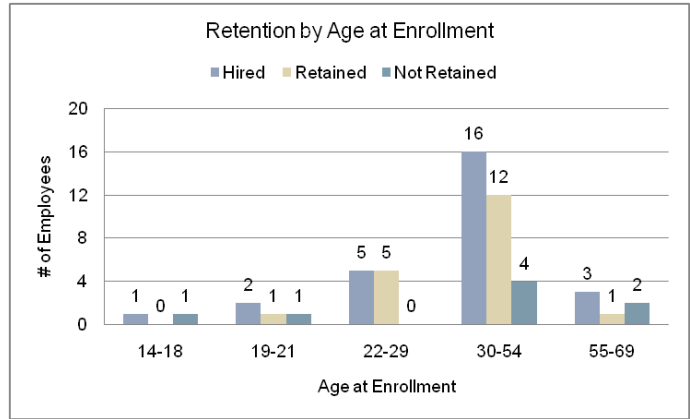


Of the 18 people who were not employed when they applied to the program, one person reported no previous work history. For the other 17, the time they had been unemployed ranged from one to 36 months. The average time of unemployment was 9.41 months, with a median of 7 months.



Last Employment	Hired	Retained	Terminated
Never	1	0	1
0-2 months	3	2	1
3-5 months	5	4	1
6-11 months	3	2	1
12-23 months	5	5	0
24+ months	1	1	0
Grand Total	18	14	4

Age Range	Hired	Retained	Not Retained
14-18	1	0	1
19-21	2	1	1
22-29	5	5	0
30-54	16	12	4
55-69	3	1	2
Grand Total	27	19	8



## II. Outputs and Outcomes – Financial Services Sector

OWC's first two cohorts are for the Customer Service Representative position with insurance companies. As of this writing, these cohorts have completed training and are now employed. The application process for the first cohort began in Summer 2008. The 16-week training program ran from September 2008 through January 2009. The second cohort completed their training in April 2009. The partnership consists of:

- Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Nebraska (BC/BS)
- Mutual of Omaha (MoO)
- Metro Community College
- Goodwill Industries
- Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce

### A. Individuals

#### Key Observations and Findings

Of the 24 participants completing the program and accepting a position, 16 remain employed by the end of Q4 2009.

- The first cohort has passed the nine-month mark with 12 being retained.
- The second cohort has passed the eight-month mark, with four retained. Two have reached the nine-month mark.
- One member of cohort 1 has been employed for over 12 months.

After six months from hire:

- All of the turnover (seven out of 24 employees) was among the African Americans – 61% of African American participants were retained after six months vs. 100% for all other ethnicities
- Participants receiving public assistance at the start of the program were retained at a higher rate after six months than those not receiving public assistance (77% v. 64%)
- Participants previously unemployed were retained at a higher rate after six months than those previously employed (80% v. 56%)
- Participants with more education were retained at a higher rate after six months than those with less education (82% for those with at least some college, v. 62% for those with high school or GED)

*Caution should be used in interpreting these numbers, as sample sizes are small.*

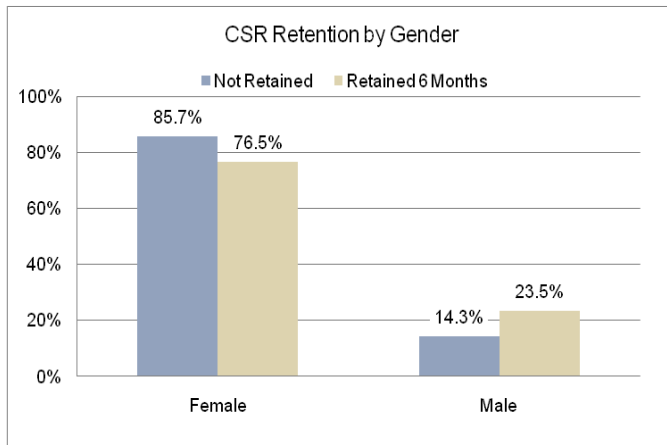
#### Wages

The following tables illustrate the wages earned by the remaining 16 employees. Blue Cross/Blue Shield has given raises to some of its employees. There have been no changes reported in the compensation of CSRs at Mutual of Omaha.

Employer	Hours/Week	Hourly Pay		
		Minimum	Maximum	Average
Blue Cross/Blue Shield	40	\$14.18	\$15.55	\$14.57
Mutual of Omaha	39	\$12.18	\$12.40 <sup>1</sup>	\$12.30

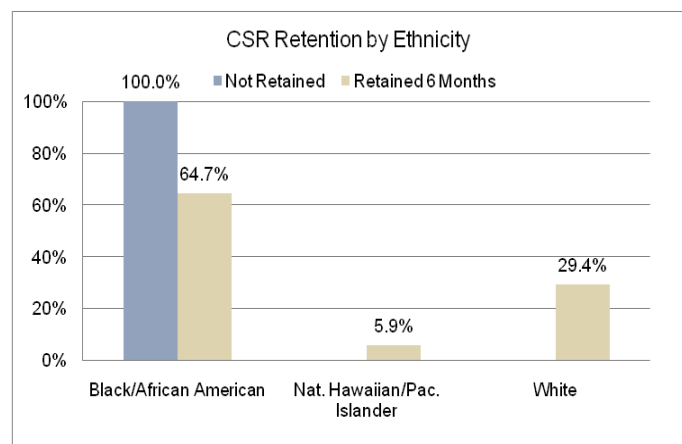
### Retention After Six Months

The figures and tables that follow illustrate the comparison between those hired but released within the first six months and those retained at six months. Seventeen CSRs remained employed at the end of six months. Data from both cohorts and both employers are combined. (Note that the earlier section looked at ALL retention as of 12/31/09 regardless of actual tenure.

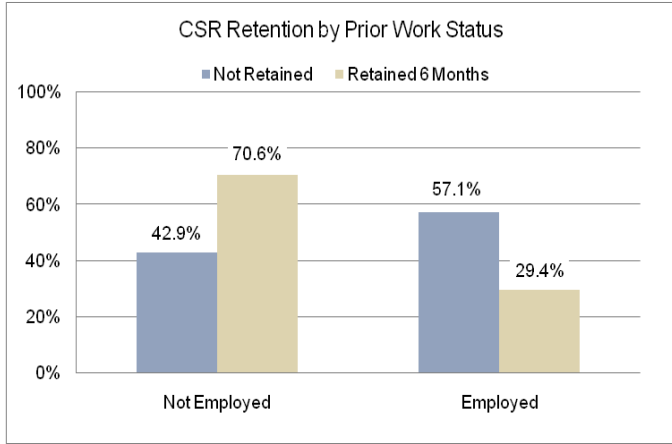


Gender	Not Retained	Retained 6 Months
	Female	6
Male	1	4
Grand Total	7	17

Ethnic	Not Retained	Retained 6 Months
	Black/African American	7
Nat. Hawaiian/Pac. Islander	0	1
White	0	5
Grand Total	7	17

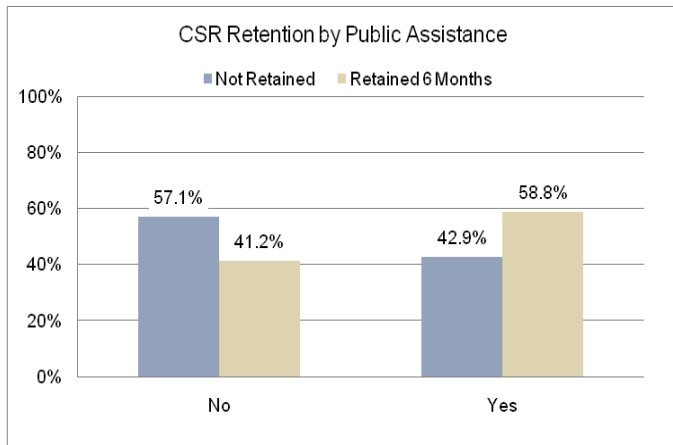
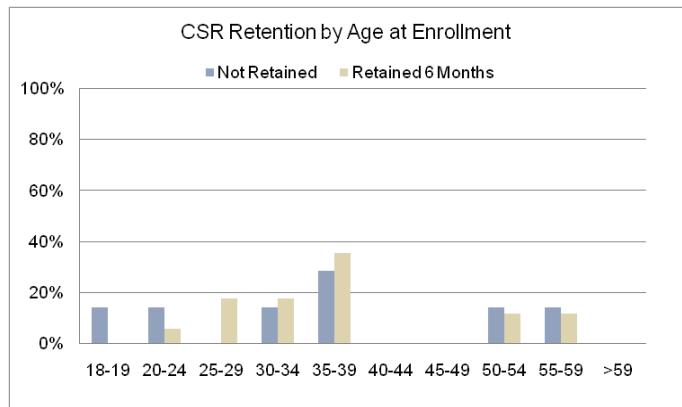


<sup>1</sup> The person making \$12.55 last quarter was released at the end of his/her contract, thereby decreasing the maximum pay of retained workers.

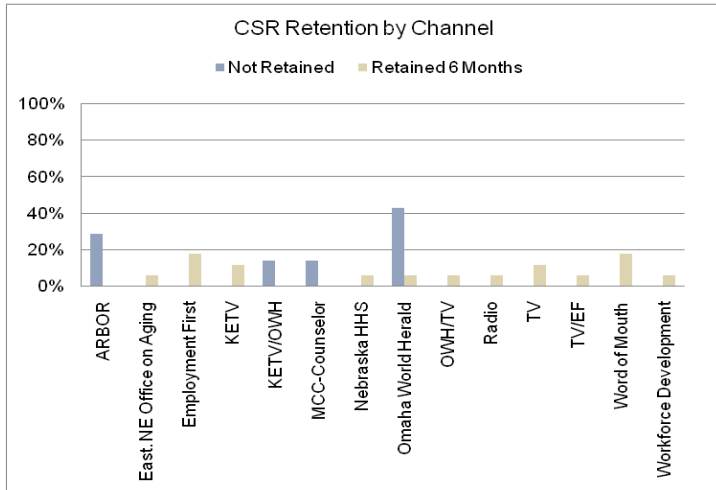


Prior Work Status	Not Retained	Retained 6 Months	Grand Total
Not Employed	3	12	15
Employed	4	5	9
Grand Total	7	17	24

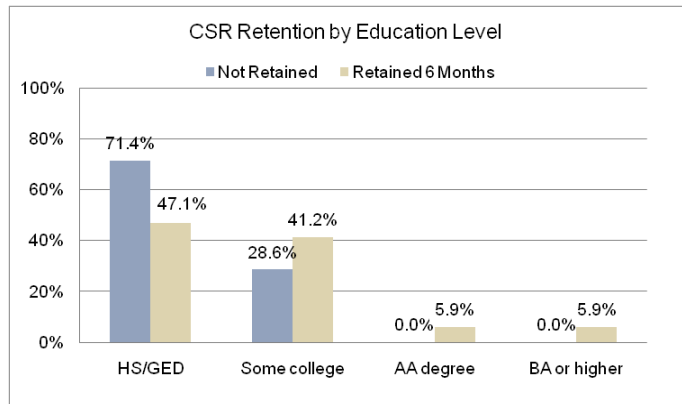
Age at Enrollment	Not Retained	Retained 6 Months
18-19	1	0
20-24	1	1
25-29	0	3
30-34	1	3
35-39	2	6
40-44	0	0
45-49	0	0
50-54	1	2
55-59	1	2
>59	0	0
Grand Total	7	17



Public Assistance	Not Retained	Retained 6 Months
No	4	7
Yes	3	10
Grand Total	7	17



Channel	Not Retained	Retained 6 Months
ARBOR	2	0
East. NE Office on Aging	0	1
Employment First	0	3
KETV	0	2
KETV/OWH	1	0
MCC-Counselor	1	0
Nebraska HHS	0	1
Omaha World Herald	3	1
OWH/TV	0	1
Radio	0	1
TV	0	2
TV/EF	0	1
Word of Mouth	0	3
Workforce Development	0	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>17</b>



### *Blue Cross/Blue Shield*

Cohort 1: Nine participants were hired with seven remaining as of 12/31/09.

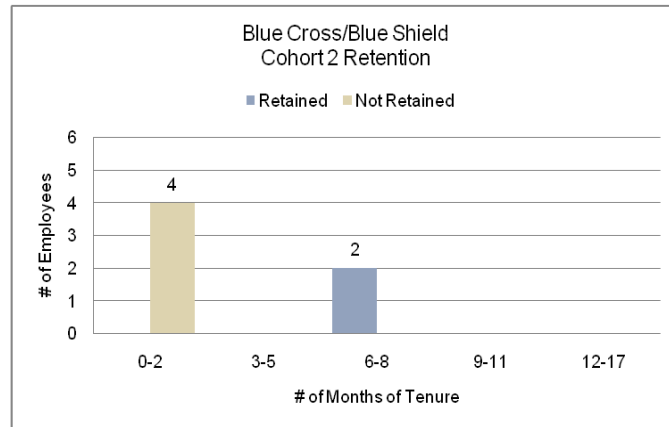
- Seven (77.8%) were still employed after six months
- One has earned a 7.7% raise from \$13.78/hr to \$14.85/hr
- All CSRs were retained since last quarter
- In total, two have been dismissed for poor performance

Cohort 2: Six participants were hired with two remaining as of 12/31/09.

- Two remain after six months (33.3%)
- All CSRs were retained since last quarter
- In total, four have been dismissed for poor performance

### *Performance*

Because Blue Cross/Blue Shield terminates any employee not meeting the performance standards of a traditional hire, no statements about performance improvement may be made. All employees have a performance rating of “Same.” However, the absence of any terminations indicates that participants are performing on a par with traditional hires.



### *Mutual of Omaha*

Cohort 1: Seven participants were hired with five remaining as of 12/31/09. However, three were reassigned outside of the CSR role to other positions.

- Since the previous report, one CSR was released for attendance reasons. One of the employees who had been reassigned from the CSR position was released at the end of his/her contract.
- In total, two are no longer employed by Mutual of Omaha

Cohort 2: Two participants were hired and both remain as CSRs.

- Both employees are retained in their original positions, at the end of three months.

### *Performance*

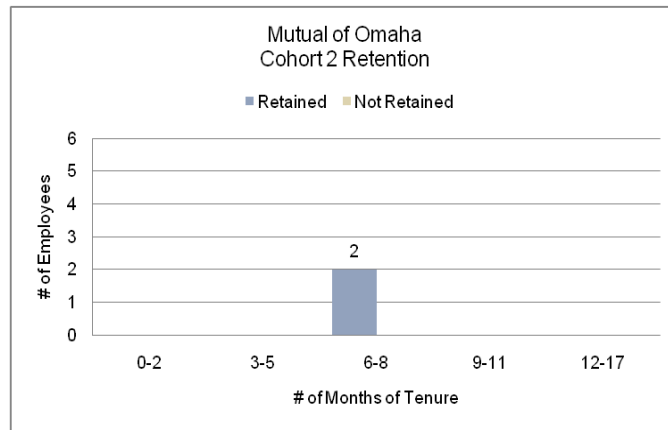
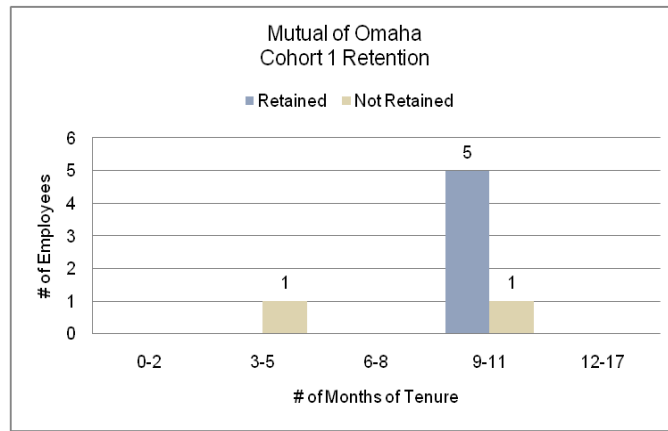
Of the eight remaining employees at Mutual of Omaha, five retained their rating of “Below” performance of a traditional hire. However, three have improved from a three-month score of “Below” to a six-month score of “Same.”

### *Enrollment in Advanced Training*

One member of cohort 2 has been enrolled in LOMA<sup>2</sup> 280: Principles of Insurance: Life, Health, & Annuities training. From the LOMA website, "LOMA 280 introduces the principles of insurance, the process of becoming insured, and the policy owner's contractual rights. The

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.loma.org/LOMA280.asp>

course includes information on the features of individual and group life insurance, health insurance, and annuity products."



## B. Employers

No employer interviews were conducted this quarter.

## C. Partnership

No workforce partnership interviews were conducted this quarter.

### III. Outputs and Outcomes – Healthcare Services Sector

The first cohort in the Healthcare sector is for Ophthalmic Assistants (OA). The application process began in May 2009. The eight-week training program ran from July 14 to September 1. The partnership consisted of:

- Midwest Eye Care (Midwest)
- University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC)
- Metro Community College (MCC)
- Nebraska Workforce Development (NWD)
- Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce

#### A. Individuals

Three individuals were hired from the training program. This report reflects their tenure as of 12/31/2009. One employee has been on the job for 90 days. All three have been retained.

#### Employee Demographics

The table below identifies the demographics of the three OA employees.

Gender		Ethnicity		Age		
Female	Male	Afri/Am	Cauc	Min	Avg	Max
2	1	2	1	24	32	46

Employed at Start		Public Benefits		Sole Wage Earner	
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
0	3	1	2	2	1

Education		Dependents		Relevant Experience	
High School	Some College	Yes	No	Yes	No
1	2	3	0	3	0

Omaha Grad		Criminal Record	
Yes	No	Yes	No
1	2	0	3

#### Wages

Two individuals have been hired full time and the third graduate has been hired part time. All are currently paid \$12.50/hour. They will be eligible for the employer's standard benefits

package after 90 days. (The one employee who has been employed for three months is eligible.)

### **Retention**

All three employees have been retained. One employee has been on the job for three months; the other two have been employed for two months.

### **B. Employers**

No employer interviews were conducted this quarter.

### **C. Partnership**

No partnership interviews were conducted this quarter.

## IV. Outputs and Outcomes – Trades Sector

The first OWC offering in the Trades sector is an introductory program to welding, derived from the welding program currently offered by Metro Community College. The application process began in May 2009, closing in June. The Ramsay Mechanical Aptitude Test (MAT) was administered to applicants in late June and early July. Those successfully completing the MAT were then reviewed for interview invitations. Final selection was made in July. The ten-week program began September 8 and ended on November 16. The partnership consists of:

- Metro Community College (MCC)
- YWCA of Omaha
- Distefano Tool & Mfg. Company
- Valmont Industries, Inc.
- Nebraska Workforce Development (NWD)
- Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce

### A. Individuals

Twelve students were accepted into the program. Eleven successfully completed.

#### Student Demographics

The table below identifies the demographics of the Pre-Welding students.

Gender		Ethnicity		Age		
Female	Male	Afri/Am	Cauc	Min	Avg	Max
1	11	3	8	1	21	37

Employed at Start		Public Benefits		Sole Wage Earner	
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
2	10	2	9	1	11

Education		Dependents		Relevant Experience	
High School	Some College	Yes	No	Yes	No
7	4	1	2	9	1

Omaha Grad			Criminal Record		
Yes	No	Unk	Yes	No	Unk
7	3	2	8	3	1

At the end of the program, none of the employer partners could make a job offer to program participants as no job openings were available. The employers cited the downturn in the economy and the usual winter slowdown as factors. The employers are hopeful that jobs will come available in the first quarter of 2010.

## **B. Employers**

No employer interviews were conducted this quarter.

## **C. Partnership**

No employer interviews were conducted this quarter.

## V. Appendix – Readings on Persistence

Examples from the California Adult Literacy Professional Development Project (2005) *Learner Persistence in Adult Basic Education*, California Adult Education Research Digest (vol 2, January 2005). Retrieved February 7, 2010 from <http://www.calpro-online.org/pubs/100719LearnerPersistenceNewsletterPress.pdf>

The Adult Education Persistence Scale, which measures schooling attitudes, self-efficacy, resilience, and attributions for success and failure, as an intake instrument. Ziegler, M., Bain, S., Bell, S., & Brian, D. (2003). *Dispositional variables predicting the persistence of welfare recipients in adult basic education*. In D. Flowers, M.-Y. Lee, A. Jalipa, E. Lopez, A. Schelstrate, & V. Sheared (Eds.), AERC 2003. Proceedings of the 44th Annual Adult Education Research Conference, pp. 465-470. San Francisco: San Francisco State University.

Use of a learning disabilities screening device, because some learners may be unaware of, or uncomfortable disclosing, disabilities. Goforth, D., & Jonik, M. (2001). *What works: Recruitment and retention of Ontario Works clients—Phase 2*. Ottawa: Workplace and Employment Preparation Branch, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities; National Literacy Secretariat, Human Resources Development Canada. Retrieved January 3, 2005 from <http://www.collegeupgradingon.ca/projrprt/whatwork/whatwork.pdf>.

A self-management/self-direction screening process to assess capacity for self-direction and to identify ways to build these skills. Goforth, D., & Jonik, M. (2001) and Reder, S., & Strawn, C. (2001). *Program participation and self-directed learning to improve basic skills*. Focus on Basics, 4(D), 15-18. Retrieved January 3, 2005 from <http://ncsall.gse.harvard.edu/fob/2001/reder2.html> (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 451 397)

Learner focus groups, which provide a forum for raising issues and concerns, give practitioners valuable feedback for assisting learners, and can evolve into learner support groups. See above reference Goforth, D., & Jonik, M. (2001)

Pre-enrollment opportunities for learners to observe classes and make peer contacts to ease the stress and anxiety in returning to school. Heffern, L. (2003). *Improving student drop-out rates through student observations and peer contacts*. McKeesport, PA: Pennsylvania Action Research Network. Retrieved January 3, 2005 from <http://www.learningfrompractice.org/paarn/monos03/Heffern.pdf>.

In-depth interviews with new students that explore past schooling, reasons for dropping out of high school, and goals for education and the future, which can build into writing assignments and provide information for making referrals to social agencies that can assist with some barriers. Jones, J. D. B. (1998, June). *Retention and the GED*. Focus on Basics, 2(B), 15-17. Cambridge, MA: National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 431 868)