

# BOSTON BUSINESS JOURNAL

## **ViewPoint: With talent tight, career centers shift model**

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Earlier this summer, James, a recent immigrant to the United States, had difficulty finding a job in the health care industry in Boston, despite extensive experience in the field in his native country. He attended a health care job fair, a few networking sessions, and a workshop on Opportunities in Health Care at JVS CareerSolution in Boston.



He was very nervous and unsure of how to approach employers. JVS staff introduced him to a contact at a leading home-care agency. The agency staff person saw great potential for James as a caregiver for their clients. He is now one of the agency's star employees.

Stories like James' are happening all over the commonwealth as the state's 32 One-Stop Career Centers retool their efforts to match great talent with employers' growing need for additional workers. Over the past year-and-a-half the state's regional career centers have shifted their operating model from one where they focused on finding jobs for unemployed individuals to one that is more employer-driven, where they work to place the right individual at a company looking for new employees. The goal is to help more unemployed individuals find work with the right company, while helping businesses grow in the commonwealth.

While Massachusetts' unemployment rate dipped to 3.9 percent in August — the lowest it has been in 15 years — the Baker-Polito administration has not lost sight of the fact that approximately 140,000 residents remain unemployed. In some parts of the state, and some population groups, the unemployment rates are stubbornly higher.

Within this new low-unemployment environment, employers must work harder than ever to find talent. The state's workforce system and career centers have an essential role to play.

The commonwealth's 32 One-Stop Career Centers are rolling out innovative strategies to match unemployed residents with companies that need talent.

The state Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development mobilized the state's One-Stop Career Centers to respond rapidly to employers that have hiring needs. For some career centers that previously built relationships with local employers, the shift has been easy. For example, the career center in Fall River has a long-standing relationship with Stop & Shop, where the supermarket chain's distribution center is located. During the past decade, the career center has helped place more than 600 employees at the Stop & Shop facility in Freetown.



Several career centers have initiated sector strategies through which they have developed focused industry expertise, relationships and customized programming. JVS CareerSolution in Boston is currently running two initiatives, one in health care and another in the hospitality sector. The initiatives include industry-specific networking groups for job seekers, training, job fairs, and recruitment sessions, as well as one-on-one coaching and job matching services. With career centers located in every region of the state, the workforce system is well-positioned to create flexible and responsive services that match the varied needs of key regional industries.

*Ronald Walker II is Secretary of Labor and Workforce Development of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and Jerry Rubin is president and CEO of Jewish Vocational Services, the operator of JVS CareerSolution, a Massachusetts One-Stop Career Center.*