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Federal aid boosts services for jobless

Stimulus funds go for hires, training



Mary Sarris, executive director of the North Shore Workforce (Aram Boghosian for The Globe)

By John Laidler
Globe Correspondent / February 18, 2010

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An infusion of federal stimulus dollars is providing a boost to area employment boards as they struggle to serve the growing ranks of job seekers.

The four Workforce Investment Boards serving this region have been allotted \$12.9 million from last year's federal stimulus law, funds they are using to expand training opportunities, job placement, and summer youth jobs.

The funding includes the four boards' \$2.2 million share of \$8 million that the state announced last month is being allotted to its 16 workforce investment boards under the federal Reemployment Services program. That money is being used to bolster services at the state's 37 one-stop career centers.

Workforce Investment Boards administer the career centers and develop broad-based strategies to meet the employment needs of their regions. The four in this region cover the North Shore, Metro North, Greater Lowell, and Merrimack Valley.

"This is a total and complete gift to us," Mary Sarris, executive director of the North Shore Workforce Investment Board, said of the \$2.9 million in overall stimulus money her board is receiving.

"We really are where the rubber hits the road in this recession," Sarris said of Workforce Investment Boards. "We are dealing with people who need to go to work, who are directly affected by this recession, and if we can't help them it will never get better."

As a reflection of the growing need for services, Sarris noted that while the number of people making initial unemployment insurance claims in her 19-community region fell by 559, or 13.9 percent between December, 2008 and

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December 2009, the total number of unemployment insurance claimants rose by 179, or 2.5 percent, to 7,316.

“So we are seeing the number of claims going down, but people on it longer, and that becomes the challenge,” she said.

The stimulus money allocated to the state’s workforce investment boards is augmenting regular yearly allotments they receive through five existing programs: the Reemployment Services and Wagner-Peyser programs, both of which help fund operation of employment centers; separate programs under the federal Workforce Investment Act that fund training for low skilled adults and laid-off workers; and a youth employment assistance program for economically disadvantaged youth funded under the same act.

The state is disbursing the Reemployment Services funding in separate allotments in fiscal 2010 and 2011. All the other funds come in a single allocation.

Saris said that her board used its Reemployment Services and Wagner-Peyser money to add four employees to its career centers, located in Lynn, Salem, and Gloucester.

She said with the larger staff, the board is able to “ease the customer flow through our centers, allowing us to target more direct one-to-one services to our job seekers.”

In particular, she said the added staff allows new job seekers to more quickly access such assistance as workshops, intensive career counseling, and coaching. [Continued...](#)



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