

**College:** Quinebaug Valley Community-Technical College  
**Location:** Danielson, Connecticut  
**Practice:** Career Transition Center  
 Providing one-stop career transition services to dislocated workers through a consortium of state, local, educational, and nonprofit agencies

<i>Year Started</i>	1994
<i>Budget</i>	\$200,000
<i>Practice Participants</i>	1,500 since inception
<i>College FTE</i>	597
<i>Target sector</i>	N/A
<i>Staff size</i>	5
<i>Structure</i>	Partnership among state, local, educational, and nonprofit
<i>Key outcomes</i>	Nearly 100% re-employment rate for re-trained workers 63% re-employment rate overall Over 500 job placements made

## Introduction

The northeastern corner of Connecticut is known as the “quiet corner” because of the peaceful attractiveness of its small towns and rural landscape. The abundance of its beauty, however, is in sharp contrast to its poverty. In fact, the region has another nickname: “the other Connecticut.” A rural pocket cut off from the urban resources, high income, and low unemployment that the rest of the state enjoys, this “other Connecticut” contains places where the welfare participation rate is more than 40 percent.

With a low tax base, high unemployment, and the loss of much of its manufacturing base, the region has a great need for worker transition services but few resources with which to provide

them. To address the situation, several employment and human services agencies came together to create the Career Transition Center, a particularly successful One Stop job center that makes the most of each agency’s strengths, maximizes available resources, and avoids duplication of services.

## Community Background

The service area of Quinebaug Valley Community-Technical College includes the ten small towns of Windham County (total population 105,000). At 9.6 percent, Windham County’s unemployment rate was the highest in Connecticut in 2000. Indeed, the county is on the U.S. Census Bureau’s list of Labor Surplus Areas. This list identifies towns where

Program focus	Sector specific	Economic condition	Economic base			Target populations
			Mfg	Agr	Svc	
Access and at-risk	No	Distressed	20	0.7	38	Dislocated workers

<i>Service Area</i>	<i>Windham County</i>
<i>Total Population</i>	105,000
<i>Median Household Income</i>	\$37,000
<i>% Below Poverty Level</i>	9.6
<i>% Unemployment Rate</i>	7.0
<i>% Minority Population</i>	1.8
<i>% Rural Population</i>	68
<i>% High School Graduates</i>	71.1
<i>% College Graduates</i>	16.8

unemployment is at least 20 percent above the U.S. average. In the last five years, only eight towns in the nation were on the list every year; three are in Windham County.

Like much of New England, northeast Connecticut's industrial and commercial past lies in manufacturing, particularly river mills. Today, the mill businesses are gone, and manufacturing has been in a steady decline. Several large firms have closed in the past three years. Most recently, Anchor Glass shut down, eliminating 350 high-paying jobs. Downsizing in defense-related industry has also hit the region hard. Witness the massive layoffs at General Dynamics.

While manufacturing still plays a major role in the region, services industries and warehousing are replacing it as the dominant sectors. Unfortunately, both tend to pay lower wages than manufacturing; both also tend to provide fewer full-time and more temporary and part-time jobs.

## Program Description

Quinebaug Valley Community-Technical College (QVC-TC) is a two-year comprehensive community college that provides Windham County with a variety of educational options. It offers 14 associate degrees, many occupation- or industry-specific, and 19 skills- and occupation-based certificates. Quinebaug has 1,200 students in credit courses (600 FTEs) and roughly 10,000 participants in non-credit activities. The college was founded in 1971 as Quinebaug Valley Community College. In 1992, the Connecticut legislature merged the state's community and technical colleges, expanding Quinebaug's mission to include technical programs. Quinebaug

Valley's mission includes a pledge to "be an active partner with the community in local economic, social, and cultural development."

In the early 1990s, Windham County's declining manufacturing and defense sectors, along with its growing unemployment rate, signaled a need for assistance to dislocated workers. And Workforce One, the local workforce development board, received competing proposals to offer these services. Because resources are scarce and because each of the submitting agencies offered valuable expertise, Workforce One asked them to find a way to jointly administer a program of assistance. QVC-TC submitted a successful proposal to lead a four-agency effort to open the Career Transition Center. The four agencies are QVC-TC; Connecticut Works, an agency of the Connecticut Department of Labor; EASTCONN, a specialized education services organization, and Workforce One, the workforce development board.

QVC-TC contributes to the center its space and facilities, access to its technical and vocational programs, and its director of Outreach and Employment Services to serve as the center's executive director. Connecticut Works provides access to a wide range of resources, including the nationwide job listings of the Automated Labor Exchange and data on economic and employment trends and forecasts. EASTCONN provides the client needs assessment. Workforce One provides planning and oversight assistance and most of the center's funds.

Since its inception in 1994, the Career Transition Center has provided more than 1,500 people with a variety of services, including skills assessment, workshops, technical assistance, job placement, and retraining programs. The process begins with an assessment of each client's skills and needs, followed by direction to appropriate workshops and other services that the center provides. Clients in this stage may also be referred to any appropriate support services offered by other agencies, such as counseling or substance abuse treatment. Based on the assessment, clients go on to participate in workshops covering topics such as labor market information, resume development, interviewing skills, and job searching on the Internet. Center staff also offers group and individual assistance in addition to the workshops.

The center is located on the QVC-TC campus, where clients have easy access to college facilities. The college library, which shares a building with the Center, has a career resource section containing

more than 800 titles. The staffed computer laboratory houses resources such as America's Job Bank, the computer guidance program SIGIPLUS, and Department of Labor job databases such as SOICC Career Paths. Administrative services such as copying, printing, and faxing are also available to center clients through the college's facilities. In order to begin the process of reemployment before the workers lose their jobs, the center also provides some of its services at the worksite of a firm that plans to close or downsize.

In addition to the services it provides for transitioning workers, the center also provides many services free of charge to anyone in the community. For example, through the center, employers can access detailed, reliable information about potential employees' skills, enabling them to find employees whose abilities and interests closely match their needs. The center also solicits input from employers on labor and training needs to help ensure that its workshops and training programs are relevant to the region's labor market.

## Outcomes

Since 1994, the center has served more than 1,500 clients, made more than 500 job placements, and retrained more than 300 dislocated workers. Sixty-three percent of those who receive any center service find work; among workers who receive retraining services, the center's job placement rate is nearly 100 percent. In 1996-97, the center had the best placement rate among all the transition centers in Connecticut.

Another indicator of the center's importance to the community is its ability to respond quickly and effectively to the area's changing needs—even when those changes are sudden and unexpected. In 1997, several manufacturers, including one of the region's largest employers, closed down within several months of each other. Demand for the center's services increased dramatically. It jumped from 270 clients in the 1995-96 period to 730 in the 1996-97 period. By reacting quickly to assess the region's needs, develop a response plan, and secure emergency funding, the center was able to place nearly every displaced worker in a new job.

On an individual level, many clients have written letters to the center thanking it for the assistance and support received during their job searches. What is common to all the letters is the mention of

the individual attention and positive encouragement that helped them through a difficult time in their lives. One client wrote:

*They got to know me and my abilities, and never suggested interviewing where I was not qualified, but gave me the confidence to reach a little farther than I might have. As a candidate I know that they took the time to understand my strengths and interests, and as an employer I know that they understand the needs of the employers in the area, and they do their best to match the two.*

## Strengths, Challenges, and Replicability

Representatives of the consortium agencies agree that one of the Career Transition Center's greatest strengths is its location on the Quinebaug Valley campus. The center's proximity to the college's professional and vocational programs enables it to draw on the college's strong links with area employers. Perhaps even more importantly, the college provides an atmosphere that is conducive to learning and retraining, and which helps to mitigate some of the indignities of unemployment.

Another strength of the Career Transition Center is its continual evaluation process. By designing its information systems to track all client use of the center and all client evaluations and outcomes, the center has been able to continually update and improve its services in response to client needs.

Perhaps the greatest strength of the Career Transition Center is the consortium itself. Not one of the partner agencies could, on its own, have provided comprehensive services for dislocated workers as effectively or economically as the center does. Workforce One's director points out that the facilities that the college provides, such as the staffed computer lab, the extensive library, and the access to database information, would never be affordable in a rural area if they had to be purchased solely for the use of dislocated workers. Services of an experienced assessment professional, as well as development of assessment tools and materials, would be similarly out of reach were they not provided by EASTCONN.

The partnership's benefits to the community may even continue beyond the center; EASTCONN's program director says that "building on the trust and relationships that have grown through the

center, other projects are becoming viable that maximize the use of local resources.”

Nonetheless, the program faces challenges for the future with the funding changes brought on by the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) that took effect in Connecticut on July 1, 2000. Regional workforce development boards such as Workforce One, which had been funded through the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), now receive funding through WIA to establish one-stop career centers. The change in funding streams brings with it some regulatory and structural changes. The center will now be a satellite one-stop career center for WIA. While the funding levels will not change greatly, more complex tracking requirements and performance measurement processes will pose some administrative challenges for the Career Transition Center.

The shift from JTPA to WIA has implications as well for the center’s replicability in other communities. All communities will now be receiving funds that must be used for one-stop career transition services, minimizing at least one barrier to replication. Once funds are secured, however, the challenge remains to find a way to use them as economically and effectively as possible to provide the widest range of necessary services to the community. While Connecticut’s quiet corner met this challenge through a partnership among state, local, educational, and nonprofit agencies, such a partnership is not as easy as it looks. In many communities, these sectors have no history of working together and may have to put much time and effort into establishing effective paths of collaboration. Still, as the Career Transition Center proves, it can be done.

*For more information, contact:*

Joan Macneil, Executive Director,  
Career Transition Center  
Quinebaug Valley Community College  
860-774-1130 – phone  
860-779-2998 – fax  
QV\_MACNEIL@commnet.edu