

# Maricopa Workforce Connections Sheds Best Kept Secret Image

Photos by Carolyn Dryer  
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Pamela Roberts gives a lesson in applying for a job. She is one of a group of trainers who help individuals find employment at the Maricopa Workforce Connection.



Yvette Castro, center, works the front desk at Maricopa Workforce Center. She is flanked by center coordinator Sergio Escamilla, left, and business workforce specialist Millie Bessey.

For adults looking for a new career path, or just seeking a good-paying job, there is an employment center that fills the bill just a short drive west along Peoria Avenue. It is the Maricopa Workforce Connection. MWC is at the old Arrowhead Mall at 9970 W. Peoria Ave. Tucked in the center of the

mall, the nearly 13,000-square-foot center is busy five days a week, helping people fill out application forms, teaching them how to prepare resumes, and making appointments with local businesses interested in hiring new employees.

On its Web site, the MWC states that its mission is “to promote workforce excellence by developing and providing qualified individuals and other resources to employers.” As you enter the lobby of MWC, you see dozens of people either sitting at computers or filling out forms. Center coordinator Sergio Escamilla said all of the computers are equipped with resume software and high-speed Internet. A library with resume resources is nearby for those who are not computer-literate. Just a few feet away is a fax machine, which individuals can use, for free, to send their resumes to potential employers. Every service and piece of equipment is free at MWC. There are phones for those who have no home phone or cell phone, and two hotline phones to apply for unemployment. There is also a program to provide voice mail for job seekers. It is free to sign up, and once you get a job, the phone is reset for another user.

Special equipment and software is available for people with disabilities. For individuals 55 years of age and older, the Area Agency on Aging provides a representative on site four days a week.

“That’s just one of 17 partners on site,” Escamilla said. “If you qualify, you receive subsidized employment, we get you started and on your feet.”

MWC is a Virtual One-Stop, one of two such sites in Maricopa County. Register and you can use any service and consult with any of the 17 partners on site.

“If I need a nurse at a hospital, I run a program – up pops several resumes on Virtual One Stop,” Escamilla said. “And people looking for jobs can look at the openings.”



Two of the most important services offered at MWC are client assessment and training. Pamela Roberts conducts workshops to teach job seekers how to conduct an interview. Amy Stake conducts assessments to determine a client's strengths and abilities to get them on a career path. The assessments are made on an individual basis, one on one. Stake also runs the customer service certification program. People come in, take a 90-minute exam and if they pass, they walk away with a certificate in

customer service. And, yes, it is free.

Next month, the MWC will mark its fifth anniversary at the Peoria location. It was previously in the old Manistee Town Center at 59th and Northern avenues. It has a sister facility in Gilbert, which offers a lot of the same services.

Orientations are held at 9:30 and 11:30 a.m., and 1:30 and 3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Tours of the facility are given at that time.

"Once we identify the services they need, we put them in touch with a person who can get them on the road," Escamilla said. "We're comprehensive and have all the jobs here ... we see 200 to 300 individuals a day. Last year, we saw more than 44,000 come through our door."

Millie Bessey, MWC business workforce specialist, said, "We do a lot of recruitment days. Companies come and set up a table. And we have a lot of repeats. It's beneficial to them."

Some days, the Peoria Unified School District comes in for three hours. Some companies actually interview at the site and make their decisions on the spot. "Career needs run the gamut," Escamilla said. "Entry level to mid-management." "Nobody really knows about it," Bessey said. "It's the best-kept secret out there." To learn more, call (623) 934-3231.

#### Sidebar: IF SPACE PERMITS

Maricopa Workforce Connection partners

Following are just a few of the partners on site at various times during the week:

Job Service – Department of Economic Security. Five or six staff people are on site five days a week. This department offers job searches and unemployment information.

Veterans. Representatives on site five days a week – veterans helping veterans.

Community college district. One person on site three days a week to help with registration and financial aid.

Work Links. This county program provides transportation for individuals up to six months, anything from a bus pass or if there is no bus route near an individual's home, a door-to-door shuttle service. It picks people up at their homes, takes them to work, then brings them back home after work for the first four months of employment. Time can be extended to six months.

“This allows people to get on their feet, save money to buy a car, or arrange with co-workers to carpool.” Escamilla said. “It usually allows them to retain and maintain a job.” Navigator. For people with disabilities, the program provides special help in locating job opportunities.

Phoenix Job Corps. For youth 16 to 24 years old.

AZ Call-A-Teen. This program places youth 14 to 21. It also provides stipends for clothing. AZ Call-A-Teen is at the Peoria MWC twice a week.

Arizona DES Trade Adjustment Assistance Program. This program helps with special training dollars to people who have lost jobs through their companies relocating overseas.

Adult Basic Education. For those who have not completed high school, this class meets 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday at the MWC to help people earn their General Educational Development (GED) degrees.