

NC DEPARTMENT OF  
**HEALTH AND  
HUMAN SERVICES**

## **Inclusion Works Lunch & Learn Series**

### ***Project Spark Update***

- **Alma Taylor**, Assistant Director for Employment Initiatives
- **Shayne Roos**, SWTCIE Grant Director
- **Bridget Hassan**, Project Manager  
**Division of Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities**

**February 18, 2026**

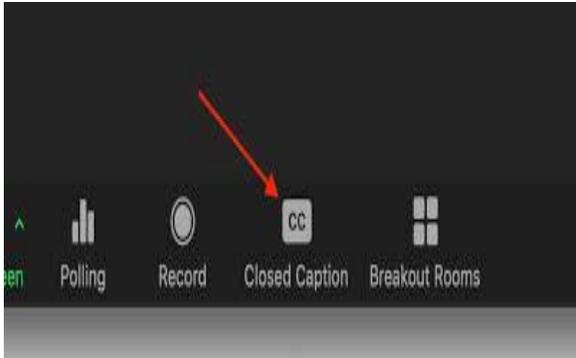


## Housekeeping

- Reminders about the webinar technology:
  - Please make sure you are using a computer or smart phone connected to the internet, and the audio function is on, and the volume is turned up.
  - Please make sure your microphone is muted for the duration of the call unless you are speaking or asking questions.
  - Questions can be submitted any time during the presentation using the “Q&A” box located on your control panel, and we will answer as many questions as time allows after the presentation.



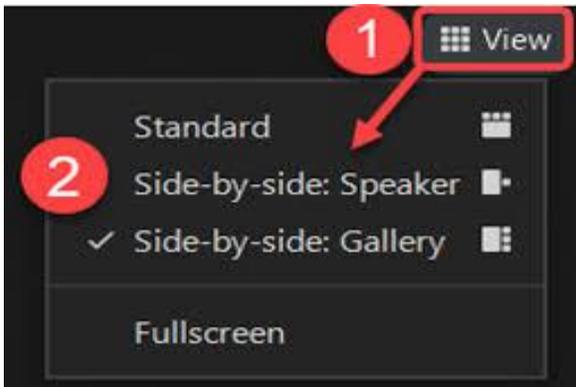
# Housekeeping



- American Sign Language (ASL) Interpreters and Closed-Captioning
  - ASL Interpreters and Closed-Captioning options will be available for today's event.
  - For closed-captioning options select the "Closed Caption" feature located on your control panel.

Intérpretes en lengua de signos americana (ASL) y subtítulos:

Habrán intérpretes de ASL y opciones de subtítulos disponibles para el evento de hoy. Para opciones de subtítulos, seleccione la función "Subtítulos" ubicada en su panel de control.



- Adjusting Video Layout and Screen View
  - Select the "View" feature located in the top-right hand corner of your screen.

# Agenda

1. **Introductions**
2. **Overview of Grant and SWTCIE Report**
3. **Provider Sites and Progress Overview**
4. **Initiation of Mini-Sites and Progress Overview**
5. **Q & A**



## Introductions



**Claire Colligan**, MS, LCMHC, LCAS, CCS  
I/DD Employment Lead, I/DD, TBI, & Olmstead  
*DMH/DD/SUS*

## Introductions



**Alma Taylor**, Assistant Director for Staff Acquisition and Employment Initiatives  
*Division of Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities (EIPD)*

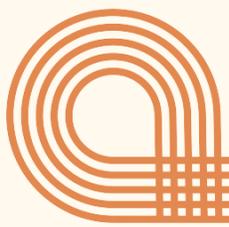


**Shayne Roos**, SWTCIE Grant Director  
*Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services*



**Bridget Hassan**, Spark Project Manager  
*Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services*

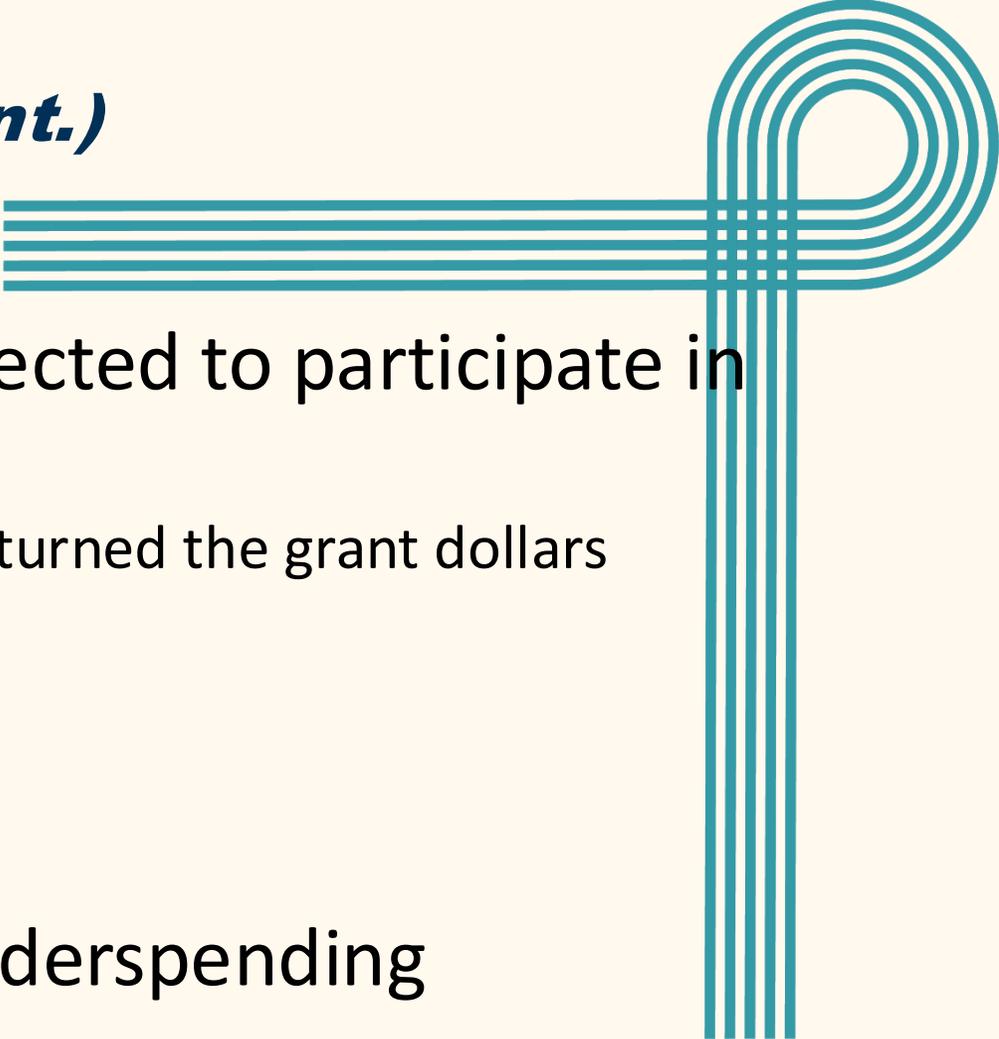
# Overview of Grant / SWTCIE Report



# Project Spark Overview

- Subminimum Wage to Competitive-Integrated Employment (SWTCIE)
  - U.S. Department of Education, **Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA)**
    - **Disability Innovation Fund (DIF)**
- Branded *Project Spark* in NC
- Purpose
  - Increase opportunities for Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) for students and adults with I/DD who are:
    - currently working in subminimum wage employment
    - contemplating subminimum wage employment
    - at-risk of subminimum wage employment

# Project Spark Overview *(cont.)*



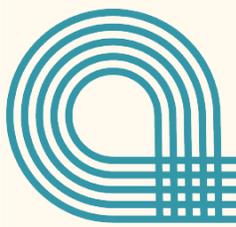
- North Carolina is among 14 states selected to participate in the five-year initiative
  - One state backed out of the initiative and returned the grant dollars
- Received \$14m
  - Halfway through Year 4
  - Over \$9m remaining
- All 13 states underperforming and underspending



# Project Spark Timeline

- **Year 1 (Oct. 2022 – Sept. 2023)**
  - Infrastructure developed
  - RFAs published and pilot sites selected
- **Years 2 & 3 (Oct. 2023 – Sept. 2025)**
  - Contracts signed and executed
  - Program positions hired and trained
  - Outreach materials developed and efforts launched
  - Outreach efforts launched
  - Referrals received and enrollment
  - Services implemented
- **Year 4 (Oct. 2025 – Sept. 2026)**
  - Services continue
  - Mini sites operationalized





# Project Spark Goals Breakdown

- **Contact = 700**
  - 500 adults
  - 200 students
- **Enroll = 450**
  - 300 adults
  - 150 students
- **Employ = 250**
  - 25 transitioning out of SWE
  - 225 contemplating SWE

# Project Spark Goals Progress

- **Contacted = 186/700 (27%)**
  - 95 adults
  - 91 students
- **Enrolled = 177/450 (39%)**
  - 68 adults
  - 79 students
- **Employed = 28/250 (7%)**
  - 4 transitioned
  - 24 contemplating



# Provider Sites / Progress Overview



# Spark Program

- TriCounty Industries, Rocky Mount
- Wake Enterprises, Raleigh
- Chatham Trades, Siler City





## Project Spark Pilot Site - TCI

- Serving 60 people in Employment in the Community
- Serving 60 people in Community Engagement
- Providing/scheduling transportation for all 60 people
- Limited public transportation service
- Supporting six people in CIE in Job Retention
- Currently have nine staff on the Spark team
- Added a staff member to provide Community Engagement





## **Project Spark Pilot Site – Wake E**

- **Serving 67 people in Employment in the Community**
- **Serving 38 people in Community Engagement**
- **Providing or scheduling transportation for 32 people**
- Have options for transportation
- **Supporting 11 people in CIE in Job Retention**
- **Currently have 7 staff on the Spark team**
- Have struggled with getting and maintaining staff

# Project Spark Pilot Site – Chatham Trades

- Serving 19 people in Employment in the Community
- Serving 6 people in Community Engagement
- Providing or scheduling transportation for 7 people
- Supporting 4 people in CIE - Job Retention
- Rural Community with limited transportation options
- Currently have 6 staff on the Spark team



## Lessons Learned So Far

- Having an I/DD Peer Mentor on team has a positive impact
- Ensuring that every person supported has ongoing support from Benefit Counselor
- Benefit Counselor ensures financial literacy training is part of the service
- Technology is provided to each participant
- Spark MCO coordinator to assist with connection and communication to other providers such as Tailored Care Managers, residential providers, etc.





# Outreach: Spark

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- Ignite the Spark Events – Resource/Provider Fair
  - March 17, 2026 – Pittsboro, Chatham County
  - May – Rocky Mount
  - July – Raleigh
  - September – Chatham
  - November - Statewide Event

# Spark Success

## Pizza Hut – Job Sampling to Employment

Job Sampling  
*with*



“Clifton did such an amazing job during those visits and the feedback from my staff prompted us to offer him a position”

- John Wendt, General Manager  
Pizza Hut of Roanoke Rapids



*Spark  
Success  
Story*

**Clifton L.**  
*TCI Works*

Clifton worked hard, impressed the team, and now has a job that he is proud of.



# Initiation of Mini-Sites / Progress Overview

- We added Spark Mini Sites to provide these supports in 10 additional counties
- Spark Mini-Site Locations – 10 EIPD Offices
  - East: Wilmington, Jacksonville, Greenville, Wilson
  - Central: Durham, Greensboro, Winston-Salem
  - West: Asheville, Gastonia, Forest City

# Spark Site and EIPD Mini Site Success

- Win/Win/Win...
- VR counselor, Navigator, Business Relations Reps, Providers and, most of all, the Client Wins through Spark with the increased supports!



# Questions?

**Project Spark Website:** [Project Spark | NCDHHS](#)

**Stay Connected**

## Want to get connected?

### Inclusion Works Advisory Committee

**Purpose:** To provide a forum to hear the perspectives and opinions of individuals, families, advocates, and providers around the updates and implementation of the Strategic Plan for CIE in North Carolina

**Meeting Time:** Third Tuesday of every 3 months at 11:00am. **Next Meeting on April 21, 2026.**

## Interested in joining?

**Email:** [Claire.Colligan@dhhs.nc.gov](mailto:Claire.Colligan@dhhs.nc.gov)

# Stay involved with updates from Inclusion Works!

Register for our bi-monthly [Lunch and Learns](#)



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