

CHAPTER V

SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE CERCs

To learn how the CERCs operate and to derive lessons that may be useful to future One-Stop initiatives, it is important to understand how the CERCs have been implemented and what services they provide. Officials from the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC) reported that they did not develop standardized procedures for service provision because circumstances in each local community, which varied widely across the CERCs, dictated much of their operations. For example, the types of partnering agencies participating in the CERCs, and their level of participation, vary from community to community. Moreover, officials said that the accelerated planning schedule within the Strike Force did not allow time for in-depth discussion of service integration issues, such as developing common intake forms or tracking systems. Nevertheless, although many procedures and systems have been developed locally, service provision is similar across the four CERCs. This chapter describes the services provided by the CERCs, including their community outreach efforts; services provided by VEC staff who operate the CERCs; and services offered by partnering agencies. Where relevant, we highlight similarities and differences in the services provided across the four sites.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

In each community, state and local officials organized high-profile ribbon-cutting ceremonies to publicize the opening of the CERCs. All of these events were attended by state and local officials; Governor Warner attended the ceremonies in Clarksville and Marion. The local media covered the openings, thus providing the CERCs with considerable publicity. During the initial period of operation, CERC managers reported continued coverage by local newspapers and television and radio stations. In most cases, however, coverage waned after a month or so.

In addition to the publicity generated by the ribbon-cutting ceremonies, the CERCs employed several community outreach strategies. VEC staff tried to inform dislocated workers about the CERCs directly. For example, the VEC sent a letter to all former

employees of Russell Stover Candies, inviting them to visit the CERC in Clarksville and informing them of the services available. When layoffs are announced, VEC Rapid Response teams typically provide information and services to workers on site in factories and other workplaces. Staff reported that they provided information about the CERCs during these sessions and encouraged workers to seek services at the CERCs. In addition, several CERCs placed regular public service announcements on local radio stations. Meanwhile, the VEC produced a brochure for each CERC, describing the services offered and including a schedule informing people when each of the partnering agencies would be on site. The Marion CERC, in particular, reported distributing these brochures widely to local churches and other service providers. Finally, each CERC placed a large sign in front of the building that reads “Coordinated Economic Relief Center.”

In most CERC communities, VEC and partner staff felt that it would have been helpful to have more publicity on an ongoing basis, such as ongoing weekly advertisements in the local newspapers, to inform the community about the services available. VEC staff in some sites thought that more advertising and outreach by partnering agencies, in addition to outreach conducted by the VEC, could have helped publicize services offered by the CERCs. In South Boston, however, staff reported that, because the volume of customers was already so high at the VEC office (where the CERC is located), they did not feel the need to conduct an extensive outreach campaign to promote the CERC.

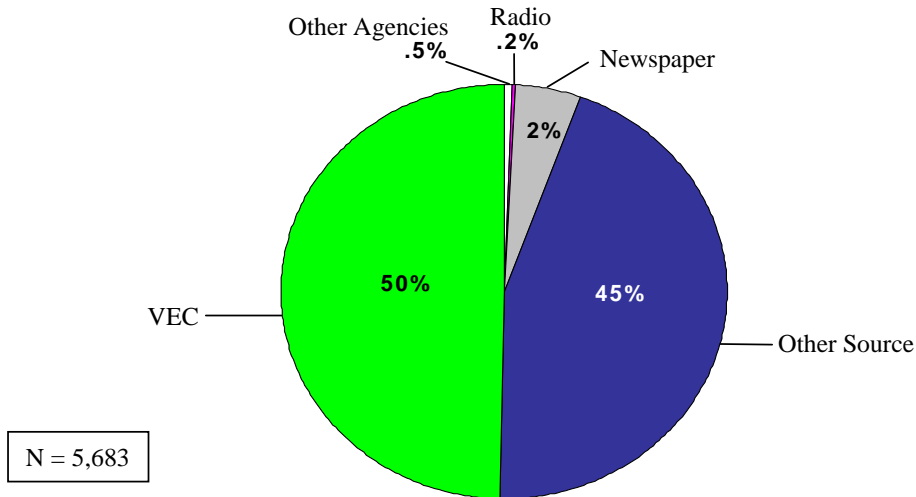
CERC staff in all sites ask customers to complete an initial intake checklist, which includes a question on how they found out about the CERCs. Customer responses suggest that most of them learned about the CERC from the VEC; these responses ranged from 21 percent in South Boston to 81 percent in Martinsville (Figures V.1 to V.4). A substantial percentage reported “another source,” ranging from 6 percent in Marion to 45 percent in Clarksville and South Boston. During the site visits, some staff speculated that many customers heard about the CERC by word of mouth, rather than as a result of CERC outreach efforts. Thus, the “other source” reported by some customers could have been a word-of-mouth referral from a family member, friend, or former coworker. Few customers reported that they were referred to the CERC by another service provider. With the exception of Marion, few of them reported learning about the CERC from public service announcements on television or radio, and few learned about the CERC from newspaper articles or advertisements.

SERVICES PROVIDED BY CERC STAFF

This section describes the services provided on site at the CERC by VEC staff. These staff provide core intake and referral services to CERC customers. They also provide the full range of VEC services, including job service registration, job search assistance, and assistance with Unemployment Insurance (UI), Trade Act, and Workforce Investment Act (WIA) services.

FIGURE V.1

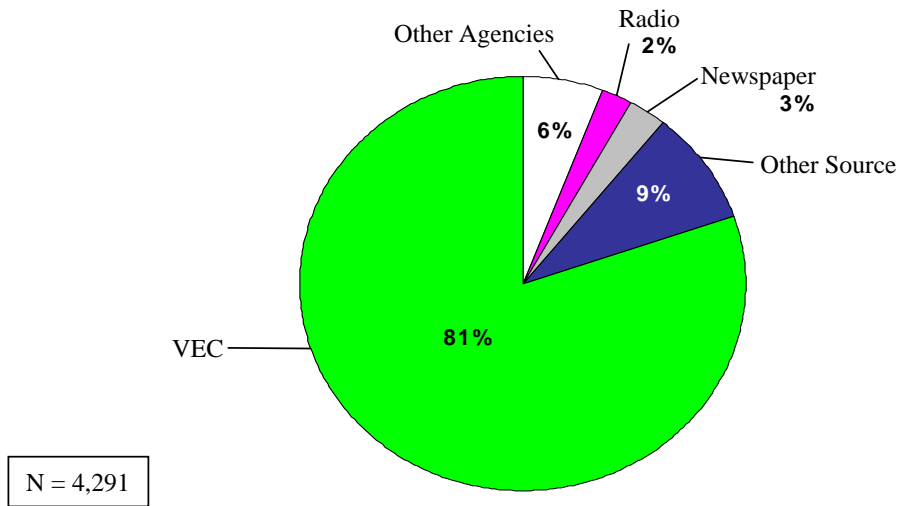
PERCENTAGE OF CUSTOMERS WHO LEARNED ABOUT THE CERC
FROM VARIOUS REFERRAL SOURCES
CLARKSVILLE



Note: Sources do not total to 100 percent due to rounding error.

FIGURE V.2

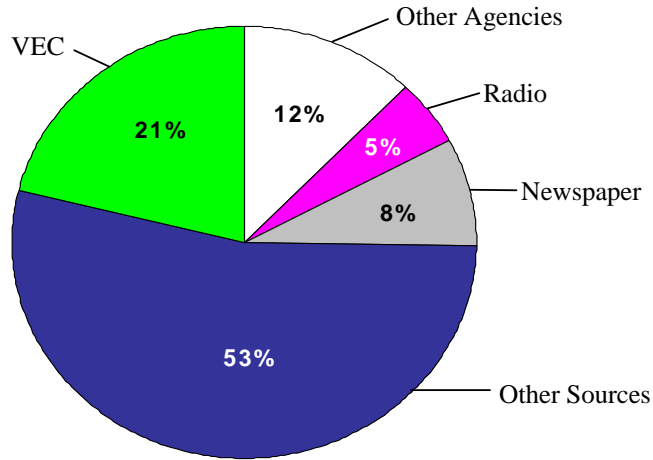
PERCENTAGE OF CUSTOMERS WHO LEARNED ABOUT THE CERC
FROM VARIOUS REFERRAL SOURCES
MARTINSVILLE



Note: Sources do not total to 100 percent due to rounding error.

FIGURE V.3

PERCENTAGE OF CUSTOMERS WHO LEARNED ABOUT THE CERC
FROM VARIOUS REFERRAL SOURCES
SOUTH BOSTON

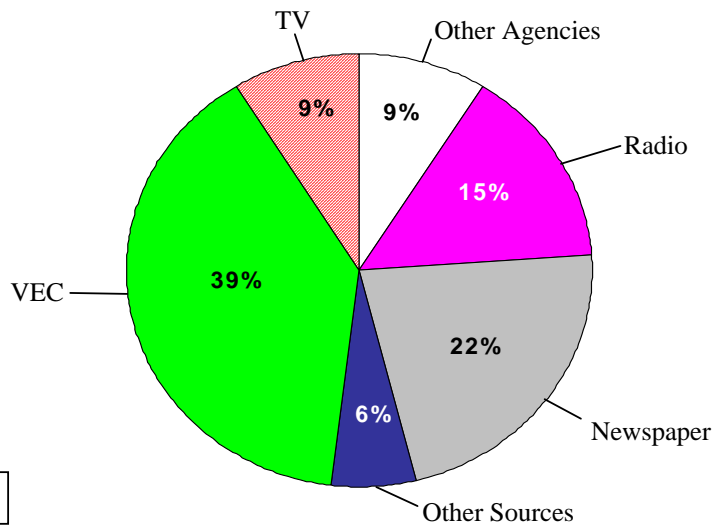


N = 1,412

Note: Sources do not total to 100 percent due to rounding error.

FIGURE V.4

PERCENTAGE OF CUSTOMERS WHO LEARNED ABOUT THE CERC
FROM VARIOUS REFERRAL SOURCES
MARION



N = 1,492

Note: Sources do not total to 100 percent due to rounding error.

VEC staff at the CERCs provide all intake and referral services to CERC customers.

When customers come in to CERC, they meet with a VEC worker at the intake desk who logs them into the computer system and records their name, social security number, referral source, and services sought. In Marion and South Boston, customers are then called in the order in which they arrive in the waiting area for a one-on-one interview with the next available workforce service representative (WSR) or with a representative from a partnering agency, if an appropriate person is on site. In Clarksville and Martinsville, the two VEC staff on-site provide intake for both CERC and VEC services. Typically, as soon as they are logged in, customers are served by VEC staff or are referred to a partnering agency. Customers in Clarksville and Martinsville usually are served in the front room, where other customers may be waiting to be served, but VEC staff will sometimes take them to a private office to discuss issues that are personal or sensitive.

CERC staff members conduct minimal needs assessments. With the exception of the Marion CERC, customers' needs are not routinely assessed at intake, and staff typically do not offer services unless a request is made or unless there is an observable need for specific services. Staff thought that because most dislocated workers have worked and supported themselves for years, and because many have never used any type of government assistance program, asking for help can be difficult and embarrassing. Consequently, because they do not want to stigmatize or offend them, most CERC staff are reluctant to ask customers about their need for services beyond those requested. Instead, they tend to think that customers will learn about the availability of services from information posted in the waiting areas and will request referrals as needed. VEC staff at the Marion CERC, on the other hand, said they consistently ask customers about their needs, regardless of whether customers express needs or request non-VEC services. As in the other sites, intake staff first ask customers to complete a one-page intake form indicating the services and referrals sought. In Marion, however, a WSR then reviews the intake form with the customer and conducts an informal verbal assessment in which the WSR probes about various needs.

Strategies to link customers to non-VEC services range in intensity from providing a directory of service providers to helping customers schedule appointments with partner agencies. Intake staff generally serve as the liaison between customers and partnering agencies by providing customers with information about other service providers and linking them to the appropriate services through appointments and referrals. Once a need has been identified, staff may ask customers to complete a one-page form indicating the services they are interested in receiving and the agencies to which they would like to be referred. Intake workers then refer customers to the appropriate agency representative on site at the CERC, if one is available. If a representative is not on site that day, the intake worker provides the customer with a schedule indicating the days and times the representative will be on site, and suggests that the customer return on the appropriate day or go directly to the agency's main office for more immediate assistance.

Staff then fill out referral forms for customers, which can include a statement of the customer's needs or simply his or her name and social security number, depending on the site. In most cases, staff have customers contact the partnering agency themselves; however, occasionally staff will contact the agencies by telephone and may even schedule

appointments for customers. This usually occurred when a customer had an urgent need for such services as emergency food assistance. As an alternative to making referrals, some workers said that they simply provide customers with a directory of community service providers and suggest they call agencies in the directory to get the help they need.

The CERCs do not provide ongoing case management. Due to the high volume of customers served, CERC staff believe it is a more efficient and equitable approach to have customers meet with the next available staff person, rather than to assign a specific case manager to each individual. This is viewed as more efficient, because customers can be seen almost immediately and do not have to wait for a particular case manager to become available. It is considered more equitable because it ensures that all WSRs work with approximately the same number of cases. Moreover, because CERC staff do not coordinate services across providers or provide ongoing case management, assigning customers to specific staff members was considered unnecessary.

VEC staff do not systematically follow up with CERC partners on the outcome of their referrals. In all four CERCs, referral forms that are given to CERC partners provide space for agencies to report back to the VEC on customer outcomes. CERC staff in all sites reported, however, that they usually do not receive completed forms back from their partners. In Marion and South Boston, some WSRs said they made concerted efforts to follow up with partners and customers, to determine whether the customer obtained the service sought, and the outcome of the service.

Partnering agencies in some sites said they could not provide outcome information on specific customers due to confidentiality restrictions. In response to this concern, staff at the Clarksville CERC were attempting to obtain aggregate, rather than individual, reports on CERC customers' outcomes from partnering agencies. For example, the CERC would provide DSS with the names of 10 customers referred from the CERC. DSS would report back that three of them had enrolled in the Food Stamp Program (FSP), and two had enrolled in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

Customers can register for the VEC's job service and conduct job search activities in CERC resource rooms.

When a customer comes to any of the four CERCs in search of a job or to file an Unemployment Insurance (UI) claim, intake workers check the VEC's computer system to see whether the person is already registered with the job service. Customers typically are required to register for the job service when they file a UI claim or ask to search the VEC's database of job listings. Customers begin the process by filling out a form and supplying information on their qualifications and the type of work they desire. Once this form is complete, staff register customers by entering the information into the VEC's job service system. Next, staff conduct a computer search of all job orders, to generate a list of jobs that match the customer's qualifications and interests. If the customer is interested in any of the jobs, CERC staff look up additional information on the job order and provide it to the customer. Once customers have registered with the job service, staff notify them by letter

when they receive job orders from employers who are a good match with customers' qualifications and interests. Customers can return to the CERC as often as they like to conduct job searches.

Job search is primarily self-directed through the use of "resource rooms." All four of the CERCs provide a resource room in which customers can use computers to search the VEC's database of current job orders or to create resumes. They can also make copies, make telephone calls, and fax resumes to employers. The resource rooms also contain videos and printed materials about creating resumes, conducting job searches, and improving interviewing skills. In addition to the resource room, the lobby of the Marion CERC (also the VEC office) is arranged so that customers have access to information on a broad range of services from the moment they walk in the door. It contains several kiosks and tables with brochures, schedules, and flyers from service providers, educators, and employers. The lobby and the resource room contain computers for those who want to search the VEC's database for jobs that match their interests and skills.

In Martinsville and Marion, VEC staff assigned to the resource rooms provide customers with personal attention and assistance with job searches. These staff members identify customers' qualifications and interests and direct them to various resource books and resume-preparation programs. In Marion, a WSR staffs a help desk in the VEC's lobby. This person can assist customers in registering for the job service and in accessing an online database to conduct their job search. Once customers have compiled a list of job orders that match their interests and skills, they can meet with a WSR to obtain more information about the positions. Similarly, in Martinsville, the VEC office services specialist helps customers with a variety of activities, such as resume preparation, contacting employers, and obtaining driving directions to interview sites using mapping software. At the time of the site visit, the Martinsville CERC was planning to offer in its resource room typing and computer tests (such as for Word, Excel, and Power Point), which are required for some positions. In addition, both resource room staff persons assist customers with computer-based job searches, resume and cover letter preparation, and improving their job interviewing skills. These staff are able to give customers personal attention and to address barriers to employment, such as inability to use a computer.

Customers can receive immediate assistance with UI at all the CERCs.

Customers can file UI claims at the CERCs; this is one of the most commonly sought services in all of the sites. Intake staff can provide customers with information about UI and can answer questions about eligibility, use of the automated UI verification system, and extension of benefits. CERC staff in Clarksville noted that many customers initially have difficulty calling into the verification system, and that they sometimes are confused by the menus or make mistakes in keying in information on the telephone. When this occurs, CERC staff take customers to a private office, call the verification system by speakerphone, and help them enter the required information.

Staff thought that CERCs not housed within the VEC office were providing more personal attention to UI claimants. In all four sites, VEC staff have witnessed an increase in the volume of UI claims in recent years as a result of mass layoffs and plant closings in their service areas. The increase in UI claims has increased the burden for staff, as VEC offices are serving more customers without additional staff or resources. As a result, staff have less time at their disposal to provide personal attention to customers and to identify needs for non-VEC services. Because stand-alone CERCs serve a lower volume of customers than do the main VEC offices, staff at the Clarksville and Martinsville CERCs felt that they had been able to provide more personal attention to UI claimants; for example, they could answer more questions and give a more thorough explanation of how to use the automated reporting system.

Customers can file Trade Act claims at the CERCs and can receive assistance enrolling in education and training programs through the Trade Act.

Trade Act programs provide assistance and services (such as education, training, and some supportive services) to dislocated workers who have become unemployed because of increased imports (Trade Adjustment Assistance), or because of imports from Canada or Mexico or a shift in production to these countries (North American Free Trade Agreement-Transitional Adjustment Assistance).¹¹ Workers laid off from companies that obtain certification from the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) under one of these programs qualify for Trade Act programs. Once a worker group has been Trade Act-certified, employees can apply for benefits and services through the VEC. The Marion and South Boston CERCs, both of which are housed in the VEC office, have staff on site who can accept Trade Act claims. In Martinsville and Clarksville, CERC staff are able to provide information and answer questions about Trade Act eligibility and services, as well as schedule appointments for customers to file Trade Act claims at the CERC.

Many of the plants in the four CERC service areas that have closed in recent years are Trade Act-certified. In Marion, most of the textile plants and many of the furniture manufacturers that have closed were able to obtain Trade Act certification, and several others were awaiting a decision about certification as of February 2003. Burlington Industries, formerly one of Clarksville's largest employers, was certified by DOL. Similarly, in South Boston, Tultex, J.P. Stevens, and Burlington Industries were all certified by DOL. Almost all the plants in the Martinsville-Henry County area that have closed in the past few years are Trade Act-certified.

¹¹With the passage of the Trade Adjustment Assistance Reform Act of 2002 in November 2002, the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) and North American Free Trade Act-Transitional Adjustment Assistance (NAFTA-TAA) were merged into a single program. However, most dislocated workers in the CERC communities would have applied for certification before November 2002 under either TAA or NAFTA-TAA.

In three of the four CERCs, customers can enroll in WIA programs and receive ongoing case management from WIA staff.

The WIA combined several federal funding streams for employment and training services to create a more streamlined, flexible workforce development system. Through WIA dislocated worker and disadvantaged adult programs, customers typically receive education, training, and supportive services, such as assistance with transportation and child care. Because WIA does not provide money for living expenses, students sometimes need to obtain additional funding through UI or the Pell Grant. Some customers opt for short-term training programs, such as truck-driving courses, that can be completed before their eligibility for UI ends. In South Boston and Marion, WIA staff are available on site at the CERC to enroll customers. In Clarksville, staff from the VEC's South Hill office come to the CERC periodically to enroll customers in the program. Initially, the Martinsville CERC had four VEC staff on site to enroll customers in WIA and to provide case management. In July 2002, however, Patrick Henry Community College assumed responsibility for providing WIA services. Since that time, WIA case managers have been located at the college.

VEC staff reported that they often enroll customers in both the WIA and Trade Act programs, because WIA can pay for some supportive services that Trade Act programs do not cover. For example, the Trade Act programs do not cover the cost of child care during trainings; but WIA does. Trade Act programs pay for transportation to training only if the training is more than 25 miles from the customer's home. WIA can cover transportation costs for shorter distances. Generally, when customers are eligible for both WIA and Trade Act services, an attempt is made to combine the services available under both programs to better meet customers' needs.

SERVICES PROVIDED BY PARTNERING AGENCIES

This section describes the services that partnering agencies have offered through the CERCs—either on site or through referral—including social services, emergency assistance, education, training, employment services, health insurance enrollment, and free or low-cost medical services. We also examine the extent to which the services provided by partnering agencies have been co-located at the CERCs.

Public, faith-based, and charitable organizations provide social services and emergency assistance through the CERCs.

The Virginia Department of Social Services (DSS) is a partner in each of the CERCs and the main provider of social services. These services include public benefit programs, such as TANF, Food Stamps, and Medicaid, as well as supportive services like child care, transportation, and emergency assistance. DSS also enrolls eligible participants in the Virginia Initiative for Employment Not Welfare program, Virginia's employment program for TANF recipients. In addition, DSS offices in some communities provided limited emergency assistance and referrals to churches and charities for shelter, food, clothing, and help with bill payment.

The extent to which DSS workers can provide a full range of services while on site varies across the CERCs. DSS eligibility workers at the CERCs in Clarksville, Martinsville, and South Boston have access to the agency's databases, computerized applications systems, and eligibility charts. In Clarksville and South Boston, DSS workers are able to take applications for TANF, the FSP, and Medicaid while on site at the CERC. However, they reported that most customers need to take the additional documentation necessary to complete their application to the main DSS office on a later day. In Clarksville, if customers do not have all the documentation an application requires, they can mail it in without having to visit the DSS office. DSS workers in Clarksville will also schedule recertification appointments at the CERC upon request. Initially, the DSS staff at the Martinsville CERC could not take applications; at the time of the site visit, the agency had begun accepting applications at the CERC for fuel assistance, Family Access to Medical Insurance (FAMIS), air-conditioning assistance, and other programs that do not require an in-person interview with an eligibility worker at the main office.

In Clarksville, Martinsville, and South Boston, DSS staff usually visit the CERCs for two half-days a week. The DSS office in Marion outstationed staff at the CERC twice a week for the first two months of operation. They received few referrals, however, and most customers referred by CERC staff requested information only. Moreover, because most customers who wanted to file an application did not have all the documentation necessary to complete it, they often went to the main DSS office to apply for benefit programs. At the time of the site visit, DSS no longer visited the CERC on a regular basis, although staff said they would go to the CERC to take an application if requested.

None of the DSS staff could take applications for supportive services, such as child care or transportation assistance, while on site at the CERCs. They could set up appointments for customers with workers in the services department at DSS. They also provided pamphlets about these services and information on how to apply.

Churches, charitable organizations, and community action agencies typically do not outstation staff to the CERCs, but they are available to receive referrals from the CERCs. Especially in Martinsville, CERC staff reported sending customers to a number of churches for emergency assistance. In South Boston, staff reported referring a substantial number of customers to the local community action agency and a faith-based organization, Good Samaritan, for help with food assistance, rent and utility payments, and other types of emergency services. Typically, these organizations have, at most, two or three staff or volunteers to provide services, and they cannot afford to outstation one of them at the CERC. Moreover, because these organizations tend to provide tangible emergency assistance (such as food, clothing, and shelter), in some cases it is not possible to provide services at a location other than their main office.

Partners provide access to education, training, and employment services that complement VEC services.

Aside from DSS, partners that have been most likely to outstation staff to the CERCs are those that provide education, training, and employment services. Many customers receive funds for education and training through the Trade Act or WIA, so community colleges and other training programs often complement the services provided through the VEC. However, in all the CERCs except South Boston, community college staff reported that they suspended their regular visits to the CERCs after several months because they received few referrals. Community college representatives at the CERCs provided information about courses and financial aid, but customers still had to go to the college campuses to register for classes or to apply for financial aid.

Some community colleges reported adapting their programs to reflect the needs of the dislocated workers in the CERC communities by developing short-term training programs in fields with strong job prospects. In Clarksville, for example, with support from corporate sponsors, the college developed a six-week course in truck driving. College staff reported that most graduates found immediate employment. For workers willing to enroll in longer education programs, the community colleges generally encourage enrollment in fields with high demand for workers, such as information systems technology, business management and administration, human services, and nursing.

In addition to the community colleges, adult education programs offer General Equivalency Diploma preparation courses for dislocated workers who lack a GED or high school degree. For example, in Marion, Mount Rodger Adult Education provides GED preparation classes on site at the CERC.

Training programs offered through initiatives such as Job Corps, the Area Agency on Aging, and Experience Works can offer assistance to special populations of workers who are either younger or older than the average working-age population. For example, staff from Experience Works, which provides community service jobs for low-income older workers, holds weekly workshops at the Martinsville CERC for jobseekers over 40 years of age. In Marion, these agencies did not maintain regular office hours at the CERCs, though they agreed to accept referrals.

The CERCs provide customers with access to health insurance and medical care.

Some dislocated workers with children qualify for Medicaid, which is available through DSS. Other families may have children who qualify for FAMIS, which is Virginia's child health insurance program for low- to moderate-income families that do not qualify for Medicaid but need health insurance coverage. Initially, all of the CERCs had representatives from partnering agencies on-site who could accept applications for FAMIS; however, due to the low volume of customers who wanted to apply and were eligible, these partners decided that it would be more cost-effective to accept referrals instead.

In some sites, CERC partners also provided access to health care for adults. CERC customers often lost their health insurance when they lost their jobs; therefore, many needed access to insurance and free or low-cost medical care. According to the local DSS offices, the majority of CERC customers do not qualify for Medicaid, so they needed to have free or low-cost medical care and prescription drugs available through referrals to partnering agencies. For example, the CERC in Marion referred customers with no health insurance to the Smyth County Free Clinic, located across the street from the CERC.

In Clarksville and Martinsville, partnering agencies offered mental health services when the CERCs opened but discontinued their regular visits after receiving few referrals. In both communities, providers said they would accept referrals or travel to the CERC to meet with customers if requested. In Martinsville, Piedmont Community Health Services also offered two sessions of a workshop, “Coping with Job Loss and Life Changes,” led by training counselors.

While the CERCs achieved a moderate level of co-location in the initial months of operation, over time, most partnering agencies discontinued their regular visits to the CERCs.

Initially, a number of partnering agencies outstationed staff at the CERCs for at least a few hours a week; however, many of these partners discontinued these visits after a few weeks or months. Other partners never provided on site services at the CERCs, but they did agree to accept referrals. With the exception of Martinsville, after a few months of operation, most of the partnering agencies that were not already on site as part of the WIA One-Stops discontinued their office hours at the CERCs. Several reasons emerged for the low level of service co-location achieved by the CERCs: resource constraints, low levels of referrals to the partners, and a perception by some partners that co-location was unnecessary or an inefficient use of resources.

Resource constraints limited the ability of partnering agencies to provide services on site at the CERCs. With the exception of Martinsville, the CERCs did not have sufficient space to house all the partners on site at the same time. Instead, each CERC created a partner schedule designed to ensure that all partners had office space at the CERC for one or two days a week. In addition, most partners could not afford to outstation staff at the CERC for more than a few hours a week. Partners reported that sending staff to the CERCs strained their resources at a time when demand for services at their main office had increased and staff were already stretched thin.

Despite the efforts of CERC staff to link customers to needed services, most partnering agencies reported receiving far fewer referrals at the CERCs than anticipated. In some cases, the population of displaced workers coming to the CERCs was somewhat different than the population served by partner agencies, and CERC customers did not necessarily meet the partnering agencies’ eligibility criteria. In other cases, customers were not aware that agency services were available at the CERC or were accustomed to seeking these services through the agency’s main office. Whatever the reason, partnering agencies found that their staff did

not serve many customers at the CERCs, and that the staff often did not have enough to do, whereas their main offices were overloaded with customers seeking services.

Some CERC and partner agency staff said that co-location of some services at the CERC was unnecessary or an inefficient use of resources. Especially in South Boston and Marion, some partnering agencies are located only a short walk or drive from the CERC. Other partners asserted that even though they had staff on site at the CERC, customers were already familiar with their main offices and preferred to go there for services. Some noted that, because the service areas of the CERCs are rural and customers are geographically dispersed, the CERC location may be convenient for some residents, and the main offices of partner agencies more convenient for others.

Moreover, staff from other partnering agencies pointed out that, although staff at the CERC could provide information about the availability of services at their main offices and the eligibility criteria for various programs, in most cases customers still need to travel to other locations to actually apply for or receive the services. Although some agencies, such as DSS, take applications on site, customers often have to return to the main office to complete the application or to provide missing documentation. In addition, if a customer comes to the CERC at a time when staff from the appropriate partner are not on site, they still have to travel to the agency's main office if they need immediate assistance. Because most partners have had staff on site at the CERC for only a few hours a week, the likelihood that a customer would find the appropriate partner on site has been small.