



TRUE COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

by Shanen L. Aranmór, COVID-19 Historian

ARIZONA@WORK-Yuma County, Campesinos Sin Fronteras, Arizona Complete Health, The Department of Economic Security (DES) and the City of San Luis have teamed up to assist agricultural workers to apply for unemployment insurance. San Luis Unemployment Insurance (UI) Service is the only office in Arizona currently offering in-person unemployment insurance services for persons who may not have access to (or fully understand how to use) existing internet UI resources.

Initially aimed at assisting seasonal workers who have been displaced at least one month early due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this collaborative effort was formed to ensure public safety through social distancing and other health practices while continuing to provide quality one-on-one services

to workers who are unable to find or retain employment. Nidia Herrera, Executive Director of ARIZONA@WORK-Yuma County, explained how Local Workforce Development Board (LWDB) Chair Maria Chavoya partnered with the State to formulate strategies and tactics to streamline the registration process. "This collaboration really shows how we pull together in a rural community," explained Herrera.

Susana Ramirez, Supervisor for the UI Office, explained the influx of seasonal workers is typical at the end of any growing season, however, due to



Training Initiative

On Monday, April 20, 2020, members of several social services in Yuma County learned how to assist members of the community to file unemployment insurance claims in both English & Spanish.

EMPLOYEES FROM VARIOUS AREA AGENCIES ASKED FOR VOLUNTEERS TO BECOME CROSS-TRAINED IN UI SERVICES SO THEY COULD PITCH IN. IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO BUILD A COMMUNITY.

the COVID-19 pandemic, their office was unable to safely accommodate the volume of people in the space provided. Local agencies stepped in to provide computers, tables, pop-up tents, bottled water, face masks, additional staff, 6' social distancing delineations and even occasional lunches to help manage the crowd. 1st Bank Yuma and the City of San Luis also provided designated parking for staff and volunteers.

COVID-19 affects the entire world but agricultural areas were hit hard and in a unique way. "Once the restaurants closed, we don't need vegetables like we used to. They are plowing the lettuce under in the fields," stated one UI applicant waiting her turn to be assisted by a staff member. She had planned to work for a major agricultural producer until the end of May or June but, that is now not an option. As hundreds of seasonal workers gather in San Luis, they are joined by many others who are out of work as a result of quarantine orders. Barbers, beauticians, massage therapists, people employed in food service, along with a host of others wonder how they will manage their bills in the coming weeks. "This money is all we have coming in. I have to feed my kids and pay rent," stated a woman from Tucson who drove across the state to the San Luis UI office, in the hopes of getting personal assistance in completing her UI claim.

"We know we will get through this..." a motto echoed by staff at the San Luis UI office. Partnering agencies and volunteers assisting the public know they are providing the best possible service to those in dire need. The Call Center at the San Luis UI location continues to process claims on weekends in an effort to meet the overwhelming need for unemployment assistance. San Luis UI Service hopes the current collaboration will continue long after the pandemic resolves in order to meet significant needs of seasonal employment change.

