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Workforce official shows proof of training programs' power in Mid-Columbia

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By Loretto J. Hulse — Tri-City Herald

The old adage, "You need to spend money to make money," holds true even when talking about unemployed workers.

That was the message Bryan Wilson delivered Tuesday to board members of the Benton Franklin-Workforce Development Council.

He's deputy director for the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board in Olympia, a state agency supporting Washington's work force.

He met with the council in Kennewick, which is under the WorkSource umbrella, to present the results of the agency's research on how well training and retraining programs work in terms of revenue versus spending. WorkSource/Workforce programs are federally funded with taxpayer dollars through the Department of Labor and the Employment Security Department.

"These days with government resources so scarce, it's more important than ever to make wise investments. Giving people skills is truly a wise investment," he said.

The state agency tracked a group of workers who completed Workforce programs and a similar group who did not. Included were workers of all skill levels.

"What we found was in all cases over the course of their working career, their earnings increased and so did their taxes. Now, Workforce is not in the business of making money for the state for federal government, but taxpayers who earn more, pay more," he said.

Cos Edwards, WorkSource Columbia Basin CEO/executive director of the Benton-Franklin Workforce Development Council, said his facility is one of the state's busiest.

"We see 450 people a day come through our doors. Not everyone is new, some are coming in for training. We had 727 jobs for Franklin and Benton counties listed on our website today. But if you're looking for a job and you don't have the necessary skills, it might as well be zero," Edwards said.

Training programs vary widely depending on what an individual needs. Some can complete a course in a few months, others take longer.

"For the most part they're in and out within a year," Edwards said.

Edwards also said Wilson's presentation Tuesday confirmed other studies the Workforce Development Council has seen.

"In every study the outcome is the same. The dollars invested in people who go back to work benefits the taxpayers, let alone the recipient," Edwards said.