

Create Bridges and FOCUS Inc. Provide Worker Incentives to Local Employees

As a part of the Create Bridges Kentucky team, FOCUS Inc. sponsored worker incentives for local employees to support locally owned businesses. FOCUS stands for Five Original Counties United for Success (includes Jackson, Clay, Lee, Owsley and Leslie counties) and is led by April Renner with the Jackson Energy Cooperative.

To better understand what incentives to provide to employees, employers completed a Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) program survey in 2019. This survey interviewed business owners on their employees' needs and ways to make their business more successful. Employers were then polled on which types of supplemental funding would be most helpful to their employees. Business owners reported that their employees had the greatest needs in the following areas; childcare, transportation and groceries. As an incentive for participating in the survey, employees of the local business were able to gain access to worker incentives in the form of funding for transportation, childcare or groceries.

April Renner reached back out to business owners who participated in BRE and asked them to participate in an additional Employee Perspective Survey that collected data about their workforce. The Employee Perspective Survey was made available to these employees, and if they chose to participate they gained access to another round of funding.

Renner was instrumental in fostering relationships between the Create Bridges Kentucky team and regional business owners. While coordinating with employees at Jack's IGA in Beattyville, Kentucky, Renner learned that employees were in need of new uniforms. This was due to the store's COVID cleaning precautions causing them to get bleach on their work clothing. Renner reached out to the uniform provider, Cintas, and the Lexington business decided to match FOCUS Inc.'s contribution to these employees, which provided each employee four new work shirts.

The impact of the FOCUS Inc. project does not end with the individual employees. The participating local employees were given access to incentives to locally owned businesses. As mentioned previously, a goal of the project was to support local businesses, allowing the dollars spent on the incentives to remain in the community.

Create Bridges encourages communities to think regionally and continues to show support to partner groups such as FOCUS Inc. through programs that provide worker incentives.

Contact Mercedes Maness Mercedes.Maness@uky.edu with any questions about Create Bridges in Kentucky.



Pictured above are employees who received incentives from their participation in the Employee Perspective Survey.



Create Bridges Kentucky is a partnership between CEDIK at the University of Kentucky and Eastern KY regional partners. For more information on the Kentucky effort, visit cedik.ca.uky.edu/createbridges

The Create Bridges project is a national program coordinated by the Southern Rural Development Center. Two additional pilot teams are led by Oklahoma State Extension and University of Arkansas Extension & Research.