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## **Arapahoe/Douglas Works! recognized at White House**

*Innovative approach to engage young adults in workforce system honored*

**Centennial, CO** – How do you inspire out-of-school young adults to learn about and access workforce services? The U.S. Department of Labor recently raised this question and issued a Customer Centered Design Challenge to public workforce systems nationwide to look for innovative solutions as part of the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act.

Arapahoe/Douglas Works! Workforce Center, a proud partner of the American Job Center Network, answered the call and was recently recognized at the White House for demonstrating innovative ideas to engage and produce better outcomes for out-of-school young adults.

Using methods of Customer Centered Design, A/D Works! established a diverse team of workforce partners, including staff members, as well as individuals from local government and nonprofit organizations serving young adults. They also made the key decision to include two young adult customers as core team members to learn directly from them on what they'd like to see in the program.

“One of the most sincere forms of respect is actually listening to what another has to say,” said D’Angelo Johnson, Training Manager for A/D Works!. “What came out of our ideation phase was a key insight that young people needed help to imagine themselves as part of our regional workforce and economy.”

Through the phases of the challenge, the team rebranded their young adult program from “Youth in the Works!” to “Future U- your path, your potential” to better reflect the impact on this population and key community business and industry stakeholders.

“Eventually we were able to create a brand that put our young customers at the center of what we do,” said Johnson. “Our new brand, Future U, was born.”

The team is currently working on implementing a paid internship and mentoring program for Future U called “Future Tank,” modeled after the popular TV competition show Shark Tank. Young adults ages 18-24 will create a marketing and outreach strategy to engage more young adults in services and activities

offered by A/D Works!. They will obtain valuable work experience, leadership skills and be empowered to make their vision a reality through internship and employment placement opportunities. Applications for the program will be available beginning in March.

“We are so proud of the work being done at A/D Works! to engage young adults in the workforce,” said Commissioner Nancy Jackson, who represents District 4. “Future U will educate young adults on the value of accessing workforce resources and programs and will develop a framework for applying Customer Centered Design to other populations.”

“A/D Works! plans to begin applying the concepts of Customer Centered Design to their Career Services, Business Services and other programmatic areas of the workforce center this year,” said Joe Barela, Arapahoe/Douglas Workforce Director.

A/D Works! was one of only 11 teams nationwide, and the only team from Colorado, to attend the Customer Centered Design Learning Exchange and Celebration at the White House Feb. 16. The Workforce Team also included one of their young adult stakeholders, Dalton McGahey, in the celebration. McGahey shared his insights with the participants to give them the opportunity to hear straight from a young adult’s perspective.

The Arapahoe/Douglas Works! Regional Workforce Center is located at 6974 S. Lima Plaza, Centennial 80112. Workforce Centers also are located in Littleton and Aurora. For more information on Arapahoe/Douglas Works! and Future U, call 303-636-1260 or visit the A/D Works! website at [www.adworks.org](http://www.adworks.org).

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