

# EMPLOYMENT SERVICES OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE

## Mario Solis

### INTRODUCTION

Within the first half of Fiscal Year (FY) 1994/95 the Alameda County Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) Program has been successful in performing more job placements in a six month period than it has ever been able to perform during a full year of operation, since implementation of the program. This dramatic increase is due in part to a shift in emphasis from long-term training to a stronger focus on job placements. Specific strategies have been developed to assist clients and staff in this transition. The establishment of a Resource Center with job leads, computers with resume software, and employment counselor available for group and/or individual counseling sessions are just some of the examples. Additionally, mini-job fairs are being hosted on County premises, including on-site workshops to prepare clients for job interviews. Although impressive, results pale in comparison to those of other counties utilizing the Dean Curtis model. San Mateo County, for example, claims an eighty percent job placement rate for GAIN participants.

Cost efficiencies may also be achieved through improved coordination of employment services programs within the County system and the community and through integration of employment services programs administered by Departments of Social Services (DSS). In this regard, San Mateo County has also embarked upon an ambitious plan to integrate the employment services programs it administers in addition to integration with the Employment Development Department (EDD).

Given Alameda County's decision to shift emphasis in GAIN, the national mood towards welfare reform, and the work incentives established by the State under the California Work Pays program, it becomes imperative that we explore other models and options for the delivery of GAIN services that may prove more cost effective and net greater results in the form of job placements. This case study is an attempt to address some of these issues by looking at strategies being implemented in San Mateo County and the potential applications to Alameda County.

### ACTIVITY STUDIED

There are three areas of interest addressed in this case study:

1. Integration of employment services programs administered by the County of San Mateo Human Services Agency, including GAIN, Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS), and General Assistance Employment Services (GAES).
2. Implementation of the Dean Curtis model in **GAIN and JTPA**; a model that emphasizes the urgency towards self-sufficiency, encourages participants to take ownership of their decisions, encourages risk-taking in order to learn or grow, focuses on life-long learning and enhancement of self-esteem at every step.

3. Integration of economic development as part of the Job Training and Economic Development Division (JTED).

## **PLAN**

The established plan of action included a review of San Mateo's Plan for Integration of the JTPA/GAIN Programs, attendance at the various integration committees scheduled to meet during the internship period, interviews with program managers/supervisors, EDD managers, and other key stakeholders. The plan of action also included participation by Alameda County GAIN staff. Two first-line supervisors attended the full, six-day Dean Curtis modules for GAIN participants. Their comments, in the form of a memorandum addressed to Jo Mueller, Alameda County GAIN Coordinator, are included as Attachment A. Periodic meetings with the assigned mentor, Bill Demestihis, Director of the JTED Division, were also scheduled, including an exit interview.

## **INTEGRATION OF EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROGRAMS**

In approximately September of 1994 the JTED Division established a work plan for the integration of their JTPA and GAIN programs with a tentative timeline for full integration by May 31, 1995. The driving force behind the plan being improved customer service (customers defined as program participants and prospective employers), improved program effectiveness, and to prevent duplication of services.

Targeted areas for integration included Intake/Eligibility, Assessment, Job Development, Case Management, Supportive Services, Marketing, Data Management, Fiscal and Staff Development/Team Building. Integration committees were established for each of these areas, and staff from the two programs were included in each committee. Although the focus was on JTPA and GAIN, staff from the VRS program were also included in some of the committees, with the expectation that integration would eventually be expanded to include the program serving General Assistance and Vocational Rehabilitation clients. An oversight committee, consisting of one representative from each of the working committees and program managers, was also established to monitor the process, to keep the committees focused and on schedule, and to provide information on progress to all interested parties. As of 5/1/95, the date of the exit interview, only some of the committees had finalized their reports and it is likely that the timeline for full integration will need to be modified.

In addition to plans for integration of JTPA and GAIN, the JTED Division is working on a proposal with EDD to open three additional SUCCESS Centers. The plan calls for EDD making a financial investment in the operation of the new centers, including co-location of EDD staff with DSS.

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DEAN CURTIS MODEL**

Curtis and Associates, Inc., a national consulting company specializing in welfare reform, currently contracts with a number of counties to provide a pro-active, outcomes-oriented, high

impact program. Their motivational work program utilizes five principles to teach self-sufficiency:

**Urgency** -- strong message that "now" is the time to commit to self-sufficiency.

**Ownership** -- encourages participants to make their own decisions.

**Learn By Doing** -- encourages risk taking in order to learn or grow.

**Life-Long Learning** -- focuses on learning skills as opposed to training.

**Motivation** -- enhances self-esteem at every step of the program.

In October 1993, Dean Curtis and Associates conducted a site visit in San Mateo County that led to a proposal and contract for services. The recommendations that were implemented include the operation of two self-sufficiency (SUCCESS) centers. Each center consists of eight team members, a supervisor and clerical staff. The focal point of each center is a resource/network room where participants can come whenever they need to as well as on their assigned day to meet their employment goals. The centers include phones, resources on child care, transportation, computers, software programs and other resources that will assist people in becoming successful.

The Agency Director, Maureen Borland, was responsible for coming up with the acronym for the SUCCESS Centers:

S erving  
U nemployed  
C ustomers  
C hoosing  
E conomic  
S elf  
S ufficiency

The two existing centers focus primarily on JTPA and GAIN. The north county center in Daly City includes both programs, co-located, while the south county center in Redwood City targets only the GAIN program. One of the three new centers being planned in conjunction with EDD will be opened as part of the Work Center operated by the VRS program and will, in a sense, bring VRS into the integration loop.

It should be noted that VRS provides employment services to clients of both the Mental Health and Income Maintenance (General Assistance) Division. VRS also operates a 40,000 square foot manufacturing facility that provides product assembly, toy packaging, shrink-wrapping, boxing and gluing, sorting and recovery work. The Work Center specializes in all types of labor intensive production and is a revenue generating operation. Its customers include: Broderbund Software, Northwest Airlines, Polaroid, United Airlines, Browning Ferris Industries, Hewlett Packard, and the Tom Peters Group, to name just a few.

## **INTEGRATION OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

San Mateo County, like other governmental entities, share a concern regarding lack of coordinated economic development efforts at the local level. Under the leadership of two members of the Board of Supervisors and SAMCEDA, the economic development advisory entity, a number of focus groups were established to include individual cities, chambers of commerce, business and industry leaders, city managers, planning directors, regional and state agencies, and the colleges. This process resulted in a plan of action for a county-wide economic development plan that has broad based support from both the private and the public sectors.

The established mission for this collaborative partnership is the development and implementation of a county-wide strategic plan for retaining, expanding and locating business within San Mateo County. The Director of the JTED Division has insured that the interests of its clientele are represented by his active participation in the different economic development forums in the county. His ability to represent those interests is enhanced by his membership on the board of directors of the Private Industry Council.

### **POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS TO ALAMEDA COUNTY**

Alameda County has consolidated within the Employment and Community Services (ECS) Department all of the employment services programs administered by the Social Services Agency (SSA). The ECS Department has developed a strategic plan that calls for the coordination of those programs. The challenge for the department during subsequent strategic planning sessions will be to explore possible integration of employment services. At the same time, coordination with employment services programs administered by other county departments and non-county entities needs to be explored.

Currently the ECS Department managers meet on a quarterly basis with EDD managers throughout the County. Preliminary discussions have been held regarding San Mateo's collaborative between the two entities and there is general agreement to explore those options in Alameda County.

Additionally, the ECS Department is planning to host a meeting inviting all employment services programs administered by the various County departments, to initiate dialogue regarding coordination and information sharing. That meeting has been scheduled. for June 1995.

Given review of the literature and observations of San Mateo County SUCCESS Centers and the Dean Curtis model, the ECS Department Director is recommending that Alameda County pursue the implementation of this model. The Alameda County GAIN Coordinator has already been requested to secure copies of the RFP documents currently being prepared by other counties also contemplating this avenue.

Finally, the Work Center operated by VRS presents an excellent example of an opportunity for counties to be competitive with the for-profit sector, to create revenue generating ventures that also provide employment training opportunities for clients. The Alameda County GAES Program Manager will be directed to conduct a comprehensive analysis on the feasibility of opening a facility similar to San Mateo's Work Center. The potential partner for a joint venture in Alameda

County is the General Services Agency (GSA). The general findings and information gathered from San Mateo County will be shared with the GSA Director.

## **ATTACHMENT A**

### **MEMORANDUM**

TO: Jo Mueller

FROM: Karen Brecher, Charles Schwab

DATE: March 29, 1995

SUBJ: San Mateo County GAIN Model

In February of 1995, two GAIN EC Supervisors spent 7 days in the GAIN Success Center in Souther San Mateo County. Our visit was in response to a report from Mrs. Beverly Dekker-Davidson, A Manager of San Mateo County GAIN. She said that they had increased job placements by 500 % as a result of changing how GAIN was implemented. We were sent to observe their new model.

The goal of the San Mateo County GAIN Program is to help participants undergo the profound change from AFDC dependency to economic self-sufficiency. The basic philosophy is that a person is in all ways better off working than unemployed, that every job is a stepping-stone to a better job, that everyone is employable, and that the time to get a job is now. Further education/training is to be scheduled after one is working, just as it's done by GAIN staff members and working people in general. GAIN helps participants set those long-range goals, and shows them how to realize their goals while employed.

They begin by processing applicants through orientation on Mondays from 9 - 12. The Appraisal component is called Steps to Self-Sufficiency. It starts the following Wednesday and lasts six days. The Job Club component follows immediately and lasts three weeks, and can be followed by eight weeks of Supervised Job Search. All of these components take place in the Success Center - a suite of attractive offices in a two story bank building in downtown Redwood City.

**The Steps to Self-Sufficiency Workshop** consists of up to 20 participants and one trainer. The large workshop room has dozens of colorful wall charts and a U-shaped arrangement of tables on which are folders containing three dozen worksheets. All the training aids - wall charts, worksheets, sample applications, resumes, cover letters, group games and exercises - fit together sequentially and build on one another. The workshop trainer follows an elaborate and detailed outline that helps foster a very positive ambiance in which participants become friends and help and support each other through the process of growing from dependency to self-sufficiency. This process is organized into seven steps: job consideration, job leads, application/resumes, interviews, post-interview, job offer, and job retention.

**Job Consideration** consists of exploring what one has done in the past, what one likes to do, one's values, hobbies, interests and so on, all the while stressing why it's better to have a job. The purpose is to lead the participant to the conclusion that it's in his/her best interests to go to work - even at a minimum wage job - rather than continue to do nothing.

The trainer compares the lifestyles of unemployment and economic self-sufficiency. A videotape of Prof. Dean Curtis is shown. He gives several reasons why it's "better" to be working. The trainer leads a discussion of how participants felt when they had jobs compared with how they feel being dependent on AFDC. Participants come to realize that they want to change their lives, that self-sufficiency is better for them and their families. The trainer says that the shift from dependency to self-sufficiency is done in a series of seven steps. The remainder of the workshop is about learning how to take those steps.

**Job Leads** - They use a chart which shows that 60 % of all jobs come from two sources: direct employer contact (31 % ) and friends and relatives (29 % ). Homework for the second day and each day thereafter is for everyone to bring in one job lead. In this way the group becomes part of one's network. In addition, there's a form titled "My Personal Network" to help participants become aware of how to use their family, friends and acquaintances to learn of job leads. The component following Steps is named the **Network** and this is where job leads are shared and developed by using the Yellow Pages.

In the Job Leads step, participants are shown how much information is contained in the Yellow Pages, and how to get interviews from the businesses listed there. Participants learn how to "cold call" for job leads. There are scripts to use, phone books, and a phone bank. Each call is noted on an Employer Contact Sheet, and many job interviews are obtained by telephone. All job leads are written on large sheets of paper, posted on the walls, and shared by the group. The lists are updated daily. In these ways the participants themselves develop almost all the jobs.

**Applications and Resumes** - The first practice job applications are completed after lunch on the first day. On the following days, samples of poor, good, and better applications are handed out and discussed. The trainer points out how best to sell oneself by submitting outstanding applications. When everyone has learned to do that, Master Applications are completed.

Samples of resumes and cover letters are studied, and participants are given several forms from which they choose how best to present themselves. There's a "Resume Specialist" at the Success Center, one of whose tasks it is to take those completed forms and create resumes for each participant. That Specialist - a very bright clerical staff member - also does cover letters as they are needed for specific job leads.

**Interviews** - Much time and energy goes into learning how to interview! On the first day, each participant does a practice interview with the trainer in front of a video camera. Videotape shows you how you really look, and that first taping is a real motivator for learning how to improve.

Participants are taught how to open and close an interview. There's a list of 16 tough questions, and those are learned and practiced again and again in mock interviews. Body language - how one sits, stands, makes eye contact, smiles, uses one's hands, etc. - is noticed and critiqued.

There's a Pre-Interview Checklist with eleven factors to look at before the interview, everything from attitude to the breath test. Participants are taught that the employer has much, much more to lose in a job interview than they do. One of the worksheets is titled "Controlling the Interview". Another is "Polishing the Interview".

By the end of the six day Steps Workshop, the participant is realistically confident of his/her ability to interview. The average participant would do better in a job interview than would our average Employment Counselor. The interview videotaped on day five is proof of how far they have progressed.

**Post-Interview** - When a participant comes back to the Success Center from a job interview, the trainers and other participants in the Network help them evaluate their interview performance. There's an interview evaluation worksheet, which along with the pre-interview checklist, helps with the debriefing. Not only does this critique help the interviewee improve his/her skills, it also helps the other participants. In this and other ways participants learn from each other.

At this Step, the participant confers with the Resume Specialist, completes the Thank You Letter worksheet, and the specialist types it up. A follow-up phone call is made a few days or a week later. These details can tip the scales in the participant's favor.

**Job Offer** - This is a separate step because the job interview is not the time and place to ask questions about a new job. There's a worksheet with most of those questions on it, and the participant gets all those answered when the job is actually offered, questions such as "what will be my starting salary", "when would you like me to begin", "what are the benefits".

**Job Retention** - This Step has two worksheets and many specific rules" "Show up. Be on time. Be Honest. Follow the rules. Be a role model in dress and speech. Be willing to do more than you are asked to do". These and other rules are discussed in the workshop. They are all obvious and we'd all be better off if we followed them. There's a worksheet titled "Moving Ahead - A guide to Job Success" which folds into fourths so it can be carried in pocket or purse, and it too has good, wholesome advice: "Respect Others, Beware of the Grapevine, Increase your Efficiency", etc.

In a much wider sense, the Steps Workshop has, from the first morning, fostered and nurtured the skills and attitudes which make a person able to not just keep a job, but to use that job as a stepping-stone to a better position. These valuable skills are called "Life-Management Skills". Some of those taught are planning, prioritizing, delegating tasks to family and friends, asking for what you want, and saying "no" to what you don't want. These are all ways of taking charge of your life, of going from passive dependency to becoming actively self-sufficient. Other skills taught in Steps were a five step process for identifying problems and solving them. Budgeting was taught, with first month income tracking forms and sample budgets.

These Life Management skills are not covered once and then forgotten. During each day in Steps and Network, some time is spent reviewing and going over all of this material so that a participant has a chance to really learn it and start establishing good habits.

One of the best things about San Mateo County's GAIN program is that the Steps process elicits the good things people have done in their lives: the skills they've learned and the accomplishments that they've never given themselves credit for. These accomplishments and positive character traits give the participant a genuine self-confidence that's built on who they really are. This newly realized self-esteem is a big part of why their participants are getting jobs. They now believe in themselves; the employers see that and they believe in them too.

**Recommendation:** Participate in the first day at the "Steps" component and then contract with Curtis & Associates or an equivalent company to develop and implement a program like the one in San Mateo County.