SONOMA: THE COUNTY THAT WORKS! IMPLEMENTING THE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Job Training and Partnership Act (JTPA) is ending as of June 30, 2000 and will be replaced by the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). JTPA is a federal job training program providing services in all regions of the U.S. It has involved the formation of Private Industry Councils (PICs) who assisted in the job development, training, and retention services delivered to customers. Additionally, these PICs were instrumental in forming various successful One-Stop centers throughout California. The success of the One-Stops in Santa Clara County can be attributed to the partnerships formed and the hard work accomplished initially between the Silicon Valley Private Industry Council, NOVA, and county staff. The One-Stop centers have been in operation for over two years and have successfully served the needs of customers within the community.

Implementing WIA in Santa Clara County will mean finding positions for displaced JTPA staff and integration of our funding, staff, space and resources with a new partner, the City of San Jose. Santa Clara County's implementation challenges are significantly different then those of Sonoma County. Sonoma County does not have one of its cities designated as a Workforce Investment area as we do. The City of San Jose is a new partner for the county. They can bring to the table funding, resources and staff. The success of county and city WIA implemention will depend entirely on the strength of the partnership that is formed.

I visited the JOBLINK One-Stop center in Sonoma County with three simple objectives. The first was to learn more about what WIA was. The second was to find out what services are mandated under WIA. The third and by far the most important, was to find out how Sonoma County has structured its Work Investment Board, (WIB) to ensure success in the area of partnerships. Having achieved these objectives, I proffer the following observations and recommendations.

One of the most important lessons learned while in Sonoma County had nothing to do with the partnerships formed under WIA, but with the internal partnerships existing between managerial staff. Managers at JOBLINK function as a team. They keep each other informed of work issues, they discuss the organizational development of their county, and they analyze, plan and implement as a team. What makes these managers unique is that they accomplish these tasks not only in meetings or lunches but almost every morning, if time and job demands allow, during morning breaks. I recommend that our managers begin this practice too. Walking together increases the visibility of management, help each manager to achieve more than just a global view (instead a working knowledge of each division) and allow time outside and away from the office where there is more confidentiality and fewer interruptions.

Another important lesson learned while in Sonoma County was how important it is for all to participate actively in the process. I recommend Santa Clara

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County reach out to our community based organizations and the City of San Jose and create an active and progressive WIB which can conduct town hall style informational meetings beginning in June, if not sooner. By getting our PIC, our CBOs, the City of San Jose and the County of Santa Clara involved from the beginning, trust and a working knowledge of WIA expectations can be developed and built upon. There is still work to be done in the area of securing and integrating funding, staffing, and resources necessary to implement the 17 core performance measures under WIA, and these meetings can be used to facilitate this endeavor.

Additionally, by June 15, 2000 we must provide our Employment Services Staff with the proper training on the 17 core measurements of services mandated by WIA. Sonoma County provided its own training and had a wonderful speaker, John Chamberlain, who provided an excellent overview of how WIA has changed the way in which Employment Services functions. His overview can be integrated into the training provided by Santa Clara County to Employment Services staff. It would be worth the expense to secure his services here in Santa Clara County. For example, his overview clarifies the need for counties to become more adept at removing participants from our employment programs when it is necessary to do so.

To have experienced working in Sonoma County with such great and caring individuals is a delight that I hope future BASSC participants can experience. The knowledge and friendship gained while in Sonoma County has helped further my understanding of WIA, and helped me to learn how to structure and maintain the partnerships that form a WIB. Sonoma County's success in implementing WIA and in forming of its WIB a direct result of effective partnering. Being exposed to new programs, being entrusted to work on a partnership information fact sheet and being accepted as part of the Sonoma County team expanded my vision of what is possible for Santa Clara County.

Sonoma: The County That Works! Implementing the Workforce Investment Act

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Introduction

As part of my professional development I have always looked for new avenues of personal enrichment and skill enhancement. When contacted to see if I might be interested in participating in the Bay Area Social Services Consortium's Executive Development Program, I had never heard of the program and did not know what the program had to offer. I researched the program and discovered it offered more in the areas of professional development than any other program available in my County. Although the program is composed of three one-week classroom sessions on numerous topics, the part of the program that interested me the most was the 15-day internship in another county. There were numerous choices of county programs. I felt it would be in my best interest and in the best interest of my county to expand my experience and leave my comfort zone of Medi-Cal behind. I had the dilemma of choosing which county program would be of most significance and help to my county. Knowing that we as an agency had been dealing with welfare reform for over three years, I knew my choice had to be related to some component of Welfare Reform not yet implemented in my county.

As a Medi-Cal trainer, I had first hand experience at retooling CalWORKS Eligibility Workers who, due to declining caseloads, were reassigned to the Medi-Cal program. I wondered if there were to be any other significant work force transitions and, if so, how I could assist in the smooth transition that would need to take place. Sonoma County offered an internship program involving the replacement of the Job Training and Partnership Act (JTPA) with new legislation known as the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). I submitted my request choosing Sonoma for my 15-day inter-agency exchange. This case study represents my experiences in Sonoma County and what I hope to bring back to help Santa Clara County through its dilemmas in WIA implementation.

Background

The program known as JTPA is ending as of June 30, 2000. JTPA is a federal job training program providing services in all regions of the U.S. It has involved the formation of Private Industry Councils (PICs) that assist in the job development, training, and retention services delivered to customers. Additionally these PICs were instrumental in forming various successful One-Stop centers throughout California. The success of the One-Stops in Santa Clara County can be attributed to the partnerships formed initially between the Silicon Valley Private Industry Council, NOVA, and County staff. Our One-Stop centers have been in operation for over two years. Within Santa Clara County a dilemma has occurred. Not only must we find positions for displaced JTPA staff but we must determine how to best implement WIA when the county no longer controls all services administered countywide. Under JTPA, the County of Santa Clara had been one of the main partners involved with the One-Stop system. The county provided most of the infrastructure and staff needed to implement and maintain ongoing employment services countywide. Even though one of the partners, NOVA, was contracted to provide services to the northern part of the county, the other two One-Stops functioned

under the County and the Silicon Valley Private Industry Council.

What has now occurred in Santa Clara County is quite unique. Under WIA, NOVA will remain in control of the northern part of the County. Mayor Ron Gonzales of San Jose has applied for recognition as a Workforce Investment Area and has been designated as the chief local elected official for a Workforce Investment Board. Part of his responsibilities will include ensuring that all mandated services under WIA for San Jose are provided. This leaves cities to the west and south, not encompassed within San Jose's jurisdiction, under the control of the old JTPA One-Stop system. The effect of the City's involvement has clearly carved up the distribution of employment related services received by the customers in our county. San Jose City is a new partner to the One-Stop system. They bring to the local Workforce Investment Board funding and administrative services but lack the infrastructure and service delivery system currently operated by the County.

The Internship

I arrived in Sonoma County with three simple objectives. The first was to learn more about WIA. The second was to find out what services are mandated under WIA. The third and by far the most important was to find out how Sonoma County has structured its WIB to ensure successful partnerships. I was assigned to work with Mrs. Karen Fies, Workforce Board Project Manager, located at the JOBLINK One-Stop center. Mrs. Fies provided me with a working knowledge of WIA and the core services mandated under WIA. I learned every county or region must implement WIA and have a WIB as mandated under WIA.

Knowing that WIA would eliminate the JTPA program, increase the coordination of employment and training services, and mandate One-Stop systems, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors set up partnerships that were WIA compliant in anticipation of upcoming legislation. In addition to the formation of their county's WIB, a five-year plan was developed to comply with the requirements of WIA. This plan has been approved by the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors and was submitted to the State. The former PIC had a total of 19 members. Under WIA, the WIB in Sonoma County is composed of 45 seats. The various partners in Sonoma County do not compete for control of service delivery or WIB membership. Instead they focus on what truly best serves the entire community. WIB member seats were allocated as follows:

- 23 seats for Business
- 2 seats for Labor Unions
- 2 seats for the Economic Development Agency
- 3 seats for CBOs
- 5 seats for Education
- 10 seats for mandatory One-Stop Partners

Members of this initial WIB have one-year terms and are expected to participate in numerous committees, conduct or attend presentations, and have active involvement in the business community. The mandated partners' participation can be in the form of shared funding streams, staffing, equipment, facilities or any other area in which the partner can add to or successfully complete the comprehensive, cohesive delivery of service that would most benefit the community and individual participants.

JTPA had 7 core performance standards under which it operated. Under WIA there are 17 core performance measures, demonstrating the expansion of services under WIA. No longer must cus-

tomers be of low income or potentially CalWORKS (cash-aid) eligible to receive basic services under WIA. However, some of the more intensive services required under WIA and delivered at the One-Stop Center may still have income tests for eligibility criteria. The WIB can prioritize services but not determine eligibility.

As for Youth Services, they have been expanded under WIA. Expansion of this component of WIA has created a funding issue. Under JTPA criteria, "hold harmless" funding had been used to anticipate and ensure payment for summer youth jobs programs. WIA has no "hold harmless" funding and this has created funding shortages in numerous counties. Counties are petitioning the state to include "hold harmless" funding for the first year as part of the WIA implementation budget. Without this component, Sonoma County loses approximately half of its Adult and Youth services funding.

If this is the outcome facing Sonoma County, one can only conclude hold harmless funding must be a critical need for many other counties throughout the state.[1]

Learning the Lingo

Part of my study of the Workforce Investment Act required me to learn an entire new vocabulary. Being a Medi-Cal trainer, I have been exposed to my fair share of acronyms but none of those prepared me for some of the jargon used to discuss WIA. From the first moment I arrived at the JOB LINK complex, I continually asked the same two questions, What does that stand for and what does that mean. I decided to write my own WIA Webster's dictionary to help keep track of what was being discussed. The following is a brief listing of some of the acronyms learned while doing my internship in Sonoma County:

WIA—Workforce Investment Act
JTPA—Job Training and Partnership Act
WIB—Workforce Investment Board
PIC—Private Industry Council
CWA—California Workforce Association
ITAs—Individual Training Accounts
ETPL—Eligible Training Provider List
NBEC—North Bay Employment Connection
RWPEDA—Regional Workforce Preparation and Economic Development Act
CCOIS—California Cooperative Occupational Information System
YEESC—Youth Education & Employment Services Council

WIA in Sonoma, Why It Works!

Having never participated in the formation of partnerships in Sonoma County, I found myself swept up and carried away by the energy, enthusiasm, and dedication of the county staff and the WIB. Although introduced as an intern from Santa Clara County, I was never made to feel like an outsider. Instead, people showed genuine interest in why I was there and were very helpful in answering questions, helping me research and learn more about WIA and partnering. WIA works in Sonoma County because of dedicated county employees, like Jerry Dunn, Director of the Employment and Training Division and Karen Fies, who work long and hard to keep the WIB focused, committed and in line with what best benefits the community and individual participants. The community as a whole shares this dedication and commitment. For example,

[1]From Public Comments toCalifornia's Draft WIA Title I Five-year Plan, Statement mad by Ben Stone, Sonoma County Economic Development Board, and restated to the state WIB by Jerry Dunn and 6 other Sonoma WIB partners.

while in attendance at one of the public hearings held on WIA, I observed Jerry Dunn discussing the "hold harmless" provisions that WIA lacks. I felt a sense of wonder as WIB members and CBOs alike testified in support of securing "hold harmless" funding for the first year of implementation. This clearly demonstrated not only support but solidarity as well.

Sonoma County empowered their staff and One-Stop partners by holding a meeting known as a summit. The purpose of this meeting was informational, to describe what WIA is and what it would mean to existing services. These meetings also allowed partners the time to start to know one another. Communication has been one of the key factors of successful WIB implementation. In addition to meetings, information is communicated via WIA newsletters, E-mails, telephone calls and presentations.

Lessons Learned/Recommendations

One of the most important things I learned while in Sonoma County was to actively participate. Santa Clara County must maintain an active and progressive WIB. The county needs to reach out to our community based organizations and the City of San Jose, by conducting community meetings. By getting our PIC, our CBOs, the City of San Jose and the County of Santa Clara involved from the beginning, trust and a working knowledge of WIA expectations can be developed and built upon. Santa Clara County must learn to share its expertise, its infrastructure and quite possibly its funds.

The county must provide Employment Services staff with the proper training on the 17 core measurements of services mandated by WIA before June 30, 2000. Sonoma County provided its own training and provided an excellent overview of how WIA has changed the way in which Employment Services works. Santa Clara County could benefit from a similar presentation. Santa Clara County must also become more adept at removing participants from our employment programs when it is necessary to do so.

Conclusion

To have experienced working in Sonoma County with such great and caring individuals is a delight that every employee should experience. The knowledge and friendship I have gained while in Sonoma County has helped to further my development and skill base. Being exposed to new programs, being entrusted to work on a partnership information fact sheet and being accepted as part of the Sonoma County team has made the return to Santa Clara County that much more difficult. Ultimately, the essence of partnerships and of community is alive and well in Sonoma County.