

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES AT PENINSULAWORKS ONE-STOP CENTERS IN SAN MATEO COUNTY

Connie Vega*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study examines how the County of San Mateo Human Services Agency dealt with the “Big Rocks” blocking their path, by utilizing and maximizing their existing resources and their strengths; collaborating and establishing partnerships; and providing staff with the support and the training necessary to implement the Workforce Investment Act of 1998(WIA). “Big Rocks” are a symbol for challenges.

Along with other localities and states the County of San Mateo Human Services Agency has provided employment-related and training services, as defined by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, by implementing the PeninsulaWorks One-Stop Centers (One-Stop Centers). One-Stop Centers are physical locations that provide a variety of employment and training services through co-location of staff from partnering agencies. Services provided include core services that are universally available to customers without eligibility determination as well as intensive and training services that may require eligibility determination. This fits nicely within the County of San Mateo Human Services Agency’s organizational design, as there are three regional offices that serve the northern, southern, and central parts of the county, including a satellite site located in Redwood City. The organizational design is also complementary to the one-stop center model, as it is the umbrella agency that includes Housing and Community Services, Income Maintenance, Youth and Families Services, and Job Training and Economic Development. In addition,

it is further enhanced by integrating their Cal-WORKS Program into the One-Stop Centers. PeninsulaWorks is available to serve the county’s population of over 700,000 residents.

In 1998 the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) was passed, requiring states to develop comprehensive workforce development strategies that incorporate the one-stop concept. The one-stop concept offers a more comprehensive and restructured approach to service delivery. The one-stop service center is modeled after the concept of one-stop shopping. The one-stop concept is a vehicle for states to implement welfare reform.

Effective July 1, 2000, states are mandated to create one-stop systems that deliver basic provisions. One such provision of the WIA is that states must develop local Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) to create and administer the program and the one-stop systems; therefore, eliminating the Private Industry Councils (PICs) and the Job Training and Partnership Act (JTPA) funding. States and localities can use WIA and welfare funding to develop one-stop service centers that can offer a variety of services. In addition, one-stop partners must include adult, youth and dislocated worker programs.

The one-stop operator uses multiple methods to refer customers to its partners. All customers receive information in the following ways: electronic, hard copy, at group orientations, by word -of-mouth or from a greeter, customer specialist,

*Connie Vega is the Executive Assistant to the Agency Director of Santa Clara County Social Services Agency.

assessment specialist or employment consultant. Customers also have the option of self-referral to Intensive Services offered by any partner organization. The SMART system electronically tracks referrals. In order to understand the customer flow process, I decided to approach the various PeninsulaWorks One-Stop Centers as if I were a customer.

My experience in the County of San Mateo PeninsulaWorks One-Stop Centers has taught me some valuable lessons. My lessons learned include: a) to appreciate the complexity of change (e.g. the difficulty of trying to integrate regulations and policies with program services and staff's attitude); b) to value and honor partnerships; and c) to have a strong but supportive Workforce Investment Board (WIB) for policy oversight and to create a bridge to the private industries.

Overall, the employment service centers provide adequate employment-related services, but the following recommendations can enhance service delivery:

1. improve the existing client greeting to be more friendly and helpful;
2. continue to maintain and strengthen existing partnerships, while developing new ones; and
3. educate and advocate to the WIBs about the needs of the client served by the employment service centers.

There can be many challenges or “Big Rocks” that one may encounter while creating a successful one-stop center. Partnerships are the foundation of your one-stop center, they require your attention and commitment. Leadership at all levels is essential in providing direction and a focused vision. While the WIA and the WIB can be a philosophical challenge, one must remember the clients that we serve.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES AT PENINSULAWORKS ONE-STOP CENTERS IN SAN MATEO COUNTY

Connie Vega

This case study examines how the County of San Mateo Human Services Agency dealt with the “Big Rocks,” blocking their path, by utilizing and maximizing their existing resources and their strengths; collaborating and establishing partnerships; and providing staff with the support and the training necessary to implement the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA).

“Big Rocks” are a symbol for challenges. While attending a PeninsulaWorks one-stop coordinating meeting, I noticed that “Big Rocks” was an agenda item. I learned from that during the initial implementation phase, staff worked with a facilitator to assist with making the transition. To encourage team-building, staff was asked to work in groups to get the “Big Rocks,” “Little Rocks” and “Sand” into a jar. Staff reported that, in addition to learning a lot about each other while doing this exercise, they learned to first start with the “Big Rocks” or major challenges.

Along with other localities and states, the County of San Mateo Human Services Agency has provided employment-related and training services, as defined by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, by implementing the PeninsulaWorks One-Stop Centers (One-Stop Centers).

One-Stop Centers are physical locations that provide a variety of employment and training services through the co-location of staff from partnering agencies. Services provided include core services that are universally available to customers without eligibility determination, as well as intensive services and training services that may require eligi-

bility determination. This fits nicely within the County of San Mateo Human Services Agency’s organizational design, as there are three regional offices that serve the northern, southern, and central parts of the county, including a satellite site located in Redwood City. The organizational design is also complementary to the one-stop center model, as it is the umbrella agency that includes Housing and Community Services, Income Maintenance, Youth and Families Services, and Job Training and Economic Development. In addition, it is further enhanced by integrating their CalWORKs Program into the One-Stop Centers. PeninsulaWorks is available to serve the county’s population of over 700,000 residents.

In Santa Clara County there are four one-stop centers called Employment Service Centers that are located in the central, eastern, southern and northern areas of the county. In partnership, the Employment Service Centers offer core, intensive, and training services which are available to the county’s population of nearly 1.6 million residents living in fifteen cities.

BACKGROUND:

In 1998 the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) was passed, requiring states to develop comprehensive workforce development strategies that incorporate the one-stop concept. The one-stop concept offers a more comprehensive and restructured approach to service delivery. The one-stop service center is modeled after the concept of one-stop shopping. The one-stop concept is a vehicle for states to implement welfare reform.

Effective July 1, 2000, states are mandated to create one-stop systems that deliver basic provisions. One such provision of the WIA is that states must develop local Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) to create and administer the program and the one-stop systems; therefore, eliminating the Private Industry Councils (PICs) and the Job Training and Partnership Act (JTPA) funding. States and localities can use WIA and welfare funding to develop one-stop service centers that can offer a variety of services. In addition, one-stop partners must include adult, youth and dislocated worker programs.

The WIA also requires that one-stop centers provide three types of services: 1) core services which are basic employment-related services; 2) intensive services which are those services that require staff assistance including counseling and case management; and 3) training services which are those services that are targeted towards serving the needs of those persons who are unable to benefit solely through core and intensive services. Priority for provision is given to low-income individuals and welfare recipients. County of San Mateo offers such services through PeninsulaWorks.

In accordance with the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was established between the San Mateo County Workforce Investment Board the PeninsulaWorks One-Stop Center partners to reflect a mutual understanding among the partner agencies. The MOU served as a policy framework and guide for the development and implementation of the PeninsulaWorks One-Stop Centers.

The One-Stop Centers have five guiding principles; they are to be:

- *Universally Accessible:* One-Stop Centers serve all job seekers and employers, offering a range

of services based on individual need, universal, and customized services. One-Stop Centers also consider the special needs of clients including people with disabilities, older workers, non-English speaking immigrants and other groups.

- *Customer Focused:* Job seekers and employers are able to go to any One-Stop Center and receive professional, friendly, customized service.
- *Performance Based:* Centers have measurable outcomes and are continuously improved based upon success and meeting the expectations of customers.
- *Integrated:* Services and programs previously administered separately by federal, state and local governments are now coordinated at One-Stop Centers.
- *Comprehensive:* One-Stop Center staff are knowledgeable of the full array of services and programs available in the community and make this information available to customers in an easy-to-understand manner that facilitates customer choice.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) defines the purpose, as well as partner agencies that include investor partners, contributing partners and affiliated partners. The MOU also describes the philosophy and goals, governance, services provided, customer flow, terms, agreements, independent agency status, methods for dispute resolution, confidentiality, modifications, termination, notices, insurance, site supervision, hours of operation, and resource sharing.

The Partners of PeninsulaWorks have formed a one-stop coordinating committee that meets monthly. The committee is composed of sixteen partners including the County of San Mateo Human Services Agency, Center for Independence of the Disabled,

Community Action Agency, Department of Rehabilitation, Employment Development Department (EDD), Family Service Agency of San Mateo, Goodwill Industries, Job Corps, Opportunities Industrialization Center West (OICW), Peninsula Library System, Poplar ReCare, RCH, Inc. (formerly Recreational Center for the Handicapped), San Mateo County Adult Schools, San Mateo County Central Labor Council, San Mateo County Community College District, and San Mateo County Office of Education. The one-stop coordinating committee develops and addresses issues specific to operational procedures.

THE CUSTOMER FLOW AND CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

The one-stop operator uses multiple methods to refer customers to its partners. All customers receive information in the following ways: electronic, hard copy, at group orientations, by word-of-mouth or from a greeter, customer specialist, assessment specialist or employment consultant. Customers also have the option of self-referral to intensive services offered by any partner organization. The SMART system electronically tracks referrals. In order to understand the customer flow process, I decided to approach the various Peninsula Works One-Stop Centers, as if I were a customer.

I was quite surprised and very impressed by each PeninsulaWorks site. I was greeted and welcomed by very pleasant staff, and oriented to the available services and resources. At first I thought that the staff knew I was visiting, so they were giving me the VIP treatment. So, I went back for a second time and, again, I was greeted and welcomed, oriented to existing services and resources. I even checked the Spanish version and found that the greeters were very friendly and helpful. I also observed this with

the customers, as I sat in the lobbies. With the greeter's help, I filled out an application, obtained a SWIPE card and was taught how to use it on the kiosk to obtain access to the Directory of Services (available in English, Spanish and Tagalog).

I decided to check out the job information center which offers access to a variety of hard copy and computerized job listings. Customers can consult with the customer specialist about various job listings, preparing a resume, making copies, calling potential employers, practicing computer skills, or even interview with employers. I attended a workshop on conflict management and found it to be informative and helpful. What I liked the most is that when customers found employment and were hired, the One-Stop-Center staff have an acknowledgment/congratulations ceremony where customers receive a Payday candy bar and their picture is taken and hung up on the wall of fame. Later, customers are mailed a little gift package that includes a PeninsulaWorks mug.

If you have not found employment after using the Core Services, staff can refer you to an employment consultant (EC) to discuss your specific employment and job search needs. An initial screening is conducted and the EC can provide job placement assistance and career counseling (if appropriate), additional information on available partners or intensive services, and any related fees. The ECs are skilled and have the knowledge to refer customers to the appropriate service.

Another available resource is the career assessment. The EC can refer customers to an assessment specialist (AS). The AS is responsible for determining if customers can be referred to training services. A individual employment plan is developed to assist the customer.

LESSONS LEARNED

My experience in the County of San Mateo PeninsulaWorks One-Stop Centers has been a valuable and incredible experience. While the lessons that I have learned are not earth-shattering nor solely applicable to Santa Clara's Employment Service Centers, I am hopeful I will be able to put them to use back at the Social Services Agency. I learned three lessons: a) to appreciate the complexity of change (e.g. the difficulty of trying to integrate regulations and policies with program services and staff's attitude); b) to value and honor partnerships; and c) to have a strong but supportive Workforce Investment Board (WIB) for policy oversight and to create a bridge to the private industries.

The first lesson I learned is the complexity of change and trying to integrate regulations and policies with program services and staff's attitude. Change was one of the most difficult experiences reported by staff. I appreciated that staff shared very candidly their experiences and perspectives while making the WIA transition to implement the PeninsulaWorks One-Stop Centers. It did not matter what position staff held, all expressed either struggling or embracing the change. Leadership was instrumental in assisting staff to head in the appropriate direction.

Santa Clara County Social Services Agency (SSA) faced the same dilemma. The implementation of WIA was not an easy task. With the introduction of Welfare Reform, the SSA began to rethink and redesign the way we plan, manage and deliver services. While this experience was recent, it did not ease the pain of having to make the WIA transition.

The most valued and treasured lesson that I learned is to value and honor partnerships. Partnerships

were the primary foundation for making the One-Stop Centers successful. I observed some incredible partnerships in San Mateo County. Both internally amongst the staff, as well as those that extend to community partners. Staff made it clear that partnerships are important and emphasized that partnerships must be maintained, and can be hard work. I saw partnerships at their best while attending both a regional one-stop meeting and a one-stop coordinating committee meeting. I noticed that both meetings had focus and good facilitation. All partners received were heard and received similar considerations. It was obvious that the partners had a sense of ownership and commitment.

In Santa Clara County, partnerships are especially vital and complex. The political dynamics of Santa Clara County have somewhat influenced the implementation of WIA. During the JTPA era, the Social Services Agency was a primary partner along with the Silicon Valley Private Industry Council and NOVA in providing countywide employment related services. WIA mandated employment-related services have been reconfigured. The SSA continues to work at maintaining and strengthening partnerships which is an on-going challenge or "Big Rock", while developing new partnerships. This is especially true with the WIBs.

My third and a critical lesson is the need to have a strong but supportive Work Investment Board (WIB) for policy, oversight and to serve as a bridge to the private industries. The WIB design and structure directly impacts one-stop centers. I observed that PeninsulaWorks One-Stops Centers are connected with the WIB director and have good communication. The WIB director provided partners with a thorough update and explained details, so that Partners could understand what was going on with PeninsulaWorks.

In Santa Clara County there are two WIBS. The WIB (NOVA) serves the northern county and the WIB (Silicon Valley) serves the remaining county area. Both WIBs require communication with Partners at various levels and in various areas, but there is very little local communication between the two WIBs. The SSA seems to share a much stronger and a much more established partnership with the NOVA WIB than with the Silicon Valley WIB.

While the SSA delivers employment services to clients, there is also the additional challenge or “Big Rock”, which is to be able to meet the mandates of providing services to assist families to become self-sufficient. This requires that the SSA take on more of a business approach than has been previously practiced by the SSA in engaging the WIBs. This may be the ultimate challenge or “Big Rock” that the SSA must face.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, Santa Clara County Employment Service Centers provide adequate employment-related services. The proposed three recommendations are minor, and have minimal fiscal implications, but would enhance service delivery to the clients. The recommendations are as follows:

- *Recommendation One:* Improve the existing client greeting to be more friendly and helpful. This would require minimal training to the receptionist staff at the Employment Service Centers. Fiscal implications are minimal, as the staff can be trained through existing training programs. This should only require time-off and coverage for staff to attend the training.
- *Recommendation Two:* Continue to maintain and strengthen the existing partnerships, while developing new partnerships.

- *Recommendation Three:* Educate and advocate to the WIBs about the needs of the clients served by the employment service centers. This is the most important recommendation, as it requires the SSA leadership to engage the WIBs. Leadership must develop strategies that demonstrate a working knowledge of entrepreneurial and business principles, while dealing with the stereotypes and stigma that are associated with “welfare.”

CONCLUSION

There can be many challenges or “Big Rocks” that one may encounter while creating a successful one-stop center. Partnerships are the foundation of one-stop centers and require attention and commitment. Leadership at all levels must provide direction and a focused vision. While the WIA and the WIB can be a philosophical challenge, one must remember the clients that we serve.

REFERENCES

- Memorandum Of Understanding Between The San Mateo County Workforce Investment Board And The PeninsulaWorks One-Stop Career Center Partners, pages 1-2.
- PeninsulaWorks Customer Flow Working Document, pages 1-2.
- County of San Mateo Human Services Agency FY 1998-1999 Annual Report, page 2.