

San Francisco County's Employment Services for General Assistance Recipients: Identifying Opportunities for Santa Cruz County

KIMBERLY PETERSEN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

San Francisco County offers comprehensive supportive services to adult cash aid recipients, who do not have children to support them, to help them identify their employment potential and overcome technical, behavioral, and emotional barriers to obtaining and maintaining work. Individuals in the Personal Assisted Employment Services (PAES) program participate in employment preparation classes that also recognize the mental health barriers to achieving sustainable employment. Participants also have access to referrals to focused counseling when needed to achieve job readiness and have the benefit of an assigned Employment Training Specialist to match them to a variety of employment options, including subsidized employment. Outcomes for

individuals who follow through with the complete program are positive, with more than 50% obtaining and maintaining work.

Santa Cruz County has more limited supportive services available to adult cash aid recipients who are without children. Santa Cruz County also has a much smaller population of General Assistance recipients, making the San Francisco County model less feasible; however, Santa Cruz County can learn from the principles and concepts in San Francisco County in order to re-evaluate components of the GA program in Santa Cruz, and collaborate with other county agencies and existing community based organizations to leverage funding and expand services for GA recipients.

**Kimberly Petersen, Program Manager, County of
Santa Cruz Human Services Department**

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Introduction

The number of General Assistance (GA) program recipients in Santa Cruz County has remained consistent, while the number of recipients who identify as employable has increased over the last six years. At the same time, the County of Santa Cruz Human Services Department (SCHSD) has implemented a customer experience-based business model and is exploring methods of providing a more holistic approach to benefit services, including employment services to GA recipients.

The City and County of San Francisco has a very robust employment services program for indigent adult cash aid recipients who choose to pursue employment. The program provides comprehensive support for clients as they work towards their self-sufficiency goals. This is an examination of San Francisco County's employment services program for GA recipients and an analysis of what lessons can be learned for Santa Cruz County.

Cash Aid and Employment Services for Adults in San Francisco County

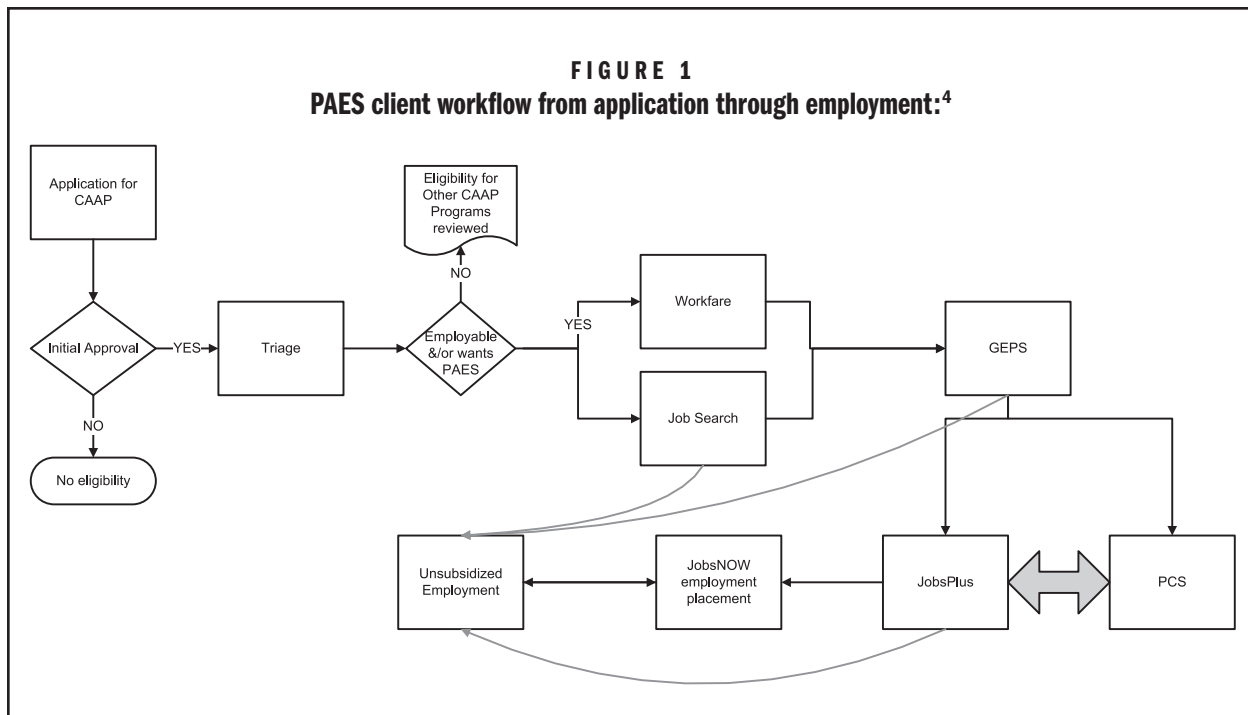
Under the umbrella of the County Adult Assistance Program (CAAP), a number of cash aid programs are available to adults without children based on their individual circumstances.¹ The aid programs are differentiated by the applicant's disability and employability status, medical status, and desire to receive employment services. Individuals who are disabled but not receiving disability, or who are unable to

work due to a medical issue and are on Medi-Cal, may be eligible for cash and services to support them in applying for and obtaining Social Security benefits. Individuals who are not disabled, or want to work, may be eligible to receive General Assistance payments or may opt to comply with the Personal Assisted Employment Services (PAES) program. In San Francisco the number of CAAP recipients averages 5,745 a month, with approximately 1,385 in GA and 2,564 in PAES.² Approximately 8% of the clients are homeless.³

Employable GA and PAES participants are required to comply with certain approved work, educational, vocational, or treatment plans. The PAES program is unique in that PAES clients have the opportunity to receive more intense employment services and a higher grant amount by signing a Participant Agreement and Employment Plan.

PAES participants have multiple paths that the client may follow towards the goal of self-sufficiency. *Figure 1* is a simple graphic outlining the flow of many PAES participants, followed by a description of each main component. Please note that the Workforce Development Department, which oversees PAES, is in the process of identifying ways to streamline processes where possible.

Triage - Triage is an evaluation and assessment of all CAAP clients. Triage is performed by trained counselors who meet one-on-one with each client to assess his or her physical and mental states and



employability. Following triage, each client is rated according to his or her employability status, so the Eligibility Worker can determine benefit programs and work requirements. The ratings are: No Restrictions, Light Duty, Temporary Disabling Condition, Likely Disabled, and Exempt. Triage services are contracted out to a mental-health-focused community-based organization (CBO), Richmond Area Multi-Services (RAMS). The Triage Clinicians work on-site at the county application center.⁵

Workfare - Workfare allows participants to perform community service through other departments, such as the Department of Public Works or Recreation and Parks; however, participants may also pursue alternative workfare with a designated CBO.⁶ The participants assist with keeping parks, trains, busses and other public facilities clean. Participants sign a contract with the organization they are doing workfare with, and they work six hours a week.

Job Search - Individuals who are unable to participate in workfare due to a “Light Duty” triage assessment participate in Job Search. Job Search requires participants to attend the Tenderloin Workforce Center (TWC) to search for jobs. Participants log

their attendance by signing in and swiping their Job Search cards through an electronic card reader. At a minimum, participants must visit the TWC ten times in a month for job searches.

Group Employment Preparation Sessions (GEPS) - In addition to Workfare or Job Search, PAES participants must attend an initial series of seven job readiness classes taught by county-employed trainers and RAMS staff. The 1.5 hour classes are once a week for approximately six weeks. In addition to life skills and job readiness activities, the classes provide for a further exploration of what the appropriate next step is for each participant to achieve his or her goals of obtaining and maintaining employment. The trainings are on topics such as identifying personal strengths, goals, skill assessments, employment and training tools and resources, and identifying actions that must be taken to achieve and maintain employment. One class provides time for a one-on-one meeting with the trainer or vocational assessment counselor, and every class provides opportunities for additional one-on-one support and referrals to other community resources. The GEPS trainers discuss what the next steps for the participant will be

following the last class, which is a graduation and opportunity to provide feedback. Upon completion of GEPS, the participants take one of two paths based on their individual circumstances. About 70% of the clients continue to Jobs Plus, and about 30% continue on to PAES Counseling Services.

PAES Counseling Services (PAES) - Individuals who need additional time to overcome barriers and develop their strengths before beginning a job search or maintaining work are referred to PCS. PCS provides focused mental and behavioral health support to individuals for a wide array of needs ranging from anger management or substance abuse to overcoming domestic violence and other issues that may hinder employment. Activities are geared toward overcoming barriers to employment. PCS is provided through a work order with the Department of Public Health, which also contracts with RAMS.

Jobs Plus - Jobs Plus is a six-week, more intensive series of job preparedness trainings, hands-on workshops, and one-on-one coaching sessions geared toward getting and maintaining employment. Sessions are co-facilitated with a county-employed trainer and RAMS staff, in order to support the participants in practicing the hard, technical skills needed for the job market and soft skills, such as communication and anger management, required to achieve employment and maintain employment. Individual participants who need focused mental health services are provided with appropriate referrals. Upon entrance to Jobs Plus, participants may receive a \$50 voucher to purchase interview clothes at a Goodwill store and complete surveys regarding their existing employment skills, educational backgrounds, and skills or behaviors for which they would like support in order to obtain and maintain a job.

Jobs Plus participants have an assigned Employment Training Specialist (ETS) who manages their case, helps develop an employment plan, and communicates with the trainers to support participants in achieving their employment goals. Through Jobs Plus, the participants have the opportunity to participate in the Jobs NOW Hiring Recruitments that

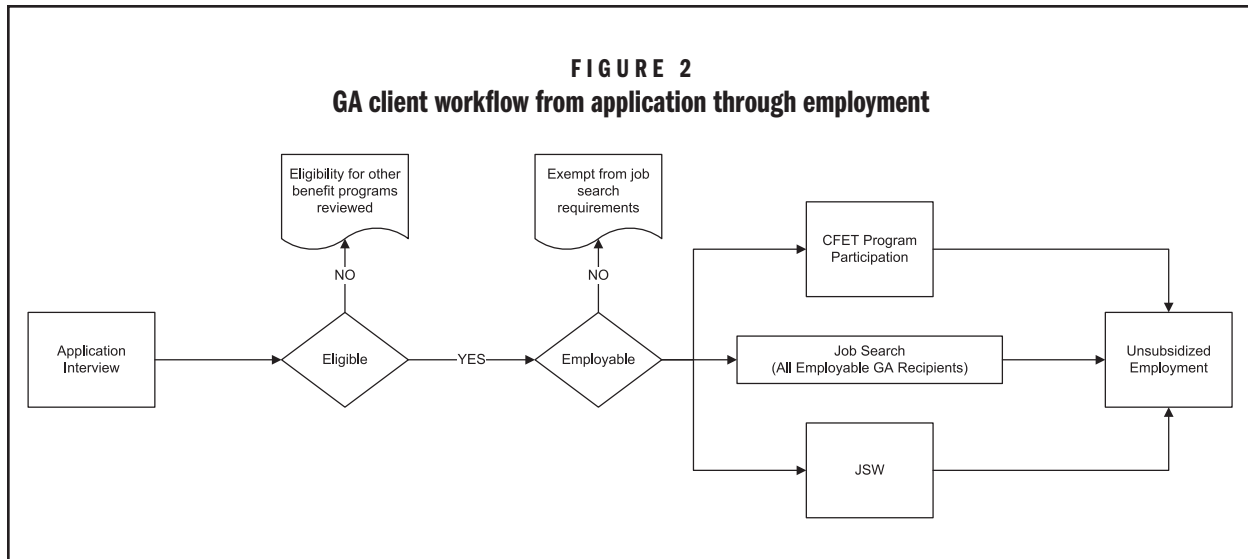
occur every Thursday at the San Francisco Career Links office.

Jobs NOW - Jobs NOW is a tiered approach to employment that places participants in a variety of jobs, ranging from highly supported internships in CBOs with additional professional development classes to more traditional jobs with private employers. The placements are based on the participant's job work readiness and ability to be hired following an interview process. Jobs Now is utilized for PAES participants, as well as CalWORK's Welfare-to-Work participants, former foster care youth, and other individuals being assisted by the county's employment services. PAES participants' trainers and ETS match individual participants with available jobs and arrange for interviews. During the weekly Jobs NOW recruitment event at the San Francisco Career Links office, the participants may interview for multiple positions. There are five tiers: Community Jobs Program, Individualized Training Internship, Public Service Trainee, Wage Subsidy, and Unsubsidized Employment. The ultimate goal is for participants to obtain or maintain long-term, unsubsidized employment following Jobs NOW.

Workfare, Job Search, GEPS, Jobs Plus, and the non-wage subsidy portions of Jobs Now are funded by CalFresh Employment and Training (CFET) funds; additional General Fund dollars are used to pay wage subsidies for PAES participants. Triage and PCS is paid for with Medicaid Title XIX Community Service Block Grant funds.

Outcomes in San Francisco

The participation rates and outcomes are higher than expected for a traditionally difficult-to-serve population. There is 60% participation across all PAES components.⁷ Between July 2011 and March 2013, 570 of 603 CAAP clients participated in Jobs NOW, and 360 of those 570 had earnings one quarter after exiting Jobs NOW, and 330 still had earnings two quarters after exiting Jobs NOW.⁸ Additionally 328, or 54%, of the 570 clients were not receiving any benefits, and 125 were receiving CalFresh only six



months after exiting. Many factors may explain why so many clients were not receiving benefits, but the number is noteworthy.

Employment Services and General Assistance in Santa Cruz County

Adults without children in Santa Cruz County who need cash assistance may be eligible for GA. Over the last 18 months, the average GA caseload has about 170 cases per month. Currently, approximately 36% of GA recipients are employable. Approximately 28% of the GA recipients are homeless. Of the total employable clients, approximately 28% are homeless and 10% of the population is both homeless and employable.⁹ *Figure 2* is a graphic overview of the basic workflow for GA applicants.

In relation to the CAAP programs in San Francisco County, there are fewer components of the GA program in Santa Cruz County, particularly in relation to mental health assessment and support, as well as structured job opportunities. During the interview with the Benefit Representative (BR), the GA applicant self-identifies as employable or non-employable due to a temporary or permanent disability. Individual's who identify as non-employable must provide a signed statement by a doctor stating why the individual is unable to work, and how long the condition is expected to last. Individuals with a mental health-related disability are exempt from

work requirements for a maximum of two months, unless they are evaluated by a clinician at the Health Services Agency confirming the condition will continue for a longer time period. Unemployable individuals are exempt from work requirements, and those evaluated to have a permanent disability are referred to an SSI Advocate to begin the process of applying for permanent disability benefits. Employable GA recipients are referred to the Job Search Workshop (JSW), or to the CalFresh Employment and Training program, and are required to verify they applied for 40 different jobs each month. All GA recipients must sign a repayment agreement.

JSW is a CalWORKS/Welfare to Work (WTW) job search and job-readiness activity in which employable GA recipients may also participate. JSW is four weeks for about seven hours/day, and it performed through a contract with a local non-profit organization. During the workshop the individuals receive training in how to develop a resume, prepare for interviews, and identify personal assets and challenges. BRs and trainers who work with the GA population have stated that GA participants need assistance beyond what JSW provides, but there is no formalized mechanism to connect them to the resource(s) they need. Following JSW, if the WTW participant does not gain employment, s/he will be referred to a subsidized employment program or further vocational or classroom training.

If authorized through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), and approved by a WIOA ETS, GA participants may attend further training and receive additional job search assistance. Subsidized employment opportunities do not exist for GA participants.

CFET in Santa Cruz County is performed through a contract with the Homeless Services Center in Santa Cruz. CFET provides assessment and case management for job readiness and job search activities, as well as housing stabilization and referrals to other services. The CFET performance goal is that 15% of the participants who enroll in CFET will obtain a job. Currently 15 GA clients have been referred to CFET, eight have participated in CFET activities, and five of those individuals have completed case plans.

When contrasting the employment training plans between the counties of San Francisco and Santa Cruz, it is apparent that San Francisco has much more robust services for a much larger population. Areas of particular interest for Santa Cruz County are the triage function that provides for an assessment and evaluation of participants at the start of the application process, the continued behavioral health support and opportunities for formalized referrals for individuals needing focused mental health services, and finally, the various levels of employment opportunities for GA participants.

Considering the size of the GA population, particularly the employable population in Santa Cruz County, it is not feasible to recreate the comprehensive systems that exist in San Francisco; however, there are opportunities to leverage existing relationships, expand existing services, and formalize existing referrals. There are also opportunities to gather more information about the GA population, and explore new relationships with existing CBOs to expand services.

Opportunities and Recommendations for Santa Cruz County

Below are a set of recommendations and opportunities listed in order based on how quickly they can be

implemented, and the practical, technical, and financial considerations of each recommendation.

- Currently there is no mechanism for GA applicants to state their barriers to employment. Change the GA intake process to allow individuals to identify mental-emotional health or substance abuse-related issues with which they want support.
- Current GA rules around job search requirements are very strict at 40 verifiable applications a month for jobs for which the recipient is qualified, and with no applications for the same job within a three-month period. The current requirements are significantly higher than CFET job search requirements, may be unattainable for many people, and may create additional emotional stressors on the recipients that hinder continuing the job search. The GA regulations could be altered to make job search requirements more realistic for the current environment and local hiring practices.
- The current report on the GA client profile paints a broad picture of GA recipients, but a more refined profile could assist in better identifying the best way to serve GA recipients. I recommend including information on the age of GA recipients, within 10 – 15 year increments, identifying whether the client identifies as homeless in North or South County, along with additional data on the number of non-homeless vs. homeless employable GA recipients, and the rate of churn.
- Create a formal feedback loop between the JSW trainers and the GA BRs, paired with guidance on available referrals for the client's needs. Ideally the referrals would be formalized through procedures with the Health Services Agency or another Medi-Cal provider equipped to support or refer clients appropriately. In the short-term, providing guidance to the BR on how to better support the client with a warm hand-off to 211 or the Central California Alliance for Health would be an improvement.

- Expand the existing agreement with HSA to provide employability-focused mental health assessments of all GA applicants. If an applicant is discontinued and re-applies within a six-month period of time, then the individual could be exempt from the assessment assuming s/he reports no changes in his/her status. Each month, there are approximately 159 GA applicants, and only about 20% are approved for services. Consider that some are likely re-applying after discontinuance; a smaller number is likely to need the mental health assessment. Assuming all GA eligible applicants are also Medi-Cal eligible, the services could be paid for through Medi-Cal, though exact funding and roles and responsibilities between HSA and the Human Services Department would need to be negotiated. Additionally, HSA capacity would need to be considered. An alternative to expanding the agreement with HSA is to establish a new arrangement and contract with a mental-health focused CBO that can also utilize Medi-Cal for services. One advantage of HSA is that clinics are located in the north and south ends of the county, making them accessible to most applicants.
- Explore the potential for a GA-focused Job Search Workshop, and/or the existence of an organization that can provide more intense CFET services to non-homeless clients, either through a new contract or expanded contract with an existing job search/support service provider. Consider whether a capable provider is already receiving money through HSD's Community Service Grants, and consider whether the services paid for can be modified to fit CFET requirements so that the grant money can leverage additional CFET funding and result in expanded services.
- Explore the feasibility of conducting a pilot program to expand the county's subsidized employment, such as STEP or Smart Hire, to provide supported employment opportunities to employable GA clients. The pilot could be very limited

to five to ten GA clients, and it could be partially funded with a portion of the money reimbursed to the GA program from SSI. Last year approximately \$100,000 was reimbursed to the GA program. Administrative activities related to the pilot could be paid for with CFET matching. The exact funding of any Employment Services staff may be challenging, but there may be a way to use BRs already familiar with the clients and Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA) employees and services. Because of the complexities and limitations around funding sources, this would be a challenging, but a potentially worthwhile endeavor.

- Consider work incentives for employable GA clients, such as lien removal following a certain time period of continuous employment.

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References

1. CAAP Information Form 2133CR (3/01/14), obtained during a CAAP Orientation. Information also available through CAAP Eligibility Manual, April 1/2015, available at: <http://www.sfhsa.org/asset/ReportsDataResources/CAAPEManual040115.pdf>
2. Caseload Data report for FY 14/15 provided by John Murray, Sr. Planning and Policy Analyst on 4/28/15
3. Client Demographic Profile, available in the Power Point Presentation on the CalFresh Employment and Training (CFET) Program provided to Federal Government Representatives in December 2014,
4. This flow is a modification of a more detailed CFET Client Flow, that can be found in the same Power Point Presentation from December 2014 mentioned above.
5. Conversation with Dr. Thomas Neill on 4/28/15 regarding Triage operations
6. Information on PAES Program components was gathered when attending Orientation, Workfare, Job Search, GEPS, Jobs Plus meetings, and the Jobs NOW recruitment over multiple days, 2/23/15, 3/2/15, 3/9/15, 3/10/15, 3/12/15
7. Conversation with Bernadette Santos, Manager Workforce Development Division, on 5/5/15
8. Jobs NOW Post Program Employment and Benefit Outcomes Power Point Presentation, 11/18/14, provided by Bernadette Santos
9. Data obtained from GA Demographic Profile Reports from Santa Cruz HSD intranet, and Frank Richards, Sr. Human Services Analyst

