

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF EMPLOYMENT ADVANCEMENT AND RETENTION
SERVICES IN SAN MATEO COUNTY:
THE ART OF ADVANCEMENT AND RETENTION**

Helene Cohen*

INTRODUCTION

Welfare reform has made us, as employees of Human Services Agencies, very aware of the need not only to help people find substantial employment, but also to provide services that will ensure a participant's success on the job. Success can mean many things; finding a job, retaining the position, acquiring skills to advance to a better position, contentment on the job, and salary increases. San Francisco County is currently assisting CalWORKS and PAES participants with training and employment opportunities. PAES stands for Personal Assisted Employment Services, and is the welfare to work program for San Francisco's indigent adults. We will provide retention services after a participant becomes employed. Employment advancement and retention are important in order for a person to succeed. The focus of this paper will be to help you become familiar with the various types of advancement and retention services San Mateo County has implemented or is planning to implement. This paper will also present information and observations, to help San Francisco County Department of Human Services in its development of retention and advancement services.

BACKGROUND

San Mateo County began their model for SUCCESS (Shared Undertaking to Change the Community to Enable Self-Sufficiency) in 1995-1996. SUCCESS is San Mateo County's comprehensive Welfare-To-Work Program. SUCCESS focuses on helping families and individuals successfully transition from welfare to work. SUCCESS helps welfare recipients overcome problems that keep them from getting and maintaining jobs. Their Human Service Agency (HSA), in collaboration with members of the community, sponsored a major effort to develop a new service delivery model. The goal of the program was to improve the self-sufficiency of individuals and families, by giving people the tools to transition from welfare to work, and the advancement and retention skills needed to maintain and excel in their positions. The caseload size in San Mateo County at the end of 1998 was: General Assistance 293, and total TANF with an adult caseload 1,120. Those numbers continue to decrease with the increased focus on employment and training. San Mateo County has been successful in placing many of their participants in employment, and their next step is to follow their participants for a period of time to assist them with services and training classes to retain and advance in their positions.

GEOGRAPHICS

San Mateo County is a large county, and their Department of Human Services offices are divided into three different regions, Northern, Central and Southern. Each region serves the needs of a variety of cities and zip codes. The cities located in the Northern Region are: Pacifica, Daly City, South San Francisco, Colma, Brisbane and San Bruno. The cities located in the Central Region

* Helene Cohen is a Training Supervisor in the PAES Program of the San Francisco County Department of Human Services.

are: San Mateo, Foster City, Belmont, San Carlos, Burlingame, Hillsborough, Milbrae, El Granada, Half Moon Bay, LaHonda, Loma Mar, Montara, Moss Beach, Pescadero and San Gregorio. The cities of the Southern Region are: Redwood City, Menlo Park, East Palo Alto, Fair Oaks, Woodside, Atherton and Portola Valley.

PURPOSE

The purpose of my project is to research the various types of advancement and retention services offered in San Mateo County. I studied five different programs in San Mateo and one in San Francisco that offer Advancement and Retention Services. These programs are a mix of county programs and Community Based Organizations services (CBO's).

- Advancement and Retention Team (A.R.T)
- Meaningful Employment Needs Domestic Support (MENDS)
- Opportunities Industrialization Center West (OICW) Evening and Weekend Program
- The Collaborative Club
- Project Career Express, Education and Advancement Connection Project
- Asian Neighborhood Design (San Francisco, Community Based Organization).

1 The A.R.T Project:

This advancement and retention team model is just in its planning stages. This project is one of San Mateo's next steps in helping individuals and families successfully transition from welfare to work, and overcome problems that keep them from getting and maintaining jobs. Some of the problems may include: mental health issues, alcohol or other drug abuse and domestic violence. A.R.T will follow-up with clients who are both active and discontinued from aid. A.R.T will make referrals to service providers, and invite employed participants in to sign-up for additional trainings. What San Mateo's HSA is working on developing is a team made up of an Employment Specialist (ESS) and one Community Worker (a worker employed by the San Mateo County who conducts many different job functions within their Department). One of the positions for a Community Worker will be to assist the Employment Specialist with follow-up services for the employed participants. A.R.T will be located in every region to provide their participants services.

The proposed operation of their system would be:

- a Placement screens (GIS and SMART) will be completed by the ESS once the participant become employed.
- b A.R.T members will provide training to employed participants and former participants in the various "soft skills" encompassed by the YES program ("our Employment Success". a training component of the Curtis Training Model). Some examples of the trainings are Communications, Teamwork, Problem Solving, Money Management and Customer Service. Trainings will be offered in the evenings and Saturdays.

- c A.R.T members will conduct follow-up calls or send letters to all employed clients (active and discontinued) at the 30, 60, 90 and 180 day points. The ART Team will use a follow-up Employment Questionnaire to monitor the progress of their participants. There is also a proposal circulating to extend business hours for working participants. The managers recommended that all services be made available and appropriate offices remain open from 8 A.M to 8 PM. Tuesdays and Thursdays in addition to 8 A.M. to 5 PM. Mondays. Wednesdays and Fridays. All information would be narrated on the SMART system to keep the files up to date.
- d A.R.T identifies service needs on active and non-active cases (for the time allocated as the retention period); A.R.T will provide direct referrals necessary and assist in scheduling the appointments. A.R.T will advise participants when issues are employer related. A.R.T will set up appointments with on-site counselors, who follow-up with the participant. A.R.T will make recommendations regarding the participants continued success.

At any time during the retention period, A.R.T may arrange a Family Self-sufficiency Team (FSST) meeting. This would be a group meeting for the participant and family and/or service providers to get together to help the participant resolve any issues.

A.R.T will also work in conjunction with the income and eligibility worker (IESS) on cases that are active and not employed through the Work First component. IESS handles eligibility and on-going case management, while the Art Team will participate in the advancement and retention follow-up.

2 The MENDS Project:

The MENDS project means "Meaningful Employment Needs Domestic Support". This is an exciting new Opportunities Industrialization Center West (OICW) project funded by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. OICW is a successful nonprofit community based organization which provides comprehensive job training and job placement services to more than 2,000 people annually. OICW is located in the southern region of San Mateo County. The MENDS project will provide both on-going and retention services for 160 unemployed low income/poverty level parents (80 per year) with job training, counseling, and placement services. Participants must have children who are dependent, and CalWORKS participants need to be attending a Jobs Now back to work program, and looking for employment. The project will utilize a case management approach and have post placement service and activities that will continue for at least two years after job placement. Case managers will work with other community resources to establish multi -disciplinary teams to work with MENDS Project clients and their families. Clients who are working are seen every three months for a follow-up visit. Monthly newsletters are sent out to inform participants on trainings, social events, and current information. Opportunities for evening programs are available for working participants. When participants become employed, they are encouraged to join credit unions, open checking accounts, and purchase necessary items such as vehicles. The goal is to achieve lasting employment with upward mobility and stable functioning families.

3 Opportunities Industrialization Center West (OICW) Evening and Weekend Programs:

OICW, San Mateo's non-profit community based One Stop Shop and Training Center knows how hard it is to find a good job without a high school diploma. OICW offers evening and weekend GED preparation classes. In addition, evening and weekend classes are being offered in Health care, Restaurants, Electronics and Computer Skills. OICW is working with their participants on how to retain their employment, and how to advance in their position with new skills. OICW is offering a voucher for an evening or weekend program free to all their vocational graduates. This voucher is used as an incentive for people to advance their skills and knowledge. because they can attend the training free of charge. OICW sends Service Questionnaires to graduates and employers asking for information about how to provide better services. Childcare is provided while participants attend trainings. Cases are managed and tracked by their service staff.

4 The Collaborative Club Community-Business Connection Project:

The club was formed as a way for the Human Service Agency of San Mateo, private employers, and educational institutions, to come together to discuss and visualize ways to support job progression and retention for participants who have entered the workforce at the entry level and are still receiving and eligible for forms of public assistance. The Community-Business Connection Project was conceived and designed to engage the local labor market in this welfare to work effort. By partnering with business and local educational institutions, they are seeking to provide services that will insure our participants success on the road to self-sufficiency, and provide employers with the people they need to be successful in their businesses.

Businesses such as Mervyns, Safeway, and United Parcel Services have all joined the Club in hopes to partner with HSA in hiring Human Service participants. Presently the Club is developing a Pilot Program to train entry-level employees at their job site. The County of San Mateo will provide a facilitator at no charge to the employer, to conduct the YES (Your Employment Success) training program over a period of weeks. The goal of the pilot is to improve the "soft skills" of their employees, thereby improving job retention and promotion potential.

5 Project Career Express; Education and Advancement Connection Project: The San Mateo County Community College District (SMCCCD) which includes Skyline College, College of San Mateo, and Canada College, and the San Mateo County Human Service Agency propose to entered a collaborative partnership to accomplish the following:

- Identify and work with CalWORKS graduates who are employed.
- Provide post-employment and transitional services
- Assist project participants in improving their skills, so they can earn a living wage in San Mateo.

The purpose of this partnership is to provide a continuum of post-employment and related transitional services. The goal is to provide a range of services and training that result in CalWORKS graduates acquiring the necessary skills to sustain employment and advance to higher paying positions thus enabling them to be self-sufficient.

The SMCCCD colleges will work with Human Services to identify participants, and employers, provide services, provide and/or link to skill training, and track outcomes. Project participation, completion of skill improvement plan, placement in training activities, wage increases and job promotions will be documented and tracked up to 6 months beyond the date of completion of the program for each participant.

— 4

6 Asian Neighborhood Design:

Last I visited one of San Francisco's non-profit Employment Training Centers, Asian Neighborhood Design. Training that is offered here is in carpentry and cabinet making. I visited a San Francisco nonprofit to compare and contrast services with San Mateo. Here 90% of the training graduates get jobs and are followed by a case manager with retention services for nine months. During the nine months the case manager develops a relationship with the employer and the employee (trainee). After one week the case manager phones the employer to see how things are working. During the first month of employment the case manager visits the employer two to four times. After the first month the visits are reduced to once a month. Tracking is followed by retention forms, telephone calls, letters to graduates, site visits, and a monthly calendar kept by the case manager.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SAN FRANCISCO COUNTY

There is much that San Francisco can learn from the new and innovative programs of San Mateo County. The five different projects that I studied in San Mateo, and the one non-profit organization in San Francisco offered ideas and procedures for making our advancement and retention services at the Department of Human Services in San Francisco more successful.

Some recommendations that I have for my county are:

- Have all employed participants centrally located in one or several designated Employment Specialists (ES) caseloads. The ES could focus on advancement and retention services. Statistics can be kept and progress can be tracked. This would allow for evening and weekend services to be offered by the Employment Specialists with these caseloads.
- Have training classes available in the evenings and on Saturdays, for participants who have begun to work. These training's for additional soft skills (YES Curriculum), and hard skills could be coordinated through the Employment Specialist staff. This would allow our participants to continue to learn new skills for career advancement. Participants might realize while on the job, that they need additional skills to succeed. This would give them the opportunity to attend classes and still retain their employment.
- Develop a case narrative and tracking system for employed participants. Currently we do not have an on-line narrative system, like the Smart system in San Mateo. For our employed caseloads, we could manually track employment, promotions, salary increases, job retention

and satisfaction on the job. We can design a form that enables monthly entries and contacts. Continued training's can be narrated and also entered on the GIS system. We might want to explore the option of an on-line narrative screen in San Francisco County.

- Design Employer/ Employee Questionnaires. The employee questionnaire can serve as a contact form with our participants. The form can ask questions pertaining to their employment. The employer questionnaire would ask about their satisfaction with our participant, and what we could do as an agency to provide additional training and supportive services.
- Follow-up calls or visits will be required at the 30, 60, 90 and 180 day point. All visits and calls will be narrated on our case narrative/tracking form.
- Evening and /or weekend hours can be arranged to accommodate our working participants.
- The Employment Specialist can schedule followup service appointments with our PAES Counselors, Job developers and Assessors.
- Hold quarterly meetings with employers who have hired our participants to review progress and additional needs.

CONCLUSION

After researching advancement and retention services in San Mateo, I realize how important these services are, and how they contribute to a person's success with their work. It is hard enough landing a job, but advancing in the position and acquiring the skills and confidence to maintain the position are even more difficult. I am hoping that this research will assist in my county's implementation of a useful component to our already successful PAES program.

I would like to thank the many staff members of the Human Service Agency in San Mateo County, OICW and Asian Neighborhood design. I would also like to thank the business and educational contacts that provided me with information and support throughout my project. San Mateo County's Human Resources Agency in collaboration with members of their community have been successful in delivering a new service model that has helped many participants move from dependency to independence.