

SAN FRANCISCO'S WAGE BASED PILOT PROGRAM: THE COMMUNITY JOBS INITIATIVE

Beverly Wright*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Welfare Reform requirements mandate that CalWORKS, able-bodied, adult recipients are limited to five years of cash assistance and must begin community service employment after 24 months on aid.

Community service employment is work performed by CalWORKS participants to give them the opportunity to develop marketable skills and build a work history in public agencies or private non-profit organizations.

The San Francisco Department of Human Services with the San Francisco Private Industry Council and two non-profit organizations, Goodwill Industries and Community Vocational Enterprise, collaborated to design the Community Jobs Initiative (CJI) project. The project began in January 1999 and is expected to continue through January 2001. The program's goal is to help unemployed clients obtain permanent and unsubsidized employment by providing paid work experience in a closely supervised environment.

The key components are:

- Participants are considered "employees" rather than recipients and their income is in the form of earnings rather than welfare.
- The Private Industry Council manages the payroll and also serves as the employer of record. Participants will show this on their resumes.

- Participants are eligible to receive the earned income tax incentive to supplement their incomes.
- Community service jobs must teach skills that are transferable to the unsubsidized work place. Work sites are to prepare participants for real jobs.
- Participants must be supported throughout the program by all involved; work site supervisor, employment specialist, job retention worker and the CJI case manger.
- The program provides incentives to reward participants. The incentives are gift certificates to a department store, to a movie theatre, pizza parlor and range in value from \$25.00 to \$150.00.
- Evaluation is contracted with the San Francisco State's Urban Institute to determine the effectiveness of the program. They will conduct a comprehensive assessment of the program and to provide real time feedback to the program managers.

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BACKGROUND

Welfare Reform requirements mandates that CalWORKS, able-bodied adult, recipients are limited to five years of cash assistance and must begin community service employment after 24 months on aid.

Community service employment is work performed by CalWORKS participants to give them the opportunity to develop marketable skills, build a work history in public agencies or private non-profit organizations.

Two approaches to community service are:

1. **Workfare:** The participant is required to work in a community service work assignment as a condition of receiving public assistance.
2. **Wage-based:** The participant's grant is used to pay wages to the participant for hours worked in a community service work assignment.

In Contra Costa County, employable General Assistance recipients are required to work in a workfare assignment as a part of their eligibility to receive aid. The number of required work hours is determined by dividing the General Assistance grant by the minimum hourly wage. Employable General Assistance recipients are assigned to work at a public agency operated recycling center, clean up crew and senior citizen centers.

INTRODUCTION

The host for my BASSC internship project was the

San Francisco Human Services Department's wage-based community service pilot program called the Community Jobs Initiative (CJI).

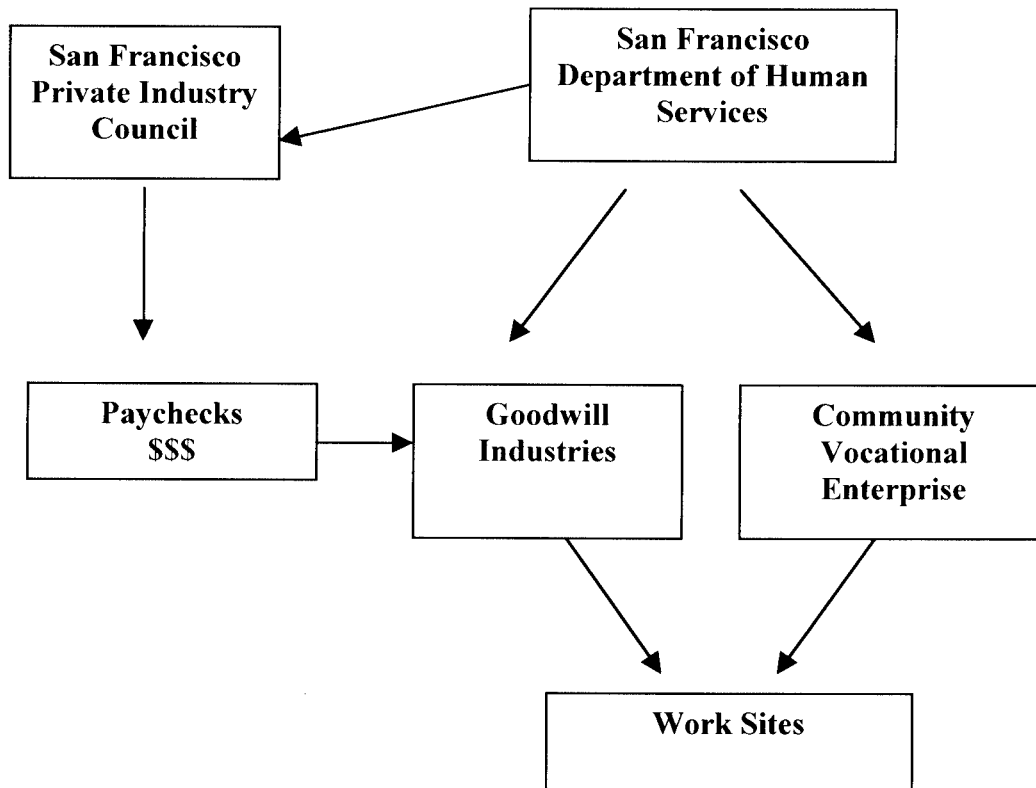
The San Francisco Department of Human Services with the San Francisco Private Industry Council and two non-profit organizations, Goodwill Industries and Community Vocational Enterprise, collaborated to design the Community Jobs Initiative project (see Figure 1 next page). The project began in January 1999 and is expected to continue through January 2001. The program's goal is help unemployed clients obtain permanent and unsubsidized employment by providing paid work experience in a closely supervised environment.

MY OBSERVATIONS

The San Francisco Department of Human Service employment specialist is responsible for handling the eligibility and employment-related tasks with an emphasis on case management. Employment Specialists have a variety of vocational training programs and community employment programs and resources available to refer participants to, and one of those programs is the Community Jobs Initiative (CJI, as it is called).

Participants who are referred to CJI attend an orientation and are then scheduled for an intake and assessment appointment at Community Vocational Enterprises to identify areas of interests, skills, barriers to employment and to develop an employment plan. They are then assigned to a Case Manager.

Figure 1



TWO-WEEK WORKSHOP

The next step is a highly motivating two-week workshop that is conducted by the Goodwill Industries. The workshop is not only employment focused but also includes life skills discussions: the everyday problems of getting up to go to work, planning the night before, stresses in the work place, establishing bank accounts, money management, and dressing for work. The workshop also conducts visits to public agencies in the community. Participants identify the type of community job they want and make preparations for the job interview.

WORKSHOP GRADUATION

At the end of each workshop a graduation program is held where family, friends, past graduates, and

the Department Human Services employment specialists are invited to attend. Graduates participate in the program by reading a poem they have been working on throughout the workshop. Case Managers have said, “there is not a dry eye in the room,” as the participants reveal some of their innermost desires for themselves and their families.

INTERVIEW PROCESS

Workshop graduates compete for the community service jobs through the interviewing process. Employers conduct the job interviews and select participants based on their interest, interviews and attempt to match the applicant with the actual work site.

COMMUNITY SERVICE JOB

The Community Service job is a six-month assignment, during this time the participant reports to the community service supervisor and maintains contact with the CJI case manager. CJI case managers are responsible for contacting the community service supervisor and the participant weekly, or at least every other week, to monitor the participant's progress and to readily provide support to the supervisor and the participant. Community service supervisors are expected to advise the CJI case manager of any problems immediately so they can be addressed as soon as possible, whether it is related to job performance, attendance, child care or substance abuse. When a problem is identified a conference is scheduled with the participant to discuss the problem and identify solutions. Depending on the situation either the community service supervisor or the Department Human Services employment specialist will attend the conference, along with the CJI case manager. Sometimes a participant asks to change positions to resolve a situation but CJI staff does not see this as a solution to the problem as this option is not available in the real work environment.

GRANT DIVERSION

The San Francisco Department of Human Services diverts the actual CalWORKS checks of the participants who are working in CJI jobs to the Private Industry Council which is responsible for managing the payroll. The pay rate for a community service position is \$5.75 an hour, but this is not enough to cover the payroll taxes. San Francisco has committed to use General Funds to cover the costs of the SDI and FICA taxes, which increases the hourly wage to \$6.26 an hour. CJI participants are also eligible to receive an earned income tax credit that

increases their monthly take home pay by \$115 per month. The Private Industry Council is the employer of record for the participants. They issue the paychecks and are listed as the employer on the participant's future resumes.

Timesheets are submitted the CJI case managers who review them for completeness and resolve discrepancies before forwarding them to the Private Industry Council. When a participant does not work the required hours, they will still always receive the child's portion of the CalWORKS grant.

JOB DEVELOPMENT

After the six-month job assignment is completed, the participant is referred to a job developer who will assist the participant with finding unsubsidized employment.

INCENTIVE AWARDS

CJI participants have the opportunity to receive incentive awards while they are working toward obtaining unsubsidized employment. The incentives are gift certificates to a department store, to a movie theatre, pizza parlor and range in value from \$25 - \$150. Incentives are given due to success on the behalf of the participant, for example after 60 days of going to work every day and being punctual, a participant receives a \$50 gift certificate. CJI participants look forward to receiving their gift certificates and remind their case managers when they are due.

RETENTION SERVICES

Goodwill and Community Vocational Enterprise provide one year of retention services to CJI participants who have obtained unsubsidized employment.

SITE DEVELOPMENT

Goodwill and Community Vocational Enterprise is responsible for developing work sites for the CJI participant.

OUTCOMES

As of January 2000, there had been 170 participants enrolled in the CJI project. 150 participants completed the workshop and 104 completed the six-month job assignment. 17 participants are now in unsubsidized jobs. Currently there are 91 CJI participants in community service employment jobs. The project's goal is to provide community employment jobs to 200 CalWORKS participants.

EVALUATION

The San Francisco Urban Institute was contracted to provide a comprehensive and real time evaluation of the CJI program. The goal of the evaluation is to provide the San Francisco Department of Human Services and CJI staff with ongoing feedback. Three progress memos will be submitted at months 6, 10, and 18. An interim report will be submitted at the end of 12 months and a final report will be submitted at the end of the 24-month pilot period. The following are some of the summary findings to date:

- CJI is enrolling the intended CalWORKS participant
- Participants believe that CJI will help them become employed.
- Department of Human Service employees are referring fewer participants than projected.
- Department of Human Service employment specialists have a limited understanding of CJI's program services.

- Participants feel that they receive very little information about the CJI program at the time of the referral.
- The two-week workshop is an effective part of the program that instills high levels of motivation, a boost in confidence and a greater understanding about the world of work.
- Positive relationships developed between staff and participants. Staff is supportive, accessible and responsive to their needs.
- Participants obtain a new perception of themselves, having something to contribute to the labor market and express improved family relations.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SAN FRANCISCO

Employment Specialist could develop and conduct a one to two hour informational workshops for currently exempt CalWORKS participants. This would be an opportunity to talk to them about their future, to develop plans for their future, provide life skills information such as how to select a child care provider.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONTRA COSTA COUNTY

The county should implement a wage based community service program for CalWORKS participants who have been unsuccessful in obtaining employment.

Try to identify community-based organizations that have experience with providing employment-related services to the hard to serve populations.

CONCLUSION

A wage-based program provides an opportunity for CalWORKS participants to meet welfare reform mandates while establishing themselves as an integral part of the community. This process can help to remove the stigma that is attached to receiving a welfare check. It can also be beneficial for the entire family by strengthening the relationships between family members. Children feel proud that their parent(s) “is at work” or “getting paid today” which can effect change in their own lives.

Although some family members and friends may feel threatened by change, the transition can be made easier for the entire family if a strong relationship can be maintained between the case manager and the participant.