

## **CALWORKS CAREER ADVANCEMENT PROGRAM (CALCAP): A COMMUNITY OUTREACH WORKER PILOT PROJECT IN SANTA CLARA COUNTY**

**Carl Dudley\***

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The average CalWORKs participant who finds a job earns approximately \$8.43 per hour as a starting wage. The Self Sufficiency Standard report released in November, 2000 by the Californians for Family Economic Self-Sufficiency (CFESS), a statewide anti-poverty coalition reports that “once again, public programs have recognized the failure of the one size fits all poverty measure to capture differences in need.” Also that, “training and education do not have the same urgency as do basic needs such as food and shelter, true long-term self-sufficiency increasingly necessitates investments that enhance skills and adaptability. Without technologically sophisticated and broad-based education – which provides the flexibility to move into new jobs and careers – self-sufficiency is in danger of being at best a fleeting accomplishment.”

The “work first” model used by many public assistance programs following the enactment of welfare reform only forced families off cash aid, only to necessitate supplemental benefits to maintain an acceptable standard of living. In that model, participants are oriented to program requirements and benefits, and referred to various job search activities, support programs, or treatment programs if significant employment barriers are present. In some cases, jobs are designed to provide participants with skills and work experience. However, once a participant becomes employed, efforts either cease or are limited.

Santa Clara County’s effort to devise a program that enhances skills and career advancement of CalWORKs participants is an example of the type of investment necessary to maintain employment. The CalWORKs career advancement program recognizes that many families who are receiving cash assistance and other support services after becoming employed full-time are not self-sufficient. The pilot project is scheduled to begin July 1, 2001, and is funded with CalWORKs incentive funds and county administrative dollars at an estimated cost of \$1,344,000. It will focus on outreach of employed families, offer career advancement and retention services to identify advancement needs, and link them to existing services offered by agency partners that enable clients to realize their career advancement goals. The project will pay clients an incentive stipend, or voucher, equivalent of \$50.00 per week, for 16 weeks. The stipend will be in addition to childcare, transportation, and other ancillary services.

The initial goal of the pilot project is to enroll 30% of the full time employed CalWORKs clients into career advancement skill upgrade services. Convincing former CalWORKs client to upgrade their skills while managing a job and family will not be easy, even with incentives. The outreach worker approach will offer participants focused, experienced, and knowledgeable help in areas such as: a) identifying and enrolling in programs and services,

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b) finding educational opportunities to improve the skills that will lead to career advancement and greater earning potential, and c) increasing their potential for self-sufficiency. I recommend that Contra Costa County turn its attention to employment retention and jobs with better wages by implementing an outreach worker approach similar to CalWORKS career advancement program.

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Since the implementation of CalWORKs, the employment rate of cash aid recipients has been increasing at an unprecedented rate. According to Santa Clara County Department of Social Service and other agencies in California responsible for administering the provisions of the California's Work Opportunities and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program, this is attributed to the "work first" model together with time limits, changes in eligibility criteria, increased incentives for working, and a healthy economy. Despite the caseload declines due to this employment surge, welfare departments are facing other critical issues for this population. People have moved off welfare, but not out of poverty. Employment alone is not enough. The high costs of living in the Bay Area and jobs requiring advanced training and education necessitates that CalWORKs participants improve their skills to be competitive and to move from the ranks of the working poor. This case study describes the efforts of Santa Clara County to enhance the job skills and career advancement of their CalWORKs participants. The CalWORKs program is summarized and a description of the CalWORKs career advancement program is provided. The case study concludes with a recommendation that Contra Costa implement a similar outreach worker program.

### **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Because of the CalWORKs time limits, most recipients cannot combine work and welfare, or cycle

between welfare and low wage work for more than two years.

There are also fewer good jobs for low-skilled workers and fewer career ladders for entry-level workers. The average participant who finds a job in Santa Clara County earns approximately \$8.43 per hour as a starting wage. Although County Employment Placement Connections in Santa Clara County report the average placement wage has changed from \$9.73 per hour to \$11.19 per hour, a recent Self-Sufficiency Standard Study<sup>1</sup> [Attachment A] for that area shows that at least \$21.24 per hour is needed for a single parent with one preschool age child to be self sufficient. The study also shows that a family of one adult, one preschool child, and one school age child requires \$25.55 per hour to be self-sufficient. Although clients are obtaining jobs and leaving welfare, the challenge of helping people reach true self-sufficiency requires a new service delivery model: a model that supports retention and career development to ensure that welfare transition clients increase their earning potential and acquire the skills necessary to advance on the job.

### **THE CALWORKS PROGRAM IN SANTA CLARA COUNTY**

"The mission of the Social Services Agency of Santa Clara County is to provide life protecting, life sustaining, and life enhancing culturally competent services to adults, children, families, elders, and

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<sup>1</sup>The Self Sufficiency Standard for California by Diana Pearce, Ph.D with Jennifer Brooks -November 2000, prepared for Californians for Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Project

economically dependent individuals.” The goal of the CalWORKs Employment Services program is to increase the number of employed clients enrolled in career advancement services, and develop and implement a marketing campaign for career advancement services.

### **CURRENT SERVICES AND CLIENT PROFILE**

Santa Clara County spans 13,000 square miles with three distinct and diverse regions: North County, Central County, and South County. Each region is comprised of diverse ethnic groups and economic necessities. Part of the county is a sprawling urban center which houses most of the residents. This is a center for high technology industry. Although this area is a major employment center for the high technology, is one of the wealthiest areas in the country, and has one of the highest standards of living, there is a widening gap between skilled and unskilled workers. In contrast to the high technology industry, the service related industry is located throughout the county. The remaining area is primarily rural.

There are 10, 447 CalWORKs families receiving cash assistance. Of this total, 5,092 participate in required employment service components. Another 2,061 families are working full-or part-time and continue to receive cash assistance. Another 1,165 families are working full-or part-time and no longer receive direct cash assistance. Most of the total participating families receive some variation of supportive services from CalWORKs.

All participants who are not employed at the time of application are required to participate in orientation and assessment. Initially, a client receives orientation to the range of services available and is

informed of the program requirements. Clients are evaluated to determine which activity must be completed to satisfy the program requirements by: reviewing the clients education, work experience, training background, and any other employment barriers. Participation is 35 hours per week, five days a week, with mandatory job preparation. Job search activity is required for most clients. These services are offered in Vietnamese and Spanish, and are staffed by employees of the department. The county contracts similar services for refugee clients with community based organizations. County case management staff are responsible for authorizing and issuing payments for support services, monitoring, and referrals related to the participant’s activity. Participants who complete the job preparation activity and don’t become employed are referred to vocational assessment. Some clients are referred directly to assessment if there is a suspected learning disability, they are physically challenged, or they have other severe employment barriers. The goal of assessment is to develop an employment plan, outlining the steps the participant must take in order to obtain sufficient skills to secure employment within 24 months.

Through the county’s existing partner network of education and training services, participants are moved under the direction of case managers. Participants may be enrolled into community colleges, adult education, regional occupational programs, and a variety of Workforce Investment Act (WIA), and refugee funded training programs. Requirements for each provider differ for entry and exit, certificate or degree completion, and in progress standards. Other services which require arrangement and monitoring are referrals to drug and alcohol counseling, mental health, legal advisement, domestic abuse counseling, and even tattoo removal.

The county operates four Employment Connection Centers located in two One-Stop sites, and in the central region of San Jose. Staffed by county employees, these centers are the crux of the job seeking and placement process for participants. These centers also house the Employment Connection Affiliates, an association of over 200 placement professionals working with the Employment Connection staff to meet the hiring needs of local employers and CalWORKs participants. These centers are also “drop-in” facilities for clients to access job search/ career resources, such as computer equipment, fax machines, phones, and resource materials, in an environment conducive to seeking employment. Employer presentations and job fairs are held often.

The county continues to dedicate resources for identification, referral, and monitoring of participants for other services necessary to prepare them to become employable. These services include:

- *Work Experience Program:* Designed to develop good work habits and skills to CalWORKs participants who have completed the classroom training and who prefer on-the-job experience. The program transitions participants to unsubsidized employment.
- *Neighborhood Self Sufficiency Centers:* Community based centers providing easily accessible activities for families and children as well as skill advancement to full-time and part-time employed clients.
- *Transportation Services:* Trained staff develops “trip planning” for participants entering CalWORKs activities. Referrals are made to other related services such as the Guaranteed Ride Home Program, a Federal Transportation Agency funded program.
- *Fresh Start Community Services Program:* Intensive case management of participants

whose 24-month time limit has expired.

Participants who are unemployed are required to participate in a community service assignment designed to serve participants with multiple employment barriers.

- *Integrated Services:* Department of Family and Children Services and employment service case managers work together to identify and coordinate the court ordered child welfare plan with CalWORKs employment plans.

Additional services related to preparing participants to enter the workforce are also available. Currently, most of the services provided are related to job search preparation and obtaining work, with none of the services or focus aimed at retention and skill upgrades once a participant becomes employed or geared toward maintaining self-sufficiency.

## PILOT PROJECT

Santa Clara County, in its attempt to increase employment and wages for CalWORKs participants through career advancement and retention services, is planning to implement a pilot project to address these critical concerns. CalCAP, the CalWORKs Career Advancement Program is scheduled to be functioning by July 1, 2001.

CalCAP will build on current post-employment services by continuing to provide the working client with support and resources to improve the job situations and self-sufficiency of clients. The program will contact employed clients, offer them career advancement and retention services, identify advancement needs, and link them to existing services offered by agency partners, agency staff, and other employment development programs. Social service staff began planning the pilot in February 2001. The project charter was completed around

April 20, 2001. Particular areas of the program design were defined during this process. This included: identifying partners, determining a voucher payment process and criteria, determining the data collection system, and developing a staff training plan. In addition, it included writing, presenting and releasing of the request for proposal for prospective service subcontractors.

The county is soliciting concept papers from proprietary and non-profit organizations to pilot the CalCAP program for CalWORKs residents. The intent is to contract for one year beginning on July 1, 2001. Potential for contracting for an additional year will be determined by funding and satisfaction of the goals and objectives of the contract. The successful bidder will work with the ten CalWORKS Case Management units throughout the county. Through counseling and assessment, staff and clients will develop career advancement plans. In a team approach, CalWORKs Employment Service Staff (CWES) and contracted outreach workers will assist the client in actualizing their career advancement plans. Participants enrolled and actively participating in the program will receive a weekly stipend of \$50.00 per week, or a voucher equivalent, for a 16-week period in addition to childcare, transportation and other ancillary services. The funding for these stipends will come from CalWORKs incentive funds for CalWORKs clients who are working and still receiving cash aid, or enrolling or participating in career advancement/skills upgrading services. Federal rules for CalWORKs incentive funds allow cash stipends for a period of four months before they count as income. Lessons learned from the CETA program, as well as promising programs in both Florida and Riverside County, point to the need to offer financial incentives for clients to enroll and participate in skills upgrading programs.

**Prerequisites for the contract are:**

- Requirement that services be available to CalWORKS participants countywide.
- Counseling staff assigned to this project must be both bilingual and culturally competent, reflecting the languages and cultural needs of the community.
- Requirement that a minimum of ten (10) staff be designated for this contract, who must have at least a four-year bachelors degree and a minimum of six months counseling experience with multi-ethnic clients.
- Requirement that contractors develop an electronic database directed, and approved by the Social Service Agency.

**The pilot project objectives will be to:**

- Institute a person-to-person marketing campaign through outreach efforts to result in the development of career advancement plans.
- Promote education and training to the full-time employed. This should include home visits, transportation to education centers, and other activities.
- Integrate staff with county CWES staff to effectively support CalCAP client's career advancement plans.

**The pilot success measurements will be:**

- 618 or 30% of the 2,061 full-time employed CalWORKS clients on aid will utilize career advancement skill upgrade services.
- At least 20% of those served will receive an increase in wages after the advancement services are provided.
- 618 of the full-time employed CalWORKS clients on aid will be eligible for, and receive a

performance incentive of a \$50.00 stipend per week, or a voucher equivalent, for up to 16 weeks. The CWES worker will pay this stipend.

The county conducted the bidding process and proposals scheduled for submission by April 27, 2001. The successful contractor will be notified around May 11, 2001. Following an appeals process, a funding recommendation will go to the Board of Supervisors around June 26, 2001. The total cost of funding this program is estimated at \$1,344,400. Budgeting for program outreach workers (\$800,000) will come from the proposed county administrative budget. Program stipends estimated at \$494,400 will come for CalWORKs incentive funds.

### **IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONTRA COSTA COUNTY**

With dramatic welfare declines and an increase in the number of working families living on the economic margins, Contra Costa County might turn its attention to employment retention and better jobs with better wages. Real progress on these issues will require: a) greater emphasis on post-job placement support for transitioning welfare recipients and their employers, and b) strategies to engage and upgrade the skills and earnings of former CalWORKs clients who are employed in low-wage jobs with limited potential.

Locating and then convincing former CalWORKs clients to upgrade their skills while managing a job and family will not be easy, even with incentives. The outreach worker approach is a direct benefit to these clients. It affords them access to benefits and programs they may not otherwise have access to. This program will also offer to the client staff who are focused on their need to improve their earning potential and more career advancements thereby

increasing the potential for self-sufficiency. Clients who attain job skills and educational credentials have greater access to better jobs and wage growth. Providing education and training with work is an effective way to promote skill development.

Employers will also benefit in many ways. Businesses commonly express frustration with workforce programs and agencies. The CalCAP program will put emphasis on the employed client, addressing skill development and career advancement, which are critical attributes for employees and their employers. This partnership, will provide more opportunities to connect and work with employers who may invest in and assist with development of training and creating financial incentives for businesses.

I recommend that Contra Costa County: a) conduct marketing and outreach activities that promote good jobs and career advancement, b) seek to offer high-quality education and training together with job search assistance, strong job development and placement service, and emphasize the quality of jobs, c) assist clients in need of more skills to enroll in education or training programs.

Contra Costa County currently operates a pilot project for retention in the East County office of the Employment and Human Services Department. This program should expand to include the components of the Santa Clara model. In order to do this however, it will have to consider operational changes. Service delivery must be "re-vamped" to accommodate the working participant. The usual 9 to 5 workday will not accommodate the needs of this population. Perhaps, contracting with a community based organization to deliver career advancement services may be the answer. Secondly, employed clients connected to CalWORKs may need incen-

tives to participate in services after spending long hours on the job, along with current support services. The idea of stipends or other incentives is practical, and the cost could be absorbed using CalWORKs incentive funds.

With most employment and human service agencies facing the dilemma of helping families transition from public assistance to self-sufficiency, this strategy could be adopted immediately. Additionally, programs that support retention and career advancement help ensure that all welfare transition clients are actively recruited to enroll in transitional benefits.