

EXPLORING THE JOBKEEPER HOTLINE SANTA CLARA COUNTY

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As the overwhelming responsibilities of the Social Service Departments move from strategic planning to implementation of Welfare Reform, our goals and commitment will be measured by the overall success of our participants at self-sufficiency. The outcomes will ultimately reflect our own success or failure of this new charge. A very important element of our participant's success will be thru long term employment. As AFDC now CalWORKS/TANF time limits are implemented job retention is a key area that we must effectively attain as the service needs of our participants demand. Job retention services are essential for the Social Service Departments to complete its employment focused service delivery to the community.

The term '**Job Retention Services**' can be defined in several ways; however, staff generally have a common understanding of this not so clearly defined service to mean providing assistance that will enable participants to keep their employment stable when problems arise that can threaten their ongoing success at work.

Job Retention Services can mean:

Information and referrals relating to child care and transportation

Job advancement opportunity information

Basic skills seminars

Continued educational or training referrals

Self esteem courses

Financial counseling information

Networks to link participants to other newly employed persons

Sponsor a mentoring program

Clothing Resource Information

Continued follow up and encouragement to our participants as long as needed

The common denominator is **information**. The key is how to **access** the assistance when it is needed by our participants.

The Career Retention and Employment Support Team (CREST) is one of the initial work groups formulated as part of Santa Clara County's Employment Support Initiative (ESI). This task force began meeting in mid 1996 with diverse representation from organizations involving employment and training professionals. As the task force began to identify barriers for participants to sustain employment it was discovered many job retention services were available but participants didn't know how to access the community services. CREST acknowledged that many participants had no one to turn to when a problem occurred preventing them from experiencing success at work. CREST determined that a 24 hour Job Retention Hotline would

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be the most effective service to make the information available to participants at their time of need. CREST designed a questionnaire that was mailed to 500 Gain participants who had secured employment in 1996. This questionnaire was completed by 230 people reflecting their thoughts on what their needs were and whether or not they would use a hotline if available. Based on the responses it confirmed the idea that a 24 hour hotline needed to be established.

CREST worked closely with CONTACT of Santa Clara to develop the Jobkeeper Hotline. CONTACT is a private, non-profit agency that is a national organization and has been in existence for approximately 25 years. CONTACT's mission is to "offer objective listening, caring involvement, and information, referrals on a 24 hour crisis line to help meet the wide range of needs in the human community." CONTACT offers help lines covering a variety of topics including: teen lines, general crisis information, grief, Care Teens, Project Rachel (abortion information), Warm Line (children at home alone). Rather than duplicating another help line CREST collaborated with CONTACT to begin this project.

CONTACT is staffed by volunteers who receive 50 hours of training learning how to handle distressed callers and how to provide information. CREST members trained CONTACT volunteers in September, 1997 to job-related counseling and other issues to prepare them to begin the Jobkeeper Hotline which became CONTACT's 18th volunteer help line. The Jobkeeper Hotline became operational on October 1, 1997. CONTACT of Santa Clara has approximately 50 volunteers that are available throughout the month. Each volunteer donates their time as their schedule allows. In talking with one volunteer during this research period,

she averages about 16 hours per month.

Outreach to participants to advertise this new service was important to the success of this resource. In September, 1997 the hotline was formally introduced to the community at the Family Independence Fair. In the early part of October approximately 8,000 postcards were mailed to working CalWORKS participants. Other promotional items were used to insure those needing this type of assistance knew where to turn for help before their employment became unstable.

In October and November, 1997 the Jobkeeper Hotline received more than 200 calls. CONTACT volunteers assist callers in problem solving, helping them to identify their own resources if available, and if this is not possible the caller receives referrals or other information about available resources. Most calls are related to child care issues and employment upgrade. CONTACT staff encourages callers to phone back with the outcome of their situation, so that referrals initiated can be monitored for helpfulness. To date, very few callers have returned calls to provide this information. The volume of calls has varied from the first month of operation. Since October thru February, 1998 the following is a breakdown of the 462 calls:

10/97	124	27%
11/97	87	19%
12/97	142	31%
1/98	70	15%
2/98	39	8%
TOTAL	462	100%

Data on the calls received has been recorded as:

- Most calls are received during the weekday, only 6% during the weekend
- 33% of calls received 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m., 55% 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., 11% 6:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m., 3% 12: a.m. to 6:00 a.m.
- 24% of calls are Non-English Speaking
- Majority of callers heard about the hotline thru flyers, referrals, mail
- 38% of callers were already working, 62% were not
- 17% of calls were child care related, 15% skills upgrade information, 1% education, 3% transportation, 17% legal, 46% information on looking for another job
- 67% received information and referral, 9% problem-solving, 1% crisis intervention, 15% supportive listening, 7% other
- 75% of callers were female, 25% male

Continued efforts are being made to ensure participants have the information about the Jobkeeper Hotline. In November and December CREST sponsored two resource fairs targeting 5,000 working participants. A total of 250 people attended these two events. In March, 1998 a toll-free number was in effect. Eligibility workers were advised to give out this number to CalWORKS participants when they discontinue cash aid due to employment. Ongoing efforts will be made to focus on further enhancements to the services offered by the Jobkeeper Hotline.

CONCLUSION

A six-month evaluation will be completed during the month of April. I plan to continue to follow the data collected and evaluations made on this exciting new service. At this time I feel I am unable to make a completely informed recommendation as the resource is still in its initial phases of development and evaluation. However, I would like to state that any assistance we can offer to help individuals sustain successful employment for themselves and their families is definitely worth pursuing. The feeling of self-worth and growth of any individual is contagious once a person feels it. We should do everything possible to foster this within our services.

Santa Clara County impressed me with its ability to get this idea operational within a short period of time. Having the resource available to them thru CONTACT saved them the cost of developing this type of resource within the county structure. I feel this is an excellent example of county's working with non-profit organizations to help the Social Service Departments deliver to the community, services that have true meaning and help with real problems. I would very much like to see our county implement a similar type of resource service and will continue to research this possibility as evaluation data are available.