

**San Francisco County’s Employment Services Programs and Subsidized
Employment for General Assistance Populations: Applying Best Practices in
Santa Clara County**

Liza Giron-Espinoza

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Both Santa Clara and San Francisco Counties offer employment services to their General Assistance (GA) populations. Clients receive support in their job search, including coaching, job matching, and referrals. Those who are not employable are referred for advocacy to help apply for Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

San Francisco’s JobsNOW program offers an employment services component to the GA population that Santa Clara does not have—subsidized employment. Using General Fund dollars, San Francisco County has developed a robust program that has demonstrated success in employment placement, retention, and moving clients off of aid as they become self-sufficient.

Expanding the services currently available to GA clients in Santa Clara County would result in better outcomes for the population. Increasing the number of Employment Counselors in Vocational Services (VS) and piloting a subsidized employment program would not only improve the quantity of services currently available to the GA population, but would improve the quality as well.

**San Francisco County's Employment Services Programs and Subsidized
Employment for General Assistance Populations: Applying Best Practices in
Santa Clara County**

Liza Giron-Espinoza

Background

Santa Clara County's General Assistance (GA) program provides assistance and resources to some of the most vulnerable residents of the community, many who are very low income or have no income. Per state law, the program is administered to provide assistance to those who are not eligible for other state or federal programs.

When a client in Santa Clara County seeks assistance via GA, his or her eligibility for Medi-Cal, food stamps (CalFresh), and cash aid is determined first. As part of the approval process, a client's ability to work is assessed. Those deemed employable are referred to Vocational Services (VS) to receive employment services which include job search preparation assistance, job matching, coaching, and ancillary support. Clients who are not deemed employable are either granted a temporary exemption or referred to the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Advocacy Unit.

The SSI Advocacy Unit social workers will screen and assess clients to determine if they meet preliminary eligibility requirements for SSI benefits. If likely eligible, the unit will assist the client with completing his or her application for SSI benefits with the goal of moving the client to the more stable, long-term program that can better meet his or her needs. The application process is detailed and can be cumbersome and confusing for clients, especially those with a

disability or impairment. Having the social worker's support to navigate the process is key for these clients.

For those who are deemed employable, the VS team of Employment Counselors provides all components of the program: orientation, assessment, referral to workfare activities, employment readiness workshops, and job placement/matching. The VS Unit also works with the community, identifying appropriate worksites for clients to complete workfare hours. This also includes providing orientation and ongoing support for new and existing worksite supervisors who host VS clients. A team of one Employment Program Supervisor and nine Employment Counselors provide these services to just over 2000 clients deemed employable.

Comparing San Francisco's CAAP Program to Santa Clara County's GA VS

Observing and studying San Francisco County's program for GA clients highlighted several significant differences between the two counties. The most significant difference is that San Francisco County offers subsidized employment with multiple tiers, funded with a plethora of General Fund money.

San Francisco's County Adult Assistance Programs (CAAP) provides cash aid as well as employment opportunities and supportive services to clients. The program is similar to Santa Clara County's, serving the same population and offering employment services. CAAP is comprised of four separate, but similar, programs with eligibility variances based on length of residency, age, and/or disability. As with Santa Clara County's program, the amount of cash aid the client receives depends on several factors. It varies based on whether the client has housing or is homeless, a single individual or married couple, has any other sources of income and has any assets. Clients must apply for both CalFresh and Medi-Cal as eligibility criteria.

San Francisco's CAAP clients are screened then assigned a work activity based on their abilities and skills. These work activities are part of the workfare requirement. Santa Clara County's GA clients can also be assigned a workfare activity, known locally in Santa Clara as a Public Work Project (PWP). Both counties generally utilize county offices or non-profit organizations as worksites; the number of hours is determined by adding the cash aid and CalFresh amounts then dividing by minimum wage. Clients not deemed fully employable with no restrictions are given a light duty assignment; those completely unemployable are given an exemption from participation or assisted with the SSI application process. San Francisco County also has an SSI advocacy unit like Santa Clara's that will support clients with completing the SSI application and related process.

Both Santa Clara and San Francisco Counties offer clients employment services if they prefer to look for paid employment rather than complete workfare—Santa Clara through Vocational Services (VS) and San Francisco through Voluntary Intensive Employment Program (VIES). Both programs offer job search assistance, job search preparation, individualized coaching, and supportive services. However, San Francisco County offers a significant employment option for GA/CAAP clients not available in Santa Clara—subsidized employment.

Subsidized Employment in San Francisco County through JobsNOW

Subsidized employment is an excellent way to transition someone into the workforce. The individual may have been unemployed for a length of time, need to practice or build his or her good work habits, or temporarily require a supported employment environment. Subsidized employment offers a lower-risk opportunity for employers to take a chance on a candidate they otherwise may not have hired. Many GA/CAAP clients are viewed as higher-risk due to personal

barriers, gaps in employment history, and stigma attached to them as recipients of public benefits—they would benefit from a subsidized employment positions. Through the JobsNOW program, job seekers in San Francisco can look for and obtain employment, with subsidized opportunities being a significant component of the program. There are multiple centers across San Francisco that offer help with finding a job including the resources needed to conduct an effective job search. Clients can receive individual coaching and access to computers, printers, telephones, fax machines, and scanners. Hiring events are also held in these centers, and some events are held in community-based locations such as the local city college. Jobs seekers come from different sources and include those receiving refugee cash assistance, clients receiving CalFresh benefits only, CalWORKs participants, GA/CAAP recipients, as well as some unaided job seekers. These jobs pay participants \$13.00 per hour and higher to work in a variety of positions in public, non-profit, and private organizations. There are four options available to clients through the JobsNOW program:

- Unsubsidized Employment: regular, permanent positions with no subsidy
- Wage Subsidy: jobs in private and non-profit organizations that go from “sub-to-unsub” within six months (hours and wages determined by employer, costs are reimbursed)
- Public Service Trainee: employment with the City of San Francisco (in various capacities at one of 14 different city departments) with fixed hours and wages of \$14.68 per hour, working 32 hours per week for six months
- Individualized Training Internship Program: internships with a non-profit organization with fixed hours and wages of \$13.00 per hour, working 32 hours weekly for six months

Covering the Cost

The JobsNOW program began in 2009 as part of the economic stimulus package issued under the Obama Administration known as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Once ARRA funding was exhausted, CalWORK's single allocation funds were accessed to continue the JobsNOW program for CalWORKs participants. However, this same funding cannot be used to serve clients from non-CalWORKs programs. San Francisco County made the determination to continue with the program for GA/CAAP and other clients, albeit smaller, and fund it with local General Fund dollars.

Funding for these services is fairly complex and is considered "braided" since the funding is drawn down from several sources to fund different populations, all participating in a single program. The services for GA/CAAP clients are paid using a combination of General Funds and CalFresh Employment and Training dollars (CFET). These CFET dollars are federal funds that are paid in the form of a 50% reimbursement to the county. This reimbursement is only for specific allowable costs around administration of the program, such as staffing and selected ancillary support services for clients like transportation and clothing assistance. It must be noted that wage subsidies to clients ARE NOT an allowable cost and cannot be claimed as part of the 50% federal reimbursement. Wage subsidies, the key elements of the subsidized employment options, are paid completely through San Francisco's General Fund—there is no draw down, nor state or federal match.

San Francisco County's overall CFET plan for federal fiscal year 2017 is just over \$17.4 million dollars. This is the cost for staffing and administration of the programs serving those receiving CalFresh, many who are part of the GA/CAAP population and receiving cash aid as well. This total is based on half of the funds being from county dollars and half being from the federal match. This total does not include the estimated \$9 million that has been budgeted for the year to

cover the cost of paying the subsidized wages of participants. Considering the cost of the allowable expenses in the budget summary, plus the cost of the subsidized wages, San Francisco County spends upwards of \$26.4 million dollars annually to serve its eligible population of subsidized employment participants from the GA/CAAP and CFET populations.

In order to ensure that CFET funds are available, San Francisco County requires that all GA/CAAP recipients apply for CalFresh as criteria for assistance eligibility. Santa Clara County also has this requirement for GA clients. This ensures that the counties can claim the 50% federal match to help cover a portion of the services offered.

Positive Outcomes and Longitudinal Evidence

The program has proven to be successful in getting people to work: between July 2011 and June 2015 a total of 3,151 individuals (across all four program options) obtained employment through JobsNOW. The GA/CAAP population accounted for 1,416 of the individuals who found employment thanks to the program. Roughly about 45% of individuals served in the JobsNOW program were from the GA/CAAP population—the largest of the five populations served. Most of these clients re-entered the workforce through a subsidized employment position.

San Francisco County has conducted a comprehensive analysis of the JobsNOW program for the period of July 2011 through June 2015. Data were used from CalWIN and JobsNOW placement records, along with information from the California Employment Development Department's (EDD) quarterly earnings data. This time frame allowed the county to start analyzing from the point where all entities were asked to provide data to the point where clients were multiple months post-program completion. During this time period 3,151 clients were JobsNOW participants; of those, 1,416 were from the GA/CAAP program. Many of these GA/CAAP clients

were found to have positive outcomes in the quarter after they exited the program. Findings included:

- 55% of GA/CAAP participants had earnings
- 53% of GA/CAAP participants were no longer on cash aid six months after exiting
- 23% of GA/CAAP participants were only receiving CalFresh six months after exiting

When examining longer term outcomes, positive results were found as well. Clients were studied 18 months after exiting the JobsNOW program. Findings for GA/CAAP clients included:

- 58% of GA/CAAP participants were no longer on cash aid 18 months after exiting
- 19% of GA/CAAP participants were only receiving CalFresh 18 months after exiting

Even longer term outcomes were studied, examining clients who had exited JobsNOW two and a half years prior. There continued to be positive trends in the findings:

- 63% of GA/CAAP participants were no longer on cash aid 30 months after exiting
- 15% of GA/CAAP participants were only receiving CalFresh 30 months after exiting

Overall, it was found that participants in the JobsNOW program made positive progress towards their employment goals. GA/CAAP participants were likely to not only obtain employment, but also to retain the job over time, resulting in no longer being reliant upon cash assistance programs.

Recommendations for Santa Clara County

A robust program like San Francisco County's requires an abundant number of dedicated staff and a large amount of General Fund money. To go from offering no program with subsidized employment for GA clients to a full program comparable to San Francisco County's would cost Santa Clara about three times its total operating budget for GA clients. While unlikely to be able to implement such a large program all at once, there are steps and strategies that can be taken to enhance and expand the services available for the GA client population:

- Expansion of Vocational Services: with over 4,000 GA clients, and approximately half of those being deemed employable, Santa Clara County's VS program is under-resourced. A total of one Employment Program Supervisor and nine Employment Counselors serve the employable population in its entirety, equaling approximately 222 clients per Employment Counselor. A more manageable caseload would be closer to 35-40 to allow more personal assistance and more effective case management. An Employment Counselor could go deeper with each client to help not only with their job readiness, but also to address and mitigate barriers. Ideally, best practice would be to utilize a model already in use in Santa Clara County that has been proven effective—namely, the Employment Connection Centers for CalWORKs Employment Services (CWES).

With such a large GA population that has been growing over the years, and nearly rivals that of CWES, it would be appropriate to enhance not only the quantity of staff serving them, but the quality of services as well. The current VS team is asked to provide all aspects of vocational services to all eligible clients who wish to participate, and are often overwhelmed with job seekers. Having this more robust staff would allow them to spend more time with clients, providing more in-depth, personalized service. Having additional

staff would allow an expansion of the program with improved services to clients and worksites alike.

- Subsidized employment for GA recipients: though expensive, subsidized employment may prove to be the proverbial “stepping stone” many clients may need to reach self-sufficiency and the goal of no longer depending on public benefits. Subsidized employment has been a proven and effective tool in Santa Clara County to help CWES participants find employment. Each year several hundred CWES clients accept subsidized employment; over 75% are successful in completing their assignment or moving into an unsubsidized position. San Francisco County has demonstrated that the return on investment for GA clients who are placed in subsidized employment is high, as a large percentage of them have positive outcomes: having earnings long-term and going off of aid. Many stay off aid and become self-sufficient. Santa Clara and San Francisco Counties have demonstrated that subsidized employment is effective at getting clients back to work—San Francisco County has been able to specifically demonstrate that it works well with the GA/CAAP population.

A smaller scale program to pilot and demonstrate the effectiveness in Santa Clara County is recommended. An allocation from Santa Clara County’s General Fund could be earmarked to pilot a subsidized employment program similar to San Francisco’s JobsNOW subsidized employment for GA/CAAP clients. Piloting this program with a group of 50 clients would be an ideal starting point. The size of the group is small enough that it can be readily managed and each participant can receive intensive case management and employment counseling. At the same time, the group is large enough to be able to glean trends, identify best practices, and measure outcomes with confidence.

Since Santa Clara County has already been administering an effective subsidized employment program through its Employment Connection Centers, it would be possible to take “lessons learned” and apply them to the program for GA clients. Existing infrastructure and procedures such as executing employment worksite agreements and payroll/invoicing procedures could be adopted as well.

Using an employer reimbursement model would allow GA VS to match and refer employable clients to an employer. The understanding would be that the expectation was for the employer to keep the client after the subsidy expires—becoming a “sub-to-unsub” regular employee. Employers electing to participate and hire clients would be reimbursed up to \$15 per hour of actual wages paid, for 40 hours per week, up to 12 weeks total. This would be \$7,200 maximum spent per client on wage reimbursement. With a pilot group of 50 clients, this would amount to \$360,000 in General Fund money (assuming each client worked all hours available to them over the three month period). An additional sum of money should be available to help support clients access and retain employment. This sum would fund support services, such as transportation costs, work-related clothing, and other work-related expenses. A maximum amount of \$250 per client would total \$12,500 in additional funds for the pilot project. Since VS staff would administer the program, there would be no additional costs around staffing. A 50 client pilot project with three months of wage reimbursement and supportive services for each client would cost Santa Clara County \$372,500 in General Fund monies.

Considering the outcomes from San Francisco County’s study and analysis showing that approximately 60% of clients went off aid and had earnings at the 18 and 30 month post-participation interval, the investment in the subsidized employment and client appears to

be worthwhile. A client drawing GA cash assistance and CalFresh receives just over \$500 per month in benefits, not including staff and administrative costs. By spending the equivalent of about 14 months of benefits on subsidized employment, it is likely that the client will remain off of aid for twice that long—or more. The majority of clients would move off of, and stay off of, public benefits. They would not only be earning enough to meet the goal of self-sufficiency, but develop and improve their work habits and skills. But, most importantly, the clients would develop an improved sense of self-esteem and feel good about themselves and their accomplishments.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the City and County of San Francisco for hosting me as I studied and learned about their GA/CAAP and CFET efforts. The staff of the Human Services Agency graciously gave of their time and shared knowledge to make this experience a meaningful one. My gratitude to Jovita Ramos, Terri Austin, David Gozum, and David Estrada for meeting with me, providing copies of various documents and materials, taking me on site tours, answering a myriad of questions, and taking me on my very first Uber ride. They gave freely of their time and knowledge, for which I am grateful.

I also offer my thanks and appreciation to my Senior Manager and Directors for making this opportunity possible. Thank you to Patricia Sun, Social Services Program Manager III, for checking in consistently and ensuring I was on track. Thank you to Rafaela Perez, Employment Services Director, and Denise Boland, Department of Employment and Benefits Services Director, for selecting me to participate in BASSC EDP. Being selected was a high compliment and honor. I feel I have grown both professionally and personally. You have my commitment

that I will bring all I can from BASSC Executive Development Program to the job to honor the investment made in me by the county—and by each of you.