

**POSTCARDS FROM SANTA CRUZ HUMAN RESOURCES AGENCY:
MY SUMMER ABROAD
Mary Counihan***

7 February 1996

Hi! I'm here, safe and sound! The trip was a little nerve wracking as traffic was heavy and I was distracted. Driving to Santa Cruz, I was a jumble of apprehension and excitement trying to anticipate what lay ahead. When I arrived at the Santa Cruz offices I reported to the main building but no one was there. Fortunately a secretary took pity on me and made some phone calls to find out where I should go. She directed me to another building to find my host family. I needn't have worried. As soon as I got to the correct building, I knew I'd found home. My new family all came out to greet me warmly and they showed me to my room (which was outfitted with basic necessities-plus a little stash of M&Ms). They had a schedule of activities already prepared for me and began immersing me in Santa Cruz language and culture.

This is great, I know I'm going to have a wonderful time.

9 February 1996

Hi!

I've just wrapped up my first week here. The crosscultural experience is fascinating. Some things are so different from San Francisco while others are remarkably the same. Most interesting are the common problems/concerns that we share but handle very differently.

The most obvious difference is size. Santa Cruz has 18 staff in 2 units providing In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) and Adult Protective Services (APS) to about 1200 recipients; San Francisco has 103 staff in 11 units serving about 8000 recipients. This difference in size has been very disconcerting and I continually need to translate data from Santa Cruz to SF numbers. Along with the numbers, I must translate the importance, priority, and influence they represent. (I had the funniest experience yesterday, I attended a community meeting on APS cuts. The agency's Assistant Administrator and the Director and Assistant Director of the Adult, Family, and Children's (AF&C) Division were present. It was billed as a meeting of key players in the Adult Services community. I was expecting to walk into a room of 20-30 people-instead there were 3!!!)

Because of their small size, the managers in Santa Cruz have a much broader span of control than do their counterparts in San Francisco. They complain about being spread too thin at times and the difficulty of staying on top of details. However, these drawbacks are mitigated by the excellent program analyst support which they have. Each division has an analyst assigned to it. The combination of analyst support and control over a wider array of programs leads to more creativity and inter-program cooperation.

An excellent example of this is the IHSS/AFDC/GAIN/JTPA collaborative effort to place AFDC recipients as IHSS homecare providers. The idea of connecting AFDC clients who want to work

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with IHSS recipients who need homecare providers is not unique. It's been floating around for some time. The major flaw in the idea was IHSS only pays minimum wage with no benefits thus making it impossible to survive on for someone raising a family. With careful research and close collaboration, Santa Cruz took this germ of an idea and turned it into a program which benefited everyone. They determined that home health aides were one of the fastest growing jobs in the area. Depending on training and skills required, these jobs paid between \$8.50-\$15.00/hour. They recruited AFDC recipients interested in this work and offered them free training as a home health worker with free childcare, if needed, provided they work a minimum of six months as an IHSS provider and receive a satisfactory evaluation. While working for minimum wage as an IHSS provider, they could continue to receive AFDC benefits under the "Work Pays" program. They were able to offer free training and free childcare because if they had at least 15 individuals to be trained, the Community College District could collect ADA and would provide the training for free. They were able to use GAIN funds for childcare. JTPA was able to assist in the placement of graduates in jobs because \$8.50/hour meets their minimum required salary. Everyone wins!

Santa Cruz social services is called a Human Resources Agency (HRA). Unlike SFDSS it includes more than just the state mandated programs. It also has JTPA, Public Guardian, and MSSP Organizationally they have a hierarchical system with an Administrator heading the agency. Under him is an Assistant Administrator, and under her are the Division Directors. Similarly, the Division Directors have Assistant Division

Directors and Program Analysts who report to them. This is not unlike our system. However, functionally they are very different. Santa Cruz operates as a team rather than a vertical chain of command. So that the Administrator and the Assistant Administrator divide duties, each taking primary responsibility for certain programs and/or tasks. In AF&C Division, the Director handles Family and Children's Programs, while the Assistant Director handles Adult Programs. This team approach fosters incredible camaraderie among the team members.

One of the most notable qualities of the staff here is how much they respect and admire their Administrator. They want to do a good job to reflect well on him and they credit him for many of their creative ideas. I really want to see if I can figure out what it is about him or the way he treats his staff which elicits such a response.

1 March 1996

Hi!

I've gone through an interesting transition this week. My schedule was not prepared for me and I had to take more initiative in contacting people, setting up meetings with them, and identifying what I wanted to learn. It has made me feel more like I belong here and less like a visitor. In San Francisco, we are spoiled because we are such a wealthy county. Here they must live within their allocation and it forces some pretty difficult choices. They have recently reduced their APS staff by almost 50%. There is no talk of doing more with less, but the frank admission that with less you are able to do less. In APS, services are restricted to mandates. Clients are selected on the basis of who they can have the biggest impact on, going for the biggest bang for their buck.

Toward that end, they are exploring having their APS staff serve as probate conservators for those aged clients who need conserving. This is an unpopular move with the APS workers, but community groups have remained neutral on the issue. Santa Cruz is very proactive about involving advocacy, community, and constituency groups in their decision making process. When they identify a problem or anticipate a change, such as welfare reform, reduction in funding, or regulation changes, they try to form a work group to come up with a solution.

For example, changes in PCSP now allow an hour limit rather than a dollar limit for IHSS contract cases. Santa Cruz has not implemented this change because they want the community involved in choices necessitated by the regulation change. They conducted a workshop for their IHSS Advisory Committee laying out the fiscal ramifications of the change. Because they were the ones conducting the study session, they are confident that the Advisory Committee got the information necessary to make an informed recommendation. On a larger scale, the HRA Administrator, Will Ughtbourne, made a presentation to the Board of Supervisors on welfare reform. Again, HRA was positioning the community to become involved in and supportive of policy decisions made by HRA. The single most notable characteristic of Santa Cruz HRA is its teamwork philosophy. It marks its internal as well as external interactions. It happens at all management levels. It has become an ingrained way of operating. This works well in Santa Cruz because the Board and community have a lot of faith in Will Lightbourne. According to Will, the Board is more interested in land use and population growth than social services issues and really don't want to be involved with HRA affairs. They are fiscally conservative and community members and advocates have met with little success in getting their support for issues costing the county money. This is not the case in San Francisco. The San Francisco Board indulges in micromanagement and the focus of their attention varies depending on who is exerting political pressure. Additionally, our Board is very cavalier about finances, approving measures or actions without regard to funds or financial liability. Therefore, the SF Board needs to be handled differently.

While the Santa Cruz approach probably would not work with our Board, I think it would work with community agencies, especially in Adult Services. Frequently we bring in the community after a game plan has been developed and then it is a challenge to get their buy in. Other times we wait for the community to identify a need and do not get involved until the community brings its plan to us. In either situation, we are working independently, proposing ideas separately, and only then coming together as a team. We need to start working as a team from the onset. We do it sometimes-we just need to make it our way of operating. It is actually a very freeing way of operating. The weight of these difficult problems we torture over and then must justify wouldn't be borne on our shoulders alone, but would be a shared responsibility.

7 March 1996

Hi!

I got to spend today with Will Lightbourne. I'm still trying to figure out the Ughtbourne magic. His staff describe him as deeply spiritual with a strong vision of what he is about and the agency's mission. They are proud to have him represent them. He is articulate, warm, and very

knowledgeable. The only remotely critical comment I heard about him was that he was distancing himself from staff (specially Adult Services) and they were feeling the loss.

I had asked if I could shadow him for a day, figuring that I would just observe him but he arranged for time to meet with me. I discussed with him my observations about his staff's opinion/reaction to him. He credited a child welfare case which blew up early in his administration with the bonding he has with staff. He took the heat when the agency was being excoriated by the press, moreover, he defended his staff. This bought him the allegiance of his staff and the union which represents them. He also said he thinks he benefited by the contrast in style between him and his predecessor.

He has a very open, easy-going manner. It is clear he loves the politics of his job and almost sees manipulating the politicians to support his goals as an exciting battle of wits. He is very good at it. Seeing him make a presentation to the Board of Supervisors was like witnessing a love fest. Community person after community person prefaced their remarks to the Board with a paean to Will Lightbourne.

I also saw him meet with the AF&C staff. He gave them information about welfare reform: a brief synopsis of the changes entailed, reported on the steps he and the agency were taking to prepare for the changes, and gave them his assessment of the status of the agency vis-a-vis other counties. Now this is not terrifically good news to line staff. They were concerned and had questions, some pretty hostile. Will answered their questions directly and honestly. He never showed any irritation or defensiveness in handling the most hostile, angry question. He was sincere and sympathetic to staff and used self-deprecating humor to lighten the tone.

The teamwork approach to life seen here seems to be a direct result of Lightbourne's leadership. It has come about and has steadfastly become more pervasive in the 4 years that Will has been the Administrator. He has made staff selections based on the candidates' collaborative work style and would seem to believe that attitude is more important than knowledge (within bounds, of course), since training can always provide the needed information. Perhaps because I have the distance of an observer, I've been able to clearly see the influence of this administrator. It is truly amazing to me to see the impact this man has on his staff and the changes he has brought about.

15 March 1996

Hi!

I mentioned in an earlier letter that JTPA was a part of HRA. it is a relatively recent addition, it has only been part of HRA for about a year. They are still adjusting to each other. There is awkwardness in the fiscal responsibility arena-both HRA and JTPA have their own fiscal officer and they operate independently of each other. Internal collaboratives are being attempted but the road has been rocky. Clearly they have a way to go before the program becomes fully integrated into HRA.

However, the addition to JTPA to HRA is significant. It changes RA's relationship to the community. The agency no longer serves primarily the poor and disenfranchised, but a broader

range of folks including the middle and working class. They are sitting at the table with employers, Private Industry Council, EDD, Community Colleges-providing assistance in retraining and placing displaced workers. Besides being seen as an asset to the economic health of the county by business, it also means the public sees the agency as providing a service to them, not just to the poor.

They are very job focused here. I don't know if it's because JTPA is new to the agency and thus there is a lot of focus on it, or whether it's because of welfare reform, or both-but whatever the reason, the agency is developing an extensive workplace preparation program. As is their style, they are involved in a coalition to develop a "One Stop Employment Center," designed to offer a variety of levels of assistance, depending on the need. The client is offered access to employment information either through computers, written material, or staff assistance, and choose the mode. The first center is due to open soon. This model is similar to the plan being developed by EDD at the state level-but Santa Cruz is on the forefront in developing this comprehensive service. They are very serious about insuring services are in place for the community when welfare reform hits. This is just another instance of HRA being proactive instead of reactive.

26 March 1996

Hi!

This is my last day and while I am happy to be returning home, I am also sad to leave. It has been interesting to track my reactions to being here. The first week was exciting and a bit scary-not knowing anyone here and not knowing what to expect. My energies were directed at getting acclimated. The second week was the honeymoon, learning about the creative collaboratives, the politics of the area, and witnessing the teamwork mentality. This third week has been more tempered. The high of the honeymoon has passed and now the more mundane aspects of life in Santa Cruz are coming to the fore. I am able to see some of the problems they have here and can identify with them. They are the same things that often get me down at home, for example, space. They just moved into a new building and already it is too small. Staff are upset that no disaster plan and evacuation route has been provided for the new building. Staff are also upset that the new building requires them to carry a key as the doors are locked.

Hearing this stuff was like having cold water thrown in my face. My idol has clay feet. I had been focusing exclusively on the positives and not seeing any negatives. While I didn't like having my bubble popped, I am glad that I moved beyond the infatuation stage. I think I am able to balance the experience better for a more realistic picture.

This has been a wonderful adventure and personally very enriching. I am grateful to all in Santa Cruz and San Francisco for allowing me to experience it.