

**THE WELFARE REFORM STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS
IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY
Betty Malks***

INTRODUCTION

Wayne Gretzky, the best hockey player of his generation, said that it's not as important to know where the puck is now as to know where it will be. "Leaders have what I think of as the Gretzky Factor, a certain 'touch.' Leaders have that sense of where the culture is going to be, where the organization must be if it is to grow." Strong leadership and a clear vision are major components in the challenge to reform the welfare system. Santa Cruz County HRA, its Administrator and staff are presently meeting the challenge of welfare reform. During my internship, I learned how a county agency exemplified this "Gretzky Factor."

BACKGROUND

In 1992, President Clinton campaigned on "ending welfare as we know it" and presented a reform in mid-1994. Four years prior to this, California was implementing changes designed to reduce dependency and promote personal responsibility (via federal waivers) through the grant reductions and the "Work Pays" program. However, the 1994 Congressional elections significantly shifted the approach to welfare reform. In 1995, Republican majorities in both houses passed separate welfare bills H. R. 4-The Personal Responsibility Act, and S.1120-The Work Opportunity Act. In November, 1995 President Clinton indicated the House proposal too harsh due to its impact on children. The House and Senate later compromised and passed a conference agreement in December 1995 which President Clinton later vetoed because of insufficient child care funding.

As of the Congressional Research Service Publication updated February 23, 1996, the following is a summary of the current state on welfare reform. The welfare reform bill (H.R. 4) approved by Congress but vetoed by President Clinton would have ended Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and several related programs and replaced them with a block grant to the states. The National Governors' Association (NGA) unanimously approved a modified version of the vetoed measure. The NGA proposal endorses the block grant concept, but requests additional Federal funding for child care and periods of high unemployment.

Under H.R. 4, states would have received a set amount of funds for temporary assistance for needy families based on historical Federal payments to states under AFDC and related programs. It also contained additional funds for states with low grants relative to poverty and/or high population growth, matching funds for child care, and matching funds for states with high unemployment.

H.R. 4 would have established a Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant to the states to replace Federal funding for AFDC, Emergency Assistance (EA), and the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) programs.

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Under H.R. 4, states would have been required to end AFDC and related programs and operate TANF beginning October 1, 1996 (Fiscal Year 1997), with an option to begin TANF sooner.

Based on Congressional Research Service (CRS) estimates, the total amount that will be paid to the 50 states and the District of Columbia under the basic family assistance grant would be \$16.3 billion.

"If enacted, the welfare reform proposals put forth in 1996 will represent the most significant change in public welfare policy in the 60 years since the Great Depression and in public morality in the century since the (Papal) encyclical Rerum Novarum addressed the issue of the role of the state in industrial society: `...when there is question of defending the rights of individuals, the poor and badly-off have a claim to special consideration. The richer class have many ways of shielding themselves ...whereas the mass of the poor...must chiefly depend upon the assistance of the state.' "

Clients, we learned, have been relentlessly exposed to adversity, many times when they were children themselves. They have become filled with rage, with frustration and with little hope. We continue to see this in children who grow up in families where nobody works. The children have little hope that they will ever have a chance to have a piece of the pie and to be the independent, full Americans wanted by Congress.

Welfare Reform Planning Process

The guiding principle of the Mission Statement of the Human Resources Agency of Santa Cruz County, is enabling the economic self-sufficiency of the client and with social services, helping each individual develop to his/her fullest human potential. The staff of HRA emphasizes teamwork, a spirit of "si se puede," and a commitment to mutual respect.

For the past 5 years, the HRA Administrator, Mr. Will Lightbourne has held the vision that in order to enable clients to be self sufficient, clients needed to be treated with dignity; the staff needed to enable clients to perform at their optimum potential and to pass this value down to their children from generation to generation. As noted,

"In changing to a culture that accepts as part of its mission the importance of challenging its clients, it is important that every effort also be made to ensure that HRA remains committed to a caring, compassionate culture, in which all activities-eligibility determination, development of training and job plans, case management, accountability procedures, fraud investigation, etc. are conducted in an atmosphere of dignity and are seen as opportunities for problem solving, not as opportunities for the program to be punitive."

Mr. Lightbourne recognized many years ago that mutual respect and mutual obligation were guiding principles in that of a role transformation between the client/worker relationship and this was needed to help clients become self-sufficient. HRA staff stated that his vision was clearly communicated through the years and in 1994, at a Management Retreat, this vision was to become a reality with the creation of Self-Sufficiency Workshops and the entire welfare reform planning process.

A second important component in the planning process is Collaboration-internal and external. Internally, in 1994 the Departments of Income Maintenance, GAIN, and CAL Learn began communicating in a Self-Sufficiency Planning Group. All internal stakeholders were part of this planning group discussion centered around institutional fragmentation, how agencies reward system savvy clients rather than more needy, multi-problem families, and ineffective use of resources in serving clients. Decisions were made to break down traditional programmatic barriers, and to open more doors to clients instead of close them. Staff discussed their own personal and professional values and how these could be translated into helping clients. The internal collaborative process of 18 months resulted in the first Self-Sufficiency Workshop in October 1994.

Externally, the HRA Administrator and staff were conveners of several collaborative in the community to communicate their values and vision and begin work creating a community welfare reform agenda. Examples of these are the Homeless Continuum of Care, the Workforce Coalition, the Children's Network, the Community Assessment Planning Committee, and the Integrated Services Coordinating Council which brings the income maintenance and employment efforts together. Community stakeholders are represented and the trust building process is ongoing.

GAIN Employment and Training Specialists lead the workshops. An EDD employees representative is present to register clients. There are up front job searches. There are honest up front discussions with GAIN, eligibility supervisors, and clients concerning what staff can do to help clients, how to help with resources, and how staff can improve. Staff discuss where the client is and what does the client need, not can they fit into our scheme of things.

The Self-Sufficiency Workshops have been very successful. From October 1994 through June 1995, 139 clients (100 families/cases) attended Self-Sufficiency Workshops. As of December 31, 1995, 53% of this population are no longer receiving AFDC.

ONE-STOP CAREER CENTERS

"Anticipating a federal and state overhaul of the existing job training structure, a local Coalition for Workforce Preparation has been meeting since 1994 to plan the design of local One-Stop Career Centers. Comprised predominantly of individuals and organizations involved in the delivery of education and employment services it has convened a number of meetings at which the following were identified as essential elements of a One-Stop model:

Universality

All populations (e.g. welfare recipients, dislocated workers, new entrants to the labor market, youth, the economically disadvantaged, skilled workers, etc.) must be afforded access to a One-Stop Center and its extensive menu of job finding and employment development services.

Customer Choice

One-Stop Centers users must be given options on where to secure the services that best meet their needs. Vouchers and open-entry programs are the preferred methods for accomplishing same.

Performance

One-Stop Center programs and services must produce tangible results and a high degree of customer satisfaction.

Private Sector Involvement

The business community must be a partner in and beneficiary of One-Stop Center programs and services. Otherwise, there is the risk that users will not be connected nor referred to real job opportunities.

Integration

One-Stop Center programs and services must be non-duplicative and coordinated so as to maximize resources, promote economies of scale and ensure satisfactory performance. One-Stop Centers should allow for the processing and dissemination of program and services information via new computer-based tools.

The coalition envisions three One-Stop Career Centers for Santa Cruz County operating in the cities of Capitola, Santa Cruz and Watsonville. EDD and HRA seem appropriate as the major participants in each facility with other programs present on site as needed to meet the unique employment and training needs of specific populations and individual communities. Through co-located staffing arrangements and shared cost agreements, the following "user friendly" and customer oriented services could be provided:

To Employers: Labor market information, economic development data, employment vacancy marketing, trained applicant pools, job order taking, candidate screening, specialized recruitment, rapid response support during plant closures, entrepreneurial training, etc.

To Job Seekers: Integrated program orientations, eligibility information, skills assessment/testing, career exploration/counseling, occupational training, staff-assisted and self-directed job search, resource referrals, labor market information, unemployment insurance and public assistance filing, case management, internships, work experience opportunities, on-the-job training placements, reemployment plans, etc.

Over the last several months, HRA staff have been working to develop child care mechanisms for AFDC applicants to attend the Self-Sufficiency Workshops. State General Fund dollars currently are contracted to the County for child care subsidies through the Alternative Payment Program (APP). The State Education Code permits request for waivers to the Superintendent of Public Instruction to allow priority service to special groups. In November 1995, upon approval

of the Board of Supervisors, HRA applied for such a waiver to provide limited-term child care during job search. The requested waiver will allow priority service under APP to AFDC recipients and applicants who need child care in order to participate in the Self-Sufficiency program. The California Department of Education has taken the matter under advisement, and HRA has recently been notified of receipt of the waivers. The agency is also continuing to explore other options for child care funding for this population."

It is important to utilize all of the collaborative skills involved in the previous model to create a One Stop philosophy where the door is always open; it's self-directed, friendly, and clients feel comfortable. It's like a huge mall with a complete range of services offered and each person regardless of skill level can make choices. What's needed is a management team that's invested, a shared philosophy, money and a physical structure.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SANTA CLARA COUNTY SOCIAL SERVICES AGENCY

Our County has recently begun a welfare reform planning process. There are six groups forming and one of these is the Restructuring of Client Services Welfare Reform Group, which I am co-chairing. The purpose of this group is to identify alternative strategies for restructuring interactions between staff and clients in support of a pro-employment agenda, and analyzing implications for the organization and staffing of services.

My experience in Santa Cruz County HRA has been extremely valuable, and I have learned many transferable skills and tips for our welfare reform planning process.

First, the staff were all welcoming and friendly, and I could sense their collegial cooperation. In observing many meetings, I could feel that HRA staff and its Administrator work closely with other community networks. They seem well respected and are able to collaborate towards common goals. The buy-in from the stakeholders was evident, internally and externally, This is especially important to me in beginning my new welfare reform work group on April 16, 1996.

Second, I, my department, and my agency will benefit from my new insights in the areas of collaboration, the need for strong leadership which communicates a clear vision to staff, the need for broad based community representation and input, and buy-in from staff .

Third, I learned about the success of the SelfSufciency Workshops and how our agency can replicate this success for clients. One reason for this success is staff commitment. Staff work and live in this community and feel a personal as well as professional commitment to their community. They run into their clients in the grocery store. Another reason is that the workshops were given in their own language. In this case, the most successful workshops were in South County where most people speak Spanish. The workshops and workshop materials are in Spanish. The content reflected what clients need. There were individualized work plans developed for each clients. This is true client service. We need to learn from what Santa Cruz HRA did and utilize what worked and what didn't work.

Fourth, the success of the Santa Cruz County HRA's Self-Sufficiency Workshops can be transferred to Santa Clara County SSA because of the similarity of the Santa Cruz, South County

demographics to the Santa Clara, South County demographics. In fact the Santa Cruz South County workshops were better attended than the North County's and more clients succeeded in job placement.

Both Santa Cruz' South County and Santa Clara's South County have client populations consisting of two parent families with children, are predominately Spanish speaking and are seasonal workers.

We can begin from this reference point and create a Self-Sufficiency pilot program in our South County and build on Santa Cruz' success record. I have spoken with our new Director and members of our Welfare Reform Oversight Committee about this possibility and the additional possibility of collaborating with Santa Cruz and San Benito Counties to create a regional tri-county pilot program.

Fifth, in addition, another model that HRA is planning to implement in July 1996 is the One-Stop Career Center. This is another idea Santa Clara County SSA would like to consider in our planning process. This concept involves networking with the entire economy. It involves a single point of access to the workforce development system. Core services such as information on jobs, assessment of skills, counseling, job search assistance, information on education, training and vocational rehabilitation programs in the local community, determinations of eligibility including student financial aid, and referral to appropriate programs, would be made available to the general population. Individuals found to need more intensive services and training would receive vouchers to maximize customer choice in the selection of training providers. Disadvantaged adults, including welfare recipients, and dislocated workers may be given priority for intensive services and education and training.