

## **WORKING WITH THE HEALTH CARE SECTOR TO CREATE CAREERS IN SONOMA COUNTY**

**Mary Miller\***

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Alameda County and Sonoma County are different in size, demographics of their populations, and labor markets. However, they both share a labor market concern with each other as well as with the rest of the State of California. That concern is the shortage of health care workers that currently exists and is projected to grow. The state-funded Caregivers Training Initiative (CTI) and the Nurse Workforce Initiative (NWI) are two skills training programs using Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds to address this specific workforce shortage. This paper describes Sonoma County's experience with the two programs and makes observations and recommendations for Alameda County.

#### **CTI AND NWI IN SONOMA COUNTY**

Sonoma County competed successfully for funding for both of the healthcare employment programs. They administered them through the Employment and Training Division of the County Human Services Department. This department administers all employment programs for the agency, regardless of the funding source. It combines the CalWORKs funding, Workforce Investment Act funding, and numerous discretionary grants from other state and federal funding sources as well as foundations and local businesses. Sonoma County has created a strong relationship with local employers as a result of its ability to provide services to both job seekers

and employers through its integrated program. The county's One Stop program is identified as the primary resource in the community for employment.

The Caregivers Training Initiative and the Nurse Workforce Initiative required collaboration by three parties. The county agency administered the grant funds, provided the project coordinator, and facilitated the collaboration's efforts. The Hospital Council exercised leadership in identifying the specific occupations that were the most critical to provide training in, and organized themselves to both shape local policy regarding use of the funds and to assure that trainees were hired by local employers. The Community College coordinated training with the needs of the programs to ensure that participants had the skills necessary to take the required state licensing exams.

Both the CTI and the NWI meet the needs of CalWORKs clients by creating entry to employment with:

- entry level positions requiring little, or only short term training;
- multiple avenues for career development; and
- continued demand and high wages.

Both projects also meet the needs of the Workforce Investment Act programs in their responsiveness to local businesses by:

- working with the Hospital Council to develop a coordinated response to a shared demand for employees in the health care field; and

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\*Mary Miller is a Supervising Program Specialist in Alameda County Employment and Support Services Programs.

- creating the pipeline for recruitment, training and retraining, and employment for job seekers.

Outcomes of the collaboration among the parties for the CTI and NWI include:

### **Employment for job seekers**

Program participants have completed training and been offered employment. This was the primary outcome desired. It benefits job seekers, healthcare industry employers, and the WIA program responsible for investing public funds.

### **Ongoing relationships**

The success of the CTI made it possible to undertake the NWI. The investment in time and support for the working relationships among all collaborating parties is an investment in the future.

### **A product**

A tangible result of this project is the development of a Hospital and Health Care Careers Directory. This directory includes fifty-six occupations and information on training and employment opportuni-

ties tailored for Sonoma and the neighboring counties in its immediate labor market. This tool is available electronically and can be easily updated as the labor market needs change.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ALAMEDA COUNTY**

It is risky to take practices that work in a small county and transplant them to a large county.

Nevertheless, there are some practices worth considering by Alameda County and are offered for exploration.

1. Replicate the Hospital and Health Care Careers Directory, customizing the information for Alameda County.
2. Strategically use the One Stop System for CalWORKs to foster closer coordination among CalWORKs and WIA funded employment programs.
3. Replicate CTI training project for CalWORKs recipients.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Both CalWORKs and the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) are concerned with helping unemployed people become employed. CalWORKs, funded through the state and federal departments of Health and Human Services, focuses on the low-income individual and her (or his) participation in a range of specific and allowable activities that will help her prepare for, seek, obtain, and retain employment. The overall purpose is to end dependence on public assistance. WIA, funded through the Federal Department of Labor, focuses on local workforce development in general, with particular interest in providing services to business while helping low-income individuals and displaced workers become employed. The overall purpose is to maintain a globally competitive workforce. Whereas CalWORKs has one client—the individual job seeker—WIA has two clients—the job seeker and the employer. The common element in these two programs is the low-income job seeker.

Sonoma County has integrated both the CalWORKs and WIA programs in the Employment and Training Division of its Human Services Department. In so doing, they offer employment services to all job seekers,

while meeting the requirements of each funding stream, in a delivery model that makes eligibility and funding invisible to the individual job seeker. Its Health Care Sector employment strategy is an example of how this has worked, and provides a model for Alameda County to draw upon.

This paper discusses two health care sector programs implemented by Sonoma County and how its integrated employment system has contributed to the success of those programs to date. It makes recommendations for Alameda County, which also houses the CalWORKs programs and the WIA programs in the same agency, but does not attempt program integration. The programs discussed are the WIA funded Caregivers Training Initiative (CTI) and the Nurse Workforce Initiative (NWI). Both projects meet the needs of CalWORKs clients by creating entry to employment with:

- entry level positions requiring little, or only short term training;
- multiple avenues for career development; and
- continued demand and high wages.

Both projects also meet the needs of the WIA programs in their responsiveness to local businesses by:

- working with the Hospital Council to develop a coordinated response to a shared demand for employees in the health care field; and
- creating the pipeline for recruitment, training and retraining, and employment for job seekers.

### **SONOMA COUNTY EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING DIVISION**

The Employment and Training Division of the Human Services Department in Sonoma county works with all job seekers as well as local employers. They have a variety of funding sources to do so, including CalWORKs and Workforce Investment Act funds. Sonoma WORKS serves CalWORKs recipients with employment and support services

such as child care, transportation, counseling and legal assistance. Job LNKS is the One Stop Center where staff coordinate resources for job seekers and employers. It has job leads, computer lab, career information, and training opportunities. A satellite office, known as Job Start is a well equipped resource room that is also staffed full time, and is conveniently located in the same building where the public assistance programs are housed. Although it is available to the public at large, Job Start is easily accessible to anyone applying for CalWORKs, Food Stamps, General Assistance or anyone who has any business to conduct in those offices. The same level of attention to a job search undertaken through Job LINKS is found at Job Start as well.

One of the key components of the Sonoma County integrated employment system is the role of the Workforce Investment Board (WIB) which has oversight of the WIA programs. From the onset of Welfare Reform in 1997, Sonoma County made a strategic decision to approach the required changes from the point of view of workforce development, rather than welfare implementation alone. They gave the WIB a significant role in shaping welfare employment programs. The CalWORKs program uses the WIB as advisors for labor market, training and overall workforce policy. Both programs report to the Board of Supervisors, and both are administered by the Employment and Training Division. That division also has a very aggressive approach to grant seeking as part of its commitment to support workforce development. Their discretionary grants are close to half of the funding allocated to training.

### **WIA, CTI AND NWI**

The healthcare industry is grappling with an imbalance between supply and demand. On the supply

side, there is currently a shortage of nurses and other skilled technicians. Recent legislation decreased the nurse to patient ratio for hospitals, will reduce the number of people entering the healthcare field over time, and is expected to contribute to a shortage of skilled nursing and technical personnel. On the demand side the factors are just as significant. The population in general has increased longevity putting pressure on the current system. The front end of the baby boom generation is poised for retirement and is moving from middle age to old age with its concomitant need for increased health care services.

One of the responses to this situation by the State of California is in its funding of training through the WIA program. The Caregiver Training Initiative (CTI), funded in 2000, was the first project. It was designed to attract new employees to the healthcare field as well as to offer training to those already employed in the field in order to upgrade their skills. Doing so helped employers meet their need for employees while assisting some individuals to develop a career path.

Following the CTI, in 2002, then Governor Davis created and funded his three-year Nurse Workforce Initiative (NWI). The vision of this project was to build on the work begun by the CTI in order to meet the long-term need in California for licensed and registered nurses, as well as other highly skilled technical healthcare employees.

Both the CTI and NWI projects were funded through a competitive process. The North Bay Employment Consortium (Sonoma, Marin, Solano and Napa Counties) applied on behalf of all partners, and was funded as a region. EastBay WORKS (Alameda and Contra Costa Counties, and the cities of Oakland and Richmond) also applied on behalf

of all partners and was awarded funds. Both programs were successful in recruiting and training people in health care occupations. In Sonoma County, the programs were part of their integrated employment services with CalWORKs and WIA. In Alameda County, the programs were administered by the WIB.

### **SONOMA COUNTY'S EXPERIENCE**

The Caregiver's Training Initiative was created to be the beginning of a career ladder. This project was also the catalyst for moving Sonoma County's employment strategy for the healthcare sector into full gear. Key components to their project that carried over to the Nurse Workforce Initiative are:

- leadership by the Hospital Council;
- employment of a dedicated program coordinator; and
- centralized case management.

#### **Hospital Council Leadership**

The Hospital Council, a formal network of the public and private hospitals in the county, existed prior to its partnership with Sonoma County Human Services Department Employment and Training Division. However, that partnership resulted in their taking on a different role. Sonoma County staff credits the Hospital Council and its leadership as being critical to the success of the programs. Without the Council's willingness to articulate its short-term and long-term workforce needs, the county could not have competed successfully for the training grants, and the program graduates would not have had assured entry to employment and career opportunities in a growing field. While working with the CTI and NWI projects, this council emerged as an active force and leader in shap-

ing workforce policies that met its needs. The Council's organization and influence from an industry perspective, rather than as individual employers, provides a model for working with other industries.

The leadership of the Hospital Council in developing a coordinated response to workforce development for the health care sector developed over the course of about two years. Any endeavor that involves significant change and institutional partnerships requires time to evolve and develop new ways of being. This effort was no different. The Hospital Council members had to recognize a benefit to themselves for working with the County Human Services Department. They learned to speak from an industry perspective, and not as individual member organizations, in order to work most effectively with the employment and training programs administered by the county. The county had to establish its credibility as a source for identifying qualified employees through its recruitment and screening activities. The county was also the leader in obtaining training funds and assumed responsibility for the project infrastructure by managing the grants and providing staff for coordination.

#### **Role of the Program Coordinator**

While the Hospital Council was instrumental in providing the road map for the health care sector employment and training programs, the project endures beyond the initial training grants in part because of the role of the Program Coordinator. One staff person dedicated to the program provided the support to the projects by serving as:

- liaison to the Hospital Council to identify training needs and responses to those needs;

- grant manager to make maximum use of funds available; and
- case manager to troubleshoot problems encountered by individual participants.

### **Case Management and Behind the Scenes Grant Management**

Every employment and training plan only exists on paper until people actually participate in it. This is where Sonoma County's integration of programs begins. Upon enrollment in a training program, the Case Manager identifies every funding source that could apply to each individual and tracks that information in a customized database. This becomes a 'behind the scenes' tool for fiscal and program management. As any given funding source grows or shrinks, the participants' costs are shifted among them. This has the benefit of:

- spending out grants that are time limited;
- selectively charging against grants to enroll the maximum number of people; and
- planning with individuals to support career growth.

An example of this would be to enroll someone in the CTI funded training to become a Certified Nurses Assistant (CNA). A second step would be to transfer that person to the NWI for skills upgrade training once they are employed. As long as there were CTI funds, new participants were enrolled in the program even if they could not complete training by the end of the grant period. Any participant in that situation was assured complete training and job placement by shifting their costs to NWI funding at the end of the CTI funding.

Another example of this integration is in a special project for Pre-CNA training. This project took prospective healthcare trainees and provided six

weeks of focused training to prepare them for the standard CNA training. Local employers hired program participants while in training and gave them pay increases upon successful completion of training. These incentives make it possible for the lowest skilled (and thus, presumably the lowest income) job seekers to enter a field with a myriad of career options. The Pre-CNA training has been particularly beneficial to people with limited English skills.

The Finance Department plays a critical role in managing the grants for maximum benefit to the job seekers. It tracks expenditures and generates detailed fiscal reports to the program staff, who then manage the charges to the funding sources as needed and appropriate. The level of cooperation and mutual understanding of the requirements and restraints on use of public funds from both perspectives—finance as well as program—cannot be underestimated. The Administrative Division has developed the reporting tools and provided the financial overview training to program staff that enables them to make the best use of funds available.

### **Benefits of Integrated Employment Services**

There are benefits to both the job seeker and the public agency in operating an integrated employment program. The job seeker benefits by working with counselors who are knowledgeable in a variety of programs, including CalWORKs, WIA, and special grants awarded to the agency. By being able to serve any job seeker as well as local employers, Job LINK is seen by the community as the resource for employers and employees alike. This status allows them to also create partnerships with the education and training agencies.

The collaboration among programs, between public agencies, and with employers takes time and energy. The benefits of investing the time are for future opportunities as much as for current projects.

## A Product

Employment programs are about training and job placement, managing grants and managing relationships. As a resource for those activities, the Sonoma County CTI and NWI produced a comprehensive directory of healthcare occupations that will be valuable for anyone undertaking career exploration. It includes a detailed description of the job, training and qualification required, opportunities for advancement, salary range, where the education and training is available in the four North Bay counties, and where to seek local employment. The directory covers fifty-six (56) occupations in ten (10) medical fields. They range from Certified Nursing Assistant to Physician's Assistant, with an array of occupations in between. Salaries are from \$10.00 an hour to more than \$100,000 a year. Using the technology of the day, this directory is easily updated by being available online at [www.hcncc.com](http://www.hcncc.com), as well as on compact disc (CD ROM).

## IMPLICATIONS FOR ALAMEDA COUNTY

Alameda County WIB received funding under both the CTI and NWI grants and has several funding sources to provide employment and training services to dislocated workers and low income job seekers, just as Sonoma County does. Its programs served newcomers to the field and incumbent workers for skills upgrade and career development. The county works closely with employers for the success of the programs. In Alameda County the WIA funded programs and the CalWORKs programs are

both housed in the same agency, just as in Sonoma County. While there are similarities in structure, there are significant differences, including:

- *WIB role in CalWORKs:* The Sonoma County WIB serves in an advisory capacity to CalWORKs. In so doing they influence employment program design and Requests for Proposals (RFP), review RFP responses, and recommend funding. In Alameda County the CalWORKs employment program stands separately from the WIB programs even though the Social Services Agency Director is a member of the WIB. Even more significant is the fact that in Alameda County there are two (2) WIBs. The City of Oakland, where approximately two-thirds of CalWORKs recipients live, has separate WIB and WIA programs. The Alameda County WIB, housed in the Social Services Agency, serves the balance of the county.
- *Role of Training in CalWORKs:* Sonoma County aggressively seeks grants to provide training opportunities in the community. They then target recruitment to appropriate populations, including CalWORKs recipients, to take advantage of that training. Alameda County CalWORKs program takes an individualized approach to training. A formal comprehensive assessment drives an individualized welfare-to-work plan. Training is limited to adult schools and community colleges, private institutions if the clients can access financial aid on their own, and a few selected community-based organizations, especially for limited English speakers.

Generally speaking, Alameda County's employment programs are driven by the regulations of their funding source. In addition to the One Stop and other WIA programs and CalWORKs, Alameda County Social Services has responsibility for

employment programs funded by the Federal Office of Refugee Resettlement, Department of Agriculture for Food Stamps, and Older Americans Act funds.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It is risky to take practices that work in a small county and transplant them to a large county. Sonoma County is sparsely populated with fewer than 450,000 people and a CalWORKs caseload of less than 4,000. There is one primary urban center, Santa Rosa, with many small towns and rural communities spread over a broad geographic area. Alameda County, on the other hand, is a large county with more than 1.4 million people and a CalWORKs caseload of over 16,000 families. At any given time approximately 25% of that caseload identifies a language other than English as their primary language. More significant than the percentage of the caseload is the numbers of languages that it represents. While Spanish and Vietnamese are the most common languages, that percentage also includes Farsi, Cambodian, Laotian, and Cantonese among others. The largest city, Oakland, is home to approximately two-thirds of the CalWORKs families. The remaining third of the caseloads live in large and medium-sized suburban communities, with a few living in the vestiges of rural areas that remain.

Nevertheless, there are some practices worth considering for Alameda County as it continues to develop employment programs. As the State Legislature grapples with the enormous budget deficit and struggles to create a workable budget for the next fiscal year, it will surely make significant reductions in resources to local governments as well as to the human services programs administered by those governments. Local agencies are faced with

the unenviable task of managing large programs with complex requirements with dwindling resources. However, scarcity creates the climate for change. Our challenge is to recognize and make use of the opportunities that arise from the cutbacks in funding to CalWORKs and WIA that are expected to remain for the foreseeable future.

Sonoma County offers a model for how the two systems could be integrated if the commitment to do so is there. The unique situation with healthcare occupations may be a good testing ground for the future. The following recommendations are actions that would test the extent to which CalWORKs and WIA programs would be integrated, or at the very least be implemented with closer coordination. They are offered for exploration.

### **1. Replicate the Hospital and Health Care Careers Directory**

A version of this directory customized for Alameda County would have several audiences. For CalWORKs, the Employment Counselors and CalWORKs participants would use it to develop training and career development plans that go beyond the minimum requirements of CalWORKs compliance. The Assessment Counselors would use it to help CalWORKs recipients make realistic long-term plans and action steps. The WIB would use it as a career planning tool for its youth programs, marketing a wide range of career options in a growing field to the low-income youth that they serve. Local education agencies would also use it as a career planning tool for junior high and high school students. The WIB would also use it as a resource for displaced workers seeking new careers that help them maintain the wage level they reached before becoming unemployed. Employers and the healthcare industry in general would use it



to update the information they want to disseminate to a broad audience for current and future employment trends.

Costs to update the information in the directory could be covered by multiple beneficiaries and validated by the local healthcare industry. Making it available on a CD as a marketing and outreach tool has further appeal with minimal production costs associated with it. This is a near-term recommendation that could be implemented upon identification of a small amount of funding.

## **2. Strategically Use the One Stop System for CalWORKs**

Alameda County has held contracts for specific services with the One Stop System. However, it is not viewed as a primary resource, nor strategically supported financially through CalWORKs. By using the employment infrastructure supported by a separate funding source, the CalWORKs program could create more training opportunities for participants as well as forge employer linkages.

In anticipation of changes in federal and state law that will make it even more imperative for CalWORKs recipients to find employment quickly, a more strategic relationship should be developed with EastBay Works, the local One Stop System that is funded through the two WIBs. By incorporating use of the One Stop system in the CalWORKs client flow of activities and paying for counseling staff at one or more sites, the CalWORKs program could leverage the resources of the entire workforce system with minimal costs. This is a mid-term recommendation that would require budget decisions for the coming fiscal year; interest on the part of the One Stop system to commit staff dedicated to working with CalWORKs participants; negotiation of

roles and expectations for all parties; and confidence by all parties that the relationship would lead to increased rates of jobs for CalWORKs participants.

## **3. Replicate CTI training project for CalWORKs recipients.**

The CTI pilot project was intended for replication. Recruiting from the CalWORKs caseload for both new employees and those already employed in low-end healthcare jobs could identify enough people to do so. In Alameda County the relationships are already in place between employer, training agency, and the WIB as coordinator. With careful data collection to compare the program outcomes to the pilot projects, the case could be made for future coordination between CalWORKs and WIA, perhaps leading to an integrated service in the County system.

This recommendation requires significant groundwork before implementation. First, a funding source must be identified. There is intense competition for CalWORKs discretionary funds available for next fiscal year, and there is the looming possibility that they may not be available at all. WIA training funds are also restricted and require stringent outcomes. There is general concern that CalWORKs participants will not meet the outcome measures. However, part of replicating the pilot project is to recruit and screen potential participants. A lesson learned from Sonoma County is that the match between the occupation and the trainee is fundamental to the success of the program and that centralized case management is critical. The need for healthcare workers is identified as a high priority for all parties affected by it. Therefore, the opportunity exists to create entry-level training expressly

linked to continuing education and career development.

Second, the role of potential partners would need to be defined in detail. They would generally be:

### **CalWORKS**

- Identify eligible participants
- Create internal tracking and reporting systems to support the program
- Provide support services to participants for childcare, transportation, educational materials

### **WIB**

- Replicate the training and employment agreements created under CTI

### **Employers**

- Identify employment opportunities and provide staff to the project

### **Community Colleges**

- Provide skill training and prepare students for licensing exams.

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