

Chapter 14

Neighborhood Self-Sufficiency Centers

Christine M. Schmidt

Michael J. Austin

With the signing of President Clinton's 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), the goals of the welfare system in the United States changed from job training and economic assistance to a focus on removing barriers to employment and propelling welfare recipients into work. The bill consolidated the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Emergency Assistance, and Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) programs into a single block grant for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). With the new legislation came time limits on assistance and a demand to the states to develop welfare-to-work programs that could address the needs of those with multiple barriers. In response, California developed its own legislation (CalWORKs) that would both adhere to federal standards and delineate guidelines for county welfare-to-work programs.

In February 1996, Santa Clara County Supervisor James T. Beall Jr. and the Social Service Agency's (SSA) executive team initiated a local planning effort to address the expected welfare reform legislation. Local businesses, community groups, public and private agencies, and public assistance recipients were invited to participate in a collaborative partnership with the SSA to develop a response to the pending changes. The basic vision of this Employment Support Initiative (ESI) was "to strengthen low-income parents' access to the resources they need to care for their children through employment and related services" (Employment Support Initiative, 1996, p. 3). Through this collaboration, SSA hoped to develop a countywide welfare-to-work strategy based on existing funding and resources that could be implemented and operational before any new policy constraints were imposed.

To further this goal, SSA developed a partnership with both NOVA Private Industry Council (NOVA PIC) and Silicon Valley Private Industry Council (SVPIC) and began discussing plans that could both comply with

federal guidelines and support the agencies' objectives for community-coordinated service delivery. While the principal tenet of the new welfare-to-work legislation was to move people into employment, the partnership recognized that successful, sustained family self-sufficiency would be obtained only by providing for the needs of the entire family in their own neighborhoods.

Out of this basic idea for addressing family needs came the concept of developing neighborhood centers that would offer family services in areas where CalWORKs participants needed them most. The centers would focus on postemployment support services to CalWORKs participants entering the workforce in an effort to sustain long-term employment and foster advancement. This is a case study of how Santa Clara County SSA, along with both private industry councils, developed and implemented neighborhood self-sufficiency centers to address the multiple barriers to employment and provide neighborhood-based supportive services.

BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the 1996 PRWORA was passed, welfare programs in the United States have placed primary emphasis on moving as many welfare recipients as possible into sustainable employment. Helped by the strong economy in most states, many people have left the rolls for work. Nationwide, caseloads have dropped by more than 40 percent, or approximately 2 million families (Tweedie, 1999). This success is due, in large part, to state and county efforts to combine a work-first philosophy with supportive employment and training programs, tailored to the abilities and requirements of clients.

The implementation of the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program, along with the welfare-to-work (WtW) grant program provided funding to states to be used not only for helping recipients find jobs but also for implementing postemployment services to help them keep those jobs (O'Connor, 1999). Such services help them maintain employment, avoid returning to welfare, and earn higher wages. WtW grants complement TANF in that they are designated specifically for work-related activities and not for cash assistance.

Unlike TANF, which is distributed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the WtW program is administered by the U.S. Department of Labor. WtW funds can be used for training or education once a person has begun work and are targeted toward those who face numerous barriers to employment. Services utilizing WtW funds may also be used to serve noncustodial fathers of children who receive TANF. Some uses of WtW funds include but are not limited to the following (U.S. Department of Labor, 1997):

- Wage subsidies
- On-the-job training
- Job readiness
- Job-placement services
- Postemployment education and services
- Job vouchers for job readiness, placement, or postemployment services, community service, or work experience
- Job-retention services
- Other support services

Seventy-five percent of WtW funds are allocated to states based on a formula that takes into account number of poor individuals and adult recipients of assistance under TANF in each state. States are required to pass along 85 percent of the money to local private industry councils, which oversee and guide job-training programs in specific geographical jurisdictions called service delivery areas.

Changes in the U.S. economy over the past twenty years have led to an increased emphasis on educational achievement and the acquisition of technical skills. Well-paying, low-skill manufacturing jobs have been replaced by low-paying, service-sector jobs (Trutko, Nightingale, and Barnow, 1999). Some researchers estimate that in today's labor market, most welfare recipients will earn between \$5.00 and \$8.00 an hour (Burtless, 1989). Although these entry-level jobs may provide a starting point for gaining work experience, they are not enough to provide long-term self-sufficiency for the families of low-income workers. Postemployment education and training services can provide the means for low-paid individuals to transition over time into higher-paid career-oriented work (Trutko, Nightingale, and Barnow, 1999).

In response, some welfare agencies are implementing postemployment training and retention services and promoting coordination with WtW programs to provide additional training opportunities and workplace support. This type of service integration features a common intake and a seamless service delivery system that eliminates repeated registration procedures, waiting periods, or other administrative barriers. Advantages to this coordinated system include the following (Pindus et al., 2000):

- *Referrals to more services and to a wider range of services:* Availability of expanded services is often the result of referral agreements or contractual relationships between coordinating agencies.
- *Greater intensity of services to clients:* Linkages with other agencies may reinforce the services that are provided through the welfare agency.

- *Simplified referrals:* A simplified client referral process might mean the client faces fewer obstacles when seeking services from another agency because the agency has already received some basic information about the client.
- *Convenience of having several or all agencies in one location:* In some instances, agencies are colocated in the same building or at a one-stop center.
- *Improved case management:* When staff of coordinated programs share information and communicate regularly, they can better understand and address the client's needs.

Implementation of an integrated system has advantages for those interested in promoting economic development and for the providers of job training and placement who have tended to operate in separate worlds. The efforts to attract industry have rarely been matched with the efforts to appropriately and adequately prepare a workforce.

As a result, it has been rare for either to make use of the tools and experiences of the other, despite the potential benefits (Theodore and Carlson, 1998). However, postemployment education and training are likely to be most effective if developed in conjunction with employers and sensitive to the realities of the workplace. Working closely with employers will not only improve possibilities for enhanced skill development among WtW participants but also help pave the way to identifying an expanded range of job openings, increased chances of job retention, and leveraging of private-sector training dollars (Trutko, Nightingale, and Barnow, 1999).

LAUNCHING THE CENTERS

On October 9, 1998, a request for concept papers (RFCP) was issued and called for agencies to develop plans that would evolve into future neighborhood self-sufficiency centers. These centers would provide employment, reemployment, and skills upgrade services to CalWORKs participants who are able to secure employment. To sustain long-term employment, the centers needed to provide family services to complement employment services. At a minimum, this would require age-appropriate educational and recreational child care activities for the children of CalWORKs participants so that the parents could then use that time for skill-building training or education. In addition, centers would be required to provide additional services such as specialized classes on topics of interest to CalWORKs participants.

In order to receive funding, the applicant providers had to demonstrate a collaborative partnership with a minimum of three providers along with a

plan to leverage other revenues or in-kind services. Proposed programs needed to include innovative activities and services that do not duplicate currently available services. Proposals needed to reflect a three-year plan for the use of federal WtW funds based on the contract renewal policy of funding years two and three on the basis of the continued need for services and performance outcomes.

PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

Each proposal needed to include a statement of work that reflected the following principles (Silicon Valley Private Industry Council, NOVA Private Industry Council, and Santa Clara County Social Services Agency, 1998):

- *Customer service:* Services that respond to both CalWORKs participants and employers.
- *Family-friendly and family-focused services:* Services that address the needs of the entire family.
- *Leveraging resources:* Services that leverage additional resources to augment the WtW program.
- *Community collaboration coordination:* Services that reflect new and/or expanded community collaboratives that support the WtW program and strengthen the entire community. In addition, services need to be coordinated among the NOVA PIC, SVPIC, and the SSA and the multitude of educational, training, and service agencies that work within the county.
- *The employer is a key customer of the WtW program and a critical partner in its success:* NSSCs need to work with employers to develop on-the-job training and work experience, on-site mentoring, job coaching, and/or skills upgrade training. Service may include assistance in coordinating job listings, improving job matches, and accessing tax credits.
- *Providing services to customers who are currently employed will require new and creative approaches to outreach and recruitment:* Services need to include incentives such as vouchers redeemable with local merchants, free recreational and educational activities for children, or financial incentives for attending educational programs.

In addition to this statement of work, proposals needed a budget and cost analysis outlining financial plans for each partner as well as one for the program as a whole. Funding allocations could not include administrative expen-

ditures, as these costs were to be a matched expense. A bidder identification form would identify each proposed partner, with subcontracts or memorandums of understanding between bidder and partners to be attached. Oversight for the approved programs would be based on the policies and procedures of both PICs in conjunction with all applicable state and federal laws, regulations, and policies, including the application and enrollment policies of the federal WtW program.

Once clients meet eligibility and are enrolled in the federal WtW program, they then meet with a case manager who assists them in completing a family assessment and service strategy form. This form includes personal and family history, assessment of current and needed skills, work history, self-sufficiency/supportive service needs, and a plan for action. Staff members complete monthly activity records, which document the activities and services received by a participant and the dollar value of each service. These records are used for WtW monitoring and reporting to the federal Department of Labor. When clients leave the program or become ineligible under WtW requirements, NSSC staff members file termination of active enrollment forms.

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

The four principal partners in the county's welfare-to-work strategy were identified as the CalWORKs participant, the participant's family, the participant's community, and the employer. Service programs need to reflect a plan to provide coordination and services to each of these partners. The following seven basic services were required either directly or through service collaborators (Silicon Valley PIC, NOVA PIC, and Santa Clara County SSA, 1998):

1. Basic skills training
2. Vocational skills and skills-upgrade training
3. Case management
4. Employment and placement services
5. Employment retention and reemployment services
6. Mentoring services
7. Support services

In recognizing the importance of family stabilization in job retention and success, all program components needed to be family focused and community related. Working closely with the employment community was seen as a crucial step in forging better job opportunities and a stable workforce. At

the same time, stable family lives and job retention help to strengthen the communities.

While the NSSCs can serve as a complement to and support a one-stop service model, they are themselves a network of services located in the neighborhoods of greatest need. Each center has so many partners that it would be impossible for all services to be colocated, although they are able to provide several of the same benefits of one-stop centers to their participants. For example, multiple collaborative activities simplify referral, and program staff members are able to refer clients to a wider range of services. Case management services are improved through shared information and regular communication among partner agencies.

With the assistance of the local CalWORKs office, NSSCs are responsible for participant outreach and recruitment. The focus is on unemployed and employed persons residing in the NSSCs' surrounding zip codes. All CalWORKs participants who obtain employment and meet eligibility requirements of the federal WtW program are referred to the centers by CalWORKs offices.

Concept papers and work statements were evaluated with the use of the following criteria (Silicon Valley PIC, NOVA PIC, and Santa Clara County SSA, 1998):

1. Innovative retention services
2. Family-centered services
3. Nutrition programs
4. Mentoring
5. Supportive services
6. Work experience and subsidized placement
7. Multilingual employment services targeting high poverty areas
8. Additional services not otherwise provided

After reviewing all submissions, six centers were selected to share in the initial \$2 million in WtW funding. In addition, NOVA PIC applied for and was granted an additional amount of \$750,000 by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation to be distributed among the centers to provide services to persons not eligible for federal WtW enrollment. Each center ultimately received \$100,000 of the foundation grant to supplement their WtW funding, with the remainder of the grant reserved for capacity-building and administrative support services such as in-house evaluation and an independent customer survey.

Based on the incidence of TANF recipients by zip codes as well as community input, three centers were located in San Jose, one in East San Jose, one in South County (Gilroy), and one in North County (Santa Clara). The

following sections outline the implementation, operation, and early successes and challenges of three of the NSSCs: (1) North County Consortium, serving Mountain View, Santa Clara, Los Altos, Sunnyvale, Cupertino, and Palo Alto; (2) South County (Adelante Familia), serving Gilroy, Morgan Hill, and San Martin; and (3) Resource Net, serving the entire county.

NORTH COUNTY CONSORTIUM

North County Consortium NSSC provides services to employed CalWORKs participants who are still receiving aid and live in the northern part of Santa Clara County. The consortium is made up of businesses, agencies, and schools that have successfully served CalWORKs participants in the past and offers job-retention services, case management, educational services and skills upgrade, child care and recreation, support services such as substance abuse and domestic violence workshops, and homeless services. The main collaborators in the consortium are the Department of Employment and Development of the City of Sunnyvale, the Housing Authority of Santa Clara County, the Santa Clara City Library, Mountain View/Los Altos Adult Education, Foothill/De Anza Community College, Springboard employment placement agency, YWCA Santa Clara Valley, Scott Lane Elementary School, Kathryn Hughes Elementary School, Santa Clara Unified School District/Educational Options, UC-Berkeley Cooperative Extension, Work Skills Associates, Software Quality Associates, AmeriCorps volunteers, and the City of Santa Clara Adult Education (lead agency). Given the diverse populations of CalWORKs participants in Santa Clara County, each of the NSSCs include a unique mix of service providers, which allows for a wide range of family-oriented services to maximize client support. Multilingual services are available at all centers, and services are accessible beyond business hours, during evenings, and on Saturdays.

The North County NSSC has a total operating budget of \$450,000, with WtW funding comprising \$350,000, and an additional \$100,000 in Packard Foundation money. In program year 1999-2000, the program enrolled a total of seventy customers, thirty-seven into the 70 percent WtW eligibility category and thirty-three into the 30 percent category. Fifty-three of these customers were currently employed (76 percent), with an average wage of \$9.08 per hour.

The North County Consortium has four neighborhood outreach centers located in high poverty areas at two elementary schools and two adult education centers. Each center has a site coordinator (SC) who provides case management services by assessing the customer's needs upon enrollment and assisting in developing a plan of action for reaching desired goals. The

SC is responsible for coordinating services and activities of the various agencies and for tracking WtW participants by utilizing the state-mandated reporting system to provide monthly cost and activity reports on each participant.

The adult education teachers in each center provide instruction on basic reading, writing, and math, while volunteers provide individual tutoring. At the elementary school sites, computer-assisted basic skills training is provided, along with an adult education instructor to guide students through the curriculum, monitor progress, and provide assessment and feedback. Families are encouraged to take part in the elementary school program called Even Start that provides child care and instruction for children while parents attend literacy classes. Child care services are provided at all sites during center activities.

SOUTH COUNTY (ADELANTE FAMILIA)

Adelante Familia NSSC is a collaborative serving South Santa Clara County in Gilroy, Morgan Hill, and San Martin. It includes seven primary partners: CET (Center for Employment Training), Community Solutions, ESO (Economic and Social Opportunities), MACSA (Mexican American Community Services Agency), Gavilan Community College, Morgan Hill Community Adult School, and the City of Gilroy Department of Housing and Community Development. The center's budget includes \$280,000 in WtW funding and \$100,000 in Packard Foundation funding, for services primarily to current CalWORKs participants who are employed but still receiving aid for their families. The program offers family support services, job-retention services, skill upgrades, and job-readiness training, along with classes and workshops available in parenting, making the transition from family to work, anger/stress management, conflict resolution, and assertiveness.

A case manager, working in conjunction with the local CalWORKs office, recruits the participants for the NSSC. As he or she receives the lists of local CalWORKs participants, he or she calls them to describe the NSSC and its services. Although most of the CalWORKs participants called are not yet eligible because they are still unemployed, the case manager describes the services they can receive when they are employed and encourages them to contact him or her as soon as they find employment. The case manager also participates in various welfare-to-work job search presentations and encourages potential participants to call when they become eligible for center-based services. Although the center does not enroll the unem-

ployed, some participants lose their job while receiving services and the center then provides job-search assistance and training.

Since its inception, the Adelante Familia NSSC has had its share of challenges mixed with successes. Start-up of the program was slow due to staff changes and confusion about policies and procedures. In spite of proactive recruiting, the center enrolled a total of forty-seven customers in its first program year, which represented 59 percent of its goal. Stringent WtW eligibility criteria made it difficult to enroll participants, although recent legislation has loosened the criteria for the second year. Only nine of the forty-seven participants (19 percent) were employed at that time, due to an unexpected number of participants losing their jobs while enrolled. Although it was unforeseen that job search and placement would become such an increased need, the center has adjusted accordingly, offering more services to unemployed participants.

Although the center has had many obstacles to face, it has also had some success. One example is an innovative program called Family Fun Night, a weekly program designed to provide a family-oriented educational and recreational activity to promote family unity. At each of the weekly meetings, guest speakers present information on family topics of interest to adults, while separate activities are available for the children and child care is available for the very young. Dinner provided by Adelante Familia and free drawings for prizes for both adults and children follow the short presentation. Participants look forward to these events, as they provide opportunities to develop support groups with other participants. Although customer satisfaction surveying has been sporadic, those interviewed have reported positively about the program, citing Family Fun Night and counseling services from Community Solutions as helpful in meeting their needs.

RESOURCE NET

Resource Net is a collaboration of housing providers, family support agencies, and employers that provides services to CalWORKs and former CalWORKs clients and their families throughout San Jose who are homeless and at risk of becoming homeless. Partners include InnVision (housing), the Emergency Housing Consortium (housing), Second Start (employment services), Santa Clara Adult Education, Head Start, and the county board of education's Homeless Youth Education project. On any given day, Resource Net's two housing partners, InnVision and the Emergency Housing Consortium, provide shelter to eighty TANF families.

Resource Net's primary customer service center, located in downtown San Jose, is inside InnVision's Georgia Travis Center. The center is in an ex-

isting multiservice organization that primarily serves homeless single women and homeless mothers with children. It is the only facility in the county specifically designed to meet the needs of homeless women and children seeking respite from the streets during the day. In addition to emergency and respite services, the Georgia Travis Center provides Resource Net participants with:

1. housing search assistance,
2. transportation services,
3. outreach,
4. family recreation,
5. educational enrichment activities for children,
6. school services for homeless children,
7. legal services,
8. tuition assistance,
9. training resources,
10. mental health and substance abuse services, and
11. Internet/voice mail services.

Participants also have access to the training or other employment resources of current Second Start programs. These employment and training services include individualized assessment, customized job matching, on-the-job training, apprenticeship training, employment retention services, and links to the area's private industry councils and community colleges.

One of the successes of the Resource Net NSSC has been its ability to maximize funding for client services. In addition to their \$175,000 WtW funding combined with \$100,000 in Packard Foundation funds, Resource Net leverages an additional \$622,000 in housing, family, and employment resources. These funds help to create a valuable continuum of emergency, transitional, and permanent housing services for its participants. Other signs of success in the first program year are the high number of enrolled persons employed (95 percent) and the average hourly wage of employed customers (\$9.89), the highest among the six NSSCs.

Although Resource Net has shown itself to be successful, it also got off to a slow start. Agencies that had never worked together had to quickly familiarize themselves with one another's roles and responsibilities and the goals of the program as a whole. Staff needed to devise a workable system for distributing tasks and paperwork and for making sure they continued to operate under all local, federal, and state guidelines. Although expenditures exceeded the initial budgeted amount, additional leveraged monies and in-kind resources absorbed the overflow.

ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES

Although a number of center-specific challenges have been presented previously, it is important to note several challenges that impact the program as a whole. First, the process of collaboration, a fundamental part of the program model, also provided a major implementation challenge. The partnership at the federal level between the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Department of Labor (DOL) was new and difficult to navigate due to very different systems of funding, eligibility, and accountability. In the centers' first year alone, there were three changes in required paperwork, making it hard to keep abreast as well as retrain staff.

Second, during this same time period, a transition from county to city administration caused a considerable staff turnover in terms of county staff assigned to the project. As a result, existing NSSC staff did not receive the level of technical assistance they would have under normal circumstances, making it even more difficult to keep up with complex paperwork. Third, private industry councils are in the process of transitioning to workforce investment boards, in compliance with the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). This further complicates matters in that county staff must familiarize themselves with new or additional WIA guidelines that could negatively affect the three-year project.

**FUTURE DIRECTIONS OF NEIGHBORHOOD
SELF-SUFFICIENCY CENTERS**

Currently all of the NSSCs, in conjunction with the social services agency and county workforce investment boards, are in the process of reviewing the start-up experience and defining future service outcomes. They are looking at ways in which to increase the capacity of service providers to understand the complexities of serving low-income workers and their families. It is anticipated that improved data collection and the use of technology to link the six centers will help to maximize services to all participants. The county is encouraging city administration to follow up on their plan to install a common case-management system for the centers that can be networked with the social services agency and area one-stop centers.

The neighborhood self-sufficiency centers represent a new model of collaboration between provider agencies as well as between cities and the county. Partners are beginning to see the value of working together and sharing successes. The collaborative partnerships are also positively impacting the interagency culture through ongoing dialogue about what works and what does not and how to work together to improve services.

LESSONS LEARNED

The following lessons are derived from the experiences of Santa Clara County and its two private industry councils as they developed and implemented the neighborhood self-sufficiency centers:

1. When working with multiple systems of funding and/or oversight, it may be difficult to keep abreast of changes in eligibility or monitoring requirements. Ongoing training is necessary to ensure compliance with state and federal reporting mandates.
2. It is necessary to identify strong leadership to develop and guide inter-agency partnerships, especially to help staff understand the purpose and desired outcomes of new service systems. Partnership start-ups that lack central leadership due to staff turnover or other internal issues can often result in role confusion among partners and lack of initial program progress.
3. Whenever possible, it is important to implement centralized information systems for use by program staff. In order to prevent the loss of time and momentum in recruiting participants, technology needs to support the distribution of information to and among centers to aid in identifying potential participants.
4. It is important to blend federal policy and program objectives with local needs and priorities. While the goals of the federal welfare-to-work plan are focused primarily on getting people back to work, priorities of PICs and social service agencies are to help people secure a job with a living wage and services that provide for a stable family life.

The NSSCs build on the success of federal programs in helping people get jobs by providing additional supportive services that can help them keep those jobs. Opportunities for additional skills and education also help participants achieve self-sufficiency by maximizing employability and increasing earning potential.

REFERENCES

- Burtless, G. (1989). The Effect of Reform on Employment, Earnings and Income. In Phoebe H. Cottingham and David T. Ellwood, eds., *Welfare Policy for the 1990s* (pp. 103-140). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Employment Support Initiative (1996). The Santa Clara Valley Employment Support Initiative: An Agenda for Children and Their Families. Concept Paper. Santa Clara County, CA.

- O'Connor, M. (1999). Getting a Job and Keeping It (Window of Opportunity for Welfare Reform). *State Legislatures*, 25:4, 21.
- Pindus, N., Koralek, R., Martinson, K., and Trutko, J. (2000). *Coordination and Integration of Welfare and Workforce Development Systems*. Prepared for the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Silicon Valley Private Industry Council, NOVA Private Industry Council, and Santa Clara County Social Services Agency (1998). Welfare-to-Work Neighborhood Self Sufficiency Centers (NSSC) Request for Concept Paper (RFCP) Solicitation. Santa Clara County, CA.
- Theodore, N. and Carlson, V.L. (1998). Targeting Job Opportunities: Developing Measures of Local Employment. *Economic Development Quarterly*, 12:2, 137-149.
- Trutko, J., Nightingale, D.S., and Barnow, B.S. (1999). *Post-Employment Education and Training Models in the Welfare-to-Work Grant Program*. Prepared for the U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.
- Tweedie, J. (1999). Eight Questions to Ask About Welfare Reforms. *State Legislatures*, 25:1, 33-35.
- U.S. Department of Labor (1997). Welfare to Work (WtW) Grants: Rules and Regulations. *Federal Register*, 62(222), 1,6-7.