

## **MENTAL HEALTH CONSUMER ACCESS TO ONE STOP CAREER CENTERS IN MONTEREY COUNTY: THE BAY AREA'S CHALLENGE**

*"Greater than the tread of mighty armies is an idea whose time has come."* --Victor Hugo

## INTRODUCTION

My assignment for the 15-day project of the BASSC UC Berkeley Executive Development Training Program was, initially, to explore the Monterey One Stop Career Center. Visiting Monterey's beautiful new One Stop Center was a wonderful experience. Helen Shaw, Deputy Director with the Department of Social Services was delightfully helpful with introductions and mountains of documents for my review. Because of my interest and involvement in vocational rehabilitation services to the Mental Health population, I began to explore several of the newly forming Bay Area One Stops to see how this population would be included. Consequently, I met Margaret Walkover, a consultant and advocate for the Mental Health community, who has also studied the legislation of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998. She is alerting the California Mental Health Directors' Association of the need to advocate to become a mandated player in the leadership structure of the State Workforce Investment Board. This paper echoes her concerns and closes with this writer's recommendations for the San Mateo County Human Services Agency (HSA) and One Stop Career Centers.

As Bay Area One Stop Career Centers are forming and begin to develop service systems, individuals with disabilities and multiple barriers to employment will challenge the responsiveness of Centers to provide the services needed to achieve successful employment outcomes. This project paper will focus on the components of WIA and the One Stop concept as they pertain to Mental Health consumers accessing employment services, Intensive services, specialized resources, and training for staff to work with this population will be some of the need areas identified. Limitations imposed by the Rehabilitation Act and Order of Selection will be noted. Examples of some innovative services of the selected Bay Area One Stops of San Francisco, Monterey, San Mateo, Alameda, Santa Cruz, and Santa Clara counties to integrate this population to date will be shared.

## BACKGROUND

An estimated 39.5 million adult Americans have a mental disorder. Of this number, many have disorders severe enough to lead to major disabilities which make the tasks of living and working difficult. These individuals are served through the Mental Health System of Care and its larger Mental Health Medi Cal Managed Care network, as well as by private sector mental health providers. As the mental health field has identified pharmacological and psychosocial methods for treating this population, the number of Americans with psychiatric disabilities who can profit from vocational services has increased dramatically. Work is an integral part of the recovery process for individuals with serious mental illnesses (SMI).

## **WIA'S CUSTOMER-FOCUSED APPROACH**

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The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 provides the framework for a unique national workforce preparation and employment system designed to meet both the needs of all job seekers and those who want to further their careers. Key components of the Act enable customers to easily access the information and services they need through the One Stop system.

The Act authorizes "core" services (which will be available to all adults with no eligibility requirements), and "intensive" services for unemployed individuals who are not able to find and keep jobs through core services alone. It specifies training services for qualified individuals unable to get or keep jobs through intensive services.

## **MANDATORY PARTNERS**

The Act identifies programs that are required partners as well as voluntary human resource programs that may be partners in the One-Stop. Mandatory One-Stop programs under WIA include:

- Adult (Title I)
- Youth (Title I)
- Dislocated workers (Title I)
- Employment Service (Title III)
- Adult education and literacy (Title II)
- Vocational Rehabilitation (Title IV)
- Welfare-to-Work
- Community Service Employment for Seniors
- Postsecondary vocational education
- Trade adjustment assistance (and NAFTA-TAA)
- Veterans employment service
- Community Services Block Grants
- HUD Employment and Training
- Unemployment insurance Voluntary One-Stop programs include:
- Welfare reform (TANF)
- Food Stamp Employment and Training
- National and Community Service Act programs

## **CORE SERVICES**

Core services for all adults who seek assistance must be available and include:

- job search and placement assistance
- labor market information (which identifies job vacancies: skills needed for in-demand jobs; and local, regional and national employment trends)
- initial assessment of skills and needs
- information about available services
- follow-up services for job retention

## **INTENSIVE SERVICES**

If core services are not sufficient to obtain employment, intensive services must be provided. Intensive services include:

- comprehensive assessment
- development of employment plans
- group and individual counseling
- case management
- short-term pre-vocational services

## **TRAINING**

In cases where qualified customers receive intensive services and are still not able to find jobs, they may receive training services, which are directly linked to job opportunities in their local area. WIA legislation requires One Stops to include the input of the employment community in order to offer an array of trainings consistent with local employer skills and retention needs.

These services may include:

- occupational skills training
- on-the-job training
- skill upgrading
- job readiness training
- adult education and literacy activities

WIA allows for customers to use individual training accounts to determine which training program and training provider fits their needs.

## **BAY AREA ONE STOPS INTENSIVE SERVICES**

The One-Stop concept requires that customers be provided with information about and access to job training, education, and employment services at a single neighborhood location. All of the Bay Area One Stop Centers visited provide resource and information as a core service. This includes computers available for electronic access to CalJOBS and other Internet resources for job hunting and career and labor market information. San Francisco's Mission Street Career Link Center, for example, has workshops including Choices, a comprehensive career exploration and information system; and "Ask for LMI", a computerized Labor Market Information system. Santa Clara's One Stop has Kiosks available for customers to access services.

Most Bay area Centers have Welfare to Work staff on site to provide services to welfare recipients. Welfare Reform limits time on aid, thus requiring recipients to seek employment directly after application. Centers offer orientations, job seeking skills classes, and supported resource centers to seek employment and retention services. San Mateo, San Francisco and Monterey utilize the Curtis and Assoc. "Step" model, an energetic, motivational, self directed job search curriculum. Welfare to Work programs recognize that recipients, who are not successful in securing or retaining jobs after these services are offered, may have significant barriers to

employment. Mental Health issues are among these barriers. Creative solutions to serve this population require even more intensive intervention. Bay Area Centers have implemented specialized programs to meet these needs. For example, San Mateo County Human Services Agency (HSA) Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) staff have a modified version of the Curtis and Assoc. curriculum, "Steps Alternative", which is adapted to discussions around special issues, such as Social Security disability work incentives, and disability disclosure issues. Weekly groups provide additional support and job search strategies. In San Francisco, Community Vocational Enterprises (CVE) and Goodwill Industries are jointly serving 200 TANF recipients through the Community Job Initiative (CJI). After intake and a two-week orientation and assessment at Goodwill, participants are provided with 3 interviews at non-profit agencies. Subsequent placement into six-month paid internships will increase their employability skills.

For customers needing clinical assessment services, County Mental Health services are available at Centers. Most have formal arrangements for partnering through Memorandums of Understanding (MOU). For example, a MOU between Monterey County Department of Social Services (DSS) and the Health Department's Behavioral Health Division (HDBHD) provides for services for Mental Health consumers through the Employment Assistance Program (EAP). EAP staff is available part-time on site at the One Stop as well as colocated at DSS offices to provide a clinical assessment for employability, determine employment accommodations required and, when necessary, provide referral to a mental health managed care network provider. Similarly, San Mateo County Mental Health and the HSA have a MOU for the provision of CalWORKS related services. A licensed mental health professional serves on the multi -disciplinary Family Self Sufficiency Team (FSST) to provide assessment and subsequent service referral of CalWORKS recipients with mental health issues. The FSST consists of various agencies working together to problem-solve issues presenting barriers to employment. A plan is developed with the customer: and various agency staff provide case management, to assist with implementation of the plan.

## **PARTNERING FOR SPECIALIZED INTENSIVE SERVICES**

Some Bay Area One Stop Centers link with specialized service programs to provide a comprehensive array of vocational services. The SMI are among job seekers requiring assessment, planning, academic and skill training referral, individualized job development and placement service, and job coaching for job retention. For instance, a specific MOU between County Mental Health and the San Mateo HSA VRS unit at the Central Employment Services Center provides intensive vocational rehabilitation, placement and retention services for severely disabled referrals primarily from the County Mental Health System of Care agencies. Monterey's Interim, Inc. Supported Employment and Education Services is a community based organization (CBO) which assists adults with psychiatric disabilities to obtain and maintain employment, and/or attend the educational institution of their choice. Linkage to the Monterey One Stop Career Center System is made via access to the web site, hosting an electronic kiosk, and training staff about Interim's program.

More One Stops must be challenged to invite public and CBO programs on site to link their specialized services for the SMI with resources of the Center partners. Alameda County

Vocation Program (AVP), San Francisco's CVE, San Mateo's Jobs Plus, Community Connection of Santa Cruz, and Santa Clara's Alliance for Community Care are among the Bay Area providers of intensive services available to One Stop Centers. These programs are among twenty-seven (27) statewide agencies in a State Departments of Rehabilitation (DR) and Mental Health (MH) Cooperative Agreement network. Through local County Mental Health certified time and/or cash match funding against federal dollars, designated DR counselors serve County Mental Health SMI consumers. Case service funds are also created through the matched funding for development of specific intensive employment services. San Mateo's VRS Cooperative program is linked to the County One Stop Career Centers network. This alliance with integrated Career Centers resulted in VRS and Kern County's Mental Health program, On Track Employment Services each being awarded a five year funded Social Security (SSA) Demonstration Project grant. This enables the two programs to provide intensive, value added services to assist SSA recipients with psychiatric disabilities with benefit counseling and employment and retention services to achieve a higher level of self sufficiency.

## **STAFF DEVELOPMENT/CROSS TRAINING NEEDS**

Even as the One Stop partners are in the process of service implementation, the need for cross training to educate and sensitize staff to special needs population issues has been identified and developed. Through training, staff learns assessment and interviewing skills, employment counseling service skills, and gains awareness of accommodations needed by individuals with disabilities. For example, Monterey has a curriculum for welfare staff consisting of six one-day modules of instruction offered through UC Santa Cruz. San Mateo social service staff have coursework in interviewing, case management and employment service skills offered through the Community College District's newly designed Human Service curriculum program. Training also occurs through the day to day cross referral and interaction of staff with customers with mental health issues. A subsequent benefit of this intervention with the population and program cross training is the desensitization and destigmatization of this often underestimated population, which has demonstrated an ability to work.

## **VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION -A MANDATORY PARTNER**

State Department of Rehabilitation (DR) counselors are located at most Centers in the Bay Area. In fact, San Francisco, Santa Clara and Santa Cruz have Cooperative agreements/MOU with DR, which brings match funding for CalWORKS recipients with disabilities in addition to the Cooperative agreements to serve the SMI. Counselors comment that they receive referrals from programs within the Center; but also enjoy integrating their existing disabled caseloads into the sites, to take advantage of single access services. A significant feature of this co-location is the grass-roots process of the integration of customers with disabilities into the Centers.

## **ORDER OF SELECTION**

While State Departments of Rehabilitation are nationally the current leading provider of vocational rehabilitation services, they are not able to meet the employment needs of all disabled populations. As, The Rehabilitation Act mandates that the most severely disabled must be served first, the Order of Selection was established. A numerical Severity of Disability (SOD) rating,

based on functional limitations, assigns the order in which an individual with a disability may receive services. While this is basically a sound rationale to identify those most needing the limited services funds; most providers of Mental Health services question the inconsistency and subjectivity of the rating within the DR system. The individuals with serious mental illness receiving high ratings will tend to be the consumers utilizing higher levels of system of care mental health services.

The impact on the One Stops is that only individuals with the most serious psychiatric disabilities utilizing the Centers will be able to receive employment plans and services following an assessment and assignment of the SOD rating by the DR counselor. Ironically, mental health service providers believe that these consumers will not tend to selfrefer themselves to the One Stop Centers. Without outreach and marketing, the SMI will lack knowledge of the Centers existence. and /or may fear that they would not "fit in" or have accommodated services available.

At the other end of the Order of Selection scale, the individuals with less severe disability ratings will remain on waiting lists until their number is reachable for services to be provided. At this end of the scale, one may find the MediCal Mental Health Managed Care service consumers. This population typically scores lower on the DR severity rating, as well as fails to meet target criteria for system of care provision in County Mental Health. They will remain on a waiting list without services, unless the One Stops can provide on site intensive services and/or linkage to resources. They may or may not be welfare recipients, otherwise provided with welfare to work services associated with One Stops. Many are on Social Security benefits including SSI and SSDI. If DR can not serve them, then One Stops must.

## **CONCLUSION**

One Stops are targeted to be the site for single access to multiple services for the general adult population with intensive service provision for the dislocated worker and public assistance recipients or other low-income populations. Clearly, individuals with mental health barriers may fall within any of these categories. Individuals with diagnosed or undiagnosed mental health issues and symptoms must be encouraged to utilize One-Stops; whether through Welfare to Work referral from social service agencies, DR referral of individuals not eligible for employment plans, or as self referred "walk-ins". Individuals with SMI may or may not be in treatment, but, nevertheless, suffer from barriers of this "hidden"disability and comprise the population often referred to as the "working poor". Issues of substance abuse, physical limitations, criminal justice histories, family violence, etc. may be additional issues presenting as barriers to employment, retention and career progression. In spite of the persistent negative symptoms of their disability, disincentives to leave welfare and Social Security benefit rolls, and other barriers to the securing, retaining, and advancement of employment; many mentally disabled individuals have made an informed choice to work. As One Stop customers they will be expecting quality; integrated accessible service delivery.

Bay Area counties are in various stages of progress in the collaboration, coordination and over-all implementation of One-Stops. Partnerships between such agencies as social service, EDD, JTPA/PIC, Department of Rehabilitation, County Mental Health, Community Colleges

and CBOs vary from strong, long standing links to looser, newly-forming relationships. Creative solutions to provide intensive services are being developed.

The clock ticks towards implementation of the WIA One Stop concept by July 2000. The commitment to serve is clear. The mission to provide quality services to those with special needs has been accepted and has begun. The challenge to integrate mental health consumers into the One Stop system continues.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SAN MATEO COUNTY**

The San Mateo County Human Services Agency (HSA) has a vocational rehabilitation counseling unit centralized at Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS). VRS is currently in the process of a buildout to become the Central Employment Services Center and a central location for One Stop services. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors outstation to the One Stop Career Center in North County, the South County Employment Services Center, and to the 5 regional locations of County Mental Health in order to provide outreach and access to assessment and employment planning services to disabled and welfare referrals.

It is proposed that, with minor restructuring, a rehabilitation division could be carved out of the present VRS structure to formalize, expand and regionalize vocational rehabilitation services. This division could be established to provide the three One Stops and Service Centers with staff to provide intensive assessment and employment services to individuals with disabilities, welfare recipients, and other "special needs" One Stop walk-in customers. Funding for services could be provided through exploration of Welfare to Work and/or WIA funding streams, fee for service schedules, or other federal, local, or state contracting. For example, VRS was approved by the Social Security Administration (SSA) to participate in the Alternate Provider Program. SSA will reimburse the County for services provided to disabled consumers who meet employment outcomes. We have not yet implemented this resource. I fear other funding sources have also not been tapped.

Additional steps could be taken to expand upon the San Mateo employment service delivery model. The Employment and Training Policy team has already begun to brainstorm around this topic. Possible actions might include:

- Initiate a pilot program to expand our specialized model of service delivery to implement individualized job development and retention service (job coaching) to CalWORKS and GA recipients unable to locate/retain employment through SUCCESS.
- Expand the existing model which provides employment services to SSI and SSDI recipients to include services to the presently exempt GA and CalWORKS recipients. These potential customers may have medicals indicating the presence of a disability, but may have the ability and desire to work at some level with supports to become more self sufficient.
- Invite CBO services to more formally link with One Stops and Service Centers to provide specialized resources. These agencies have expertise in their fields and can assist One Stop

partners with intensive service requirements. In exchange, the CBOs could assist their consumers in accessing services available at the Centers.

- Discuss procedures to implement cross training and cross referral between staff and partner programs to assure One Stop customers with disabilities have access to programs and the required intensive case management services.