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## Chapter 5

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### Case Study Findings

The purpose of the site visits in conjunction with this study was to take a closer look at several local offices that Federal and State contacts identified as having made an especially ambitious effort to provide services to ABAWDs. The goal was to obtain an indepth appreciation of the kinds of activities being provided with food stamp E&T funds. In addition, local program managers and frontline E&T workers were asked for their perspectives on the successes and problems they have encountered in providing services to the ABAWD population. Based on information gathered from the individuals providing the direct services, the case studies provide insights on how to overcome challenges in serving ABAWDs.

Locating local offices that were seen as providing exemplary services to ABAWDs was difficult. Most State officials were unable to provide any suggestions; many suggested that program rules made implementing an effective program difficult. A few States did identify programs that they thought were doing an excellent job. Additional input was provided through extensive contacts with advocacy groups and FNS regional offices. Programs that had been identified were contacted to make sure they had implemented services to ABAWDs and to confirm and expand upon the information provided from other sources.

The next two sections provide an overview of some of the characteristics of these sites and describe some promising strategies for serving ABAWDs that can be suggested on the basis of the experiences of these offices. The individual case study reports in Appendix B provide detailed information on program clients, goals, staffing, funding, the components offered, and how each office has responded to the challenges of serving the ABAWD population.

#### Site Characteristics

The local programs selected for site visits represented a variety of settings, drew on different resources, and took a variety of approaches to serving ABAWDs. A

few important characteristics of the programs and the areas they serve are described.

#### San Francisco, California

ABAWDs are not waived from the time limit in San Francisco. The ABAWD population in San Francisco faces substantial barriers to finding employment as indicated by the following: Over one-third of participants in the E&T programs for adults without dependents.<sup>28</sup> are homeless; approximately one-quarter of the participants primarily speak a language other than English; substance abuse and mental illness are common among ABAWDs in San Francisco.

The local government has made a substantial commitment to the ABAWD program. ABAWDs are eligible for cash assistance provided with local and State funding. Funding is provided for treating substance abuse and mental health problems. The E&T program has built strong links with other programs serving the ABAWD population. There is a strong focus on providing education and training. While workfare options are available, they are not the preferred strategy for assisting ABAWDs.

#### Colorado Springs, Colorado

The program visited in Colorado Springs serves all of El Paso County, Colorado. This is an area with a rapidly growing population and a strong economy. The Colorado Springs E&T program is the only one of the five visited that serves not only ABAWDs but also other food stamp participants subject to mandatory E&T requirements, including families with children not receiving TANF benefits. Case managers are able to exempt homeless clients from participation using the 15-percent discretionary exemption granted to each State in BBA. Rural residents of the county who lack transportation may also be exempted.

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<sup>28</sup>San Francisco has a number of different E&T programs for adult recipients without dependents. Most of the participants are ABAWDs, but some may not be because they are not food stamp recipients, or they are exempt from the ABAWD requirements because of age or disability. Details on San Francisco's program are available in the case study report in Appendix C.

The Colorado Springs E&T program is the only one visited where all E&T functions have been privatized. Goodwill Industries operates both the El Paso County Food Stamp E&T Program and the TANF Program. This dual role has enabled Goodwill to provide food stamp E&T clients access to some of the same resources provided to TANF clients. The program strongly emphasizes workfare. While this has been the case since the program's inception in Colorado Springs in 1989, the ABAWD requirements have led to an even stronger emphasis on a workfare component.

### **Belle Glade, Florida**

Belle Glade is the only rural office visited. Though the city of Belle Glade has a population of over 17,000, it is located in the middle of large farms that are mainly devoted to sugar cane. The agriculture industry is the main source of employment, which means that many individuals in Belle Glade are only seasonally employed.

While unemployment figures for Belle Glade itself are unavailable, figures for a surrounding county and reports of local staff suggest that unemployment is over 10 percent. ABAWDs in Belle Glade are waived from the ABAWD time limit. However, ABAWDs are mandatory work registrants and represent the only group served by the Food Stamp E&T Program in the Belle Glade office. Food stamp participants include migrants temporarily living in Belle Glade while field work is available and a larger population of permanent residents, many of whom spend part of the year outside of Belle Glade working as migrants in other towns.

The main components used by the Belle Glade Food Stamp E&T Program are job search and workfare. The program attempts to leverage its limited resources by connecting ABAWDs to other programs that they are eligible for and that provide more extensive support services.

### **Chicago, Illinois**

The Chicago Food Stamp E&T Program serves ABAWDs who are waived from the time limit but are required to participate in an E&T program in order to receive food stamp benefits. Program clients were described as generally having a poor and discontinuous work history, lacking a high school education, with a considerable number having substance abuse

and/or serious health problems. In addition, quite a few are ex-convicts and even a larger number have an arrest record from some point in their lives.

Like the San Francisco program, the Chicago E&T program visited offers cash assistance to some ABAWDs. Cash assistance is limited to 6 months out of every 12 and individuals who receive cash are required to participate in the Earnfare program. Earnfare is a work experience program requiring as many as 80 hours a month participation at a work site. ABAWDs not participating in Earnfare are required to participate in a regular Food Stamp E&T Program focused on job search and job search training.

### **Greenville County, South Carolina**

The Food Stamp E&T Program in Greenville County, South Carolina, serves an area with a very strong economy. Average unemployment in 1999 was 2.5 percent. No specific subgroup of ABAWDs stands out as predominant; rather, the ABAWD clients are described as being of diverse ages, including both men and women, and living in various types of households.

The program is able to provide many options for ABAWDs through referral arrangements with a variety of public and private nonprofit service providers in the Greenville area. These partnering agencies provide direct E&T activities and some support services to ABAWDs at little or no cost to the Food Stamp E&T Program. Establishing formal lines of communication and having two caseworkers designated to track ABAWDs' participation are viewed as critical to maintaining these successful referral arrangements. Unlike the other local programs visited, Greenville no longer offers workfare as an option and places a stronger emphasis on training components.

These characteristics provide a general overview of the five case study sites. Further details on the areas served and program features are available in the individual site visit reports contained in Appendix B.

## **Promising Strategies for Serving ABAWDs**

The five offices visited have developed a number of strategies that appear to be promising approaches to serving the ABAWD population. These strategies are described in the following sections.

## Cultivating Workfare Slots That May Turn Into Paid Employment

Workfare presents an opportunity for food stamp E&T clients to impress potential employers with their work skills. However, in practice, workfare is often treated as a way of making sure that public assistance clients meet program requirements. Limited attention is paid to the possibility that it might result in employment or at least provide a useful training opportunity. Workfare programs are more likely to help clients' transition to unsubsidized employment when they concentrate on recruiting workfare employers who are willing and able to offer permanent employment to successful participants. In a number of the sites visited, the staff responsible for developing workfare slots make an extra effort to seek out employers who might hire clients.

- In Colorado Springs, the workfare coordinator works hard to recruit employers who have positions that may be suited to workfare clients. HSR researchers accompanied the coordinator to a meeting where she was attempting to recruit the local parks and recreation agency to participate in workfare. During this interview, she conveyed the potential benefits of workfare for the agency but also asked the parks and recreation representative to discuss her agency's personnel needs. She both explicitly and implicitly stressed the goal of having the Parks and Recreation Department hire workfare participants. She has joined various civic organizations in order to cultivate contacts that may produce new workfare sites. These efforts have enabled the food stamp E&T agency to place numerous workfare clients in permanent jobs.
- The State of Illinois, which runs the Chicago program, has recently reviewed its work experience sites and decided to reduce the number of organizations it contracts with to provide positions. The State is trying to simplify administration and enhance oversight, but it is also seeking to eliminate sites that have not provided paid employment opportunities for clients.
- In Chicago, one of the ABAWD E&T providers is a small private communications and marketing firm. The owner of this firm is intently focused on developing workfare slots that can be filled by ABAWD clients because her funding is tied to how many participants find unsubsidized employment. The contract between the communications firm and organizations providing workfare slots requires the organi-

zation providing the slots to hire 50 percent of referred clients. The contract states that workfare providers should request only twice as many ABAWD clients as they can afford to hire. For example, if a provider is planning on hiring two individuals, it should request four workfare clients to try out for the jobs.

- In Belle Glade, Florida, Goodwill Industries is a major workfare provider. Most of Goodwill's employees are former public assistance recipients. There is a close relationship between the E&T agency and the main Goodwill outlet in town. This relationship is especially important because Belle Glade has very limited job opportunities outside of seasonal agricultural employment.

All three of these sites focus on using workfare and work experience as an employment and training opportunity, not just a way of meeting the ABAWD work requirement. Colorado Springs and Chicago have the advantage of a strong labor market in which employers are willing to consider hiring individuals whom they may have overlooked in the past. Many other parts of the country also currently have very strong labor markets, and this represents a real opportunity for those seeking employment positions for disadvantaged populations. However, even such communities as Belle Glade, where the economy is weak, may have organizations that are willing to offer opportunities to individuals whom other employers may overlook. Workfare programs are likely to be more successful if they view recruitment as an opportunity to locate promising employment opportunities rather than just an attempt to create slots to meet a requirement. With caseloads down and employment up in most places, this strategy may be easier to implement than in the past. Thus, States with longstanding workfare programs may want to revisit their list of providers and step up recruitment efforts.

## Partnerships With Community Organizations

Food Stamp E&T Programs can increase their effectiveness by partnering with community organizations. In many cases, this can be done at little or no cost. Through links with organizations that receive funding from other programs or grants, Food Stamp E&T Programs may be able to provide a wider variety of E&T components and address some of their clients' need for supportive services. A number of examples of such efforts were observed during the site visits.

- In Greenville, South Carolina, the Department of Social Services has a contract with United Ministries, an interdenominational nonprofit organization that provides an employment-readiness program. The program includes an employability skills workshop, one-on-one counseling sessions, individually tailored job referrals, and assistance for purchasing uniforms and obtaining licenses needed to fill the jobs the agency helps clients obtain. United Ministries has built a network of employers willing to accept employment-readiness graduates. The program is self-supporting and serves ABAWDs using funding provided through the United Way and other grants.
- Food stamp E&T services are provided under a contract with Goodwill Industries in Colorado Springs. Goodwill provides case management and develops workfare sites. It has an excellent reputation within the community and works hard to cultivate contacts with business and government groups. This has been extremely important in recruiting high-quality workfare providers.
- The San Francisco office has developed links to housing assistance organizations in the city and provides vouchers to help with housing. This office has a large number of homeless clientele and views offering employment services to the homeless as one of its key functions. Representatives of community organizations are regularly invited to the office to describe their available services to program staff.

The Food Stamp E&T Program is not the only program in most areas with extensive contact with the ABAWD population. Other existing programs, with different funding sources, regularly serve this group. Local Food Stamp E&T Programs can develop relationships with these providers that are mutually beneficial. While San Francisco is unusual in the large array of services it provides the homeless who participate in its Food Stamp E&T Program, other large and even medium-sized cities do have substantial services that could be tapped. For example, Food Stamp E&T Programs serving large numbers of homeless clients have the opportunity to establish links with existing service networks for the homeless. Such collaboration may increase the likelihood that homeless clients will maintain participation in the Food Stamp E&T Program. The case studies indicate that in order to be effective, partnerships with other community organizations have to go beyond simply referring food stamp clients to other agencies. Administrators need to build

relationships with other organizations, and frontline staff who work with ABAWDs need to be educated on what types of services are available and how they can be accessed.

### **Coordination With Other Government Assistance Programs**

In addition to community organizations, Food Stamp E&T Programs may have opportunities to coordinate their efforts with other government assistance programs. This may include other E&T programs or other types of assistance. Examples of such coordination observed during the site visits include the following:

- The staff of the local food stamp office in Belle Glade, Florida, work closely with ABAWDs to determine whether they might be eligible for the Migrant Worker Program or the local workforce development program (formerly the Job Training Partnership Act program for low-income adults). These other E&T programs are an important referral source for ABAWDs because they provide higher funding for each participant, can provide more extensive support services, and pay for classes that are not available through food stamp E&T. Yet, because the funding and available slots for these programs frequently run out before the end of the year, the food stamp E&T workers must coordinate closely with these agencies. The workers also provide an important service by helping their clients navigate the programs' different eligibility requirements. Though they might be able to participate in these programs without referrals from the Food Stamp Program, many ABAWDs would not know how to access these rich services without the assistance of the Food Stamp E&T Program staff.
- The Food Stamp E&T Programs in San Francisco and Chicago are integrated with nonfederally funded cash assistance programs for low-income adults without children. The level of cash assistance provided in these localities may provide a greater incentive for clients to participate in mandatory work programs. In addition, clients in these programs can be required to participate in workfare or related activities for more hours than under the Food Stamp Program.<sup>29</sup> Staff in each site indicate

<sup>29</sup>The Fair Labor Standards Act limits the number of hours that people can be required, as a condition of program participation, to work without pay. The limit is based on the dollar value of their benefits (food stamps and cash assistance) divided by the minimum wage.

that the additional hours that clients spend in the program can be used to better assist them and better acquaint them with potential employers.

- The Greenville, South Carolina, food stamp E&T office uses an existing vocational training program for ABAWDs subject to the food stamp work requirement. The program is fully supported by JTPA funding.<sup>30</sup> ABAWDs who are interested in vocational training are referred to a 10-week class providing training in electrical or carpentry skills. Because the class has rolling admissions, ABAWDs do not have to wait for a new semester or session before enrolling and can begin meeting their work requirement right away. Clients who complete the training are provided with a set of professional tools to enable them so they can begin working at a job site upon graduation. Though the number of clients that are referred to this component are limited to less than 10 per class, during the case study site visit the JTPA instructor indicated that nearly all of the clients referred from the Food Stamp Program complete their 10-week training session.
- The Private Industry Council (PIC) in San Francisco is the main conduit for Federal workforce development funds. PIC staff are co-located with staff who serve clients in the comprehensive employment and training program for ABAWDs. These staff attend client job search classes and work with ABAWD caseworkers to explore training opportunities for the ABAWD clientele. An up-to-date list of PIC training opportunities clearly explains requirements and availability of different programs. PIC and ABAWD case managers work closely so that clients may participate in both programs without being overwhelmed by the bureaucratic challenges of different eligibility requirements and funding streams.

These examples illustrate that coordination with other government assistance programs may be used to benefit food stamp E&T clients. The site visits revealed that local and State food stamp E&T offices vary a great deal in the level of coordination with other government assistance programs. The program that is the best candidate for coordination with the Food Stamp E&T Program is the old JTPA Program, which is currently being replaced as a result of the Workforce

<sup>30</sup>As illustrated in appendix table 6 in Appendix A, South Carolina is one of nine States that expanded the number of food stamp clients participating in vocational training after the BBA.

Investment Act (WIA). The extent that food stamp E&T clients have been able to access JTPA services has varied tremendously, as has the level of coordination between the programs. The replacement of JTPA may represent an opportunity to build stronger links. WIA lists the Food Stamp E&T Program as one of the programs States may want to include in their comprehensive plan for workforce development activities. The creation of a new structure governing the largest federally funded E&T program for disadvantaged populations represents an opportunity for better coordination. Food Stamp E&T Programs that have had a hard time linking with JTPA may want to find out about WIA implementation in their State or local area and determine if they can build a stronger link with this resource in order to provide expanded training opportunities for ABAWDs.

### Staff Training and Use

Food stamp E&T staff who work with clients can benefit from opportunities to share information and provide input into program operations. This can enhance their commitment to clients and enable them to provide services. Two of the offices visited provided good examples of such training efforts.

- The Colorado Springs office has weekly case conferences over lunch. The office's four case managers, the workfare supervisor, and the program supervisor use these lunch-time meetings to review their cases and determine the most suitable workfare assignment for each client. These meetings enable staff to share information about various work sites and provide suggestions regarding beneficial placements. They foster a sense of teamwork and allow for professional development, while giving clients the opportunity to benefit from the experience of multiple case managers.
- The San Francisco office has weekly seminars on services available to clients and other program issues. Typically, these seminars include a speaker from one of the organizations providing services to clients. The services are described in detail, and discussions are held on how best to help clients access various services. Issues of concern to case managers are also addressed. For example, the seminar observed during the site visit covered how to deal with difficult topics, such as suggesting to a client that he or she may have a mental health problem, a substance abuse problem, or poor hygiene. These

seminars also represent an opportunity for workers to learn from each other and for program managers to find out what problems need to be addressed.

Building a committed staff is a way to improve program services for clients. While some offices may be too small to offer opportunities such as those discussed here, State administrators may be able to occasionally bring together staff from smaller offices around the State to discuss promising strategies or common challenges.

### **A Comprehensive Employment Program for ABAWDs**

Of the five sites visited, San Francisco has developed the most ambitious program for ABAWDs. While this program may be difficult to duplicate elsewhere because of the level of the local financial commitment it enjoys, it does provide an example worth noting because it illustrates how food stamp E&T funds can be used within a larger effort to provide services to the ABAWD population.

The San Francisco Food Stamp E&T Program was created as part of a larger welfare reform effort that encompassed the creation of the city and county's TANF Program. The philosophy behind both the TANF and ABAWD programs is that individuals on public assistance need a wide array of supportive services in order to move toward employment and self-sufficiency. Key program features include the following:

- Over \$1.16 million is set aside annually for mental health and substance abuse treatment. The E&T agency works closely with the Department of Public Health to ensure that clients are provided suitable treatment services.
- Assistance with securing stable housing is provided to homeless clients. Vouchers are provided to help clients pay for housing. The office has made this a priority, based on experience and findings from research that indicate that stabilizing homeless clients' housing situation is often a prerequisite to helping them find employment.
- An extensive and varied set of components is offered to ABAWDs. There is a strong focus on initial training in life skills, which has been identified as a major barrier to employment for this group in San Francisco.
- Job-related expenses are covered for ABAWDs who find employment. Covered expenses include clothing, union dues, books, licenses, tools, and equipment.
- Participants who find employment remain eligible to receive case management and supportive services for up to 12 months after they find a job.

This chapter has described the key findings regarding program implementation from the five site visits. A number of promising strategies for serving ABAWDs emerged from the site visits. The case studies are not designed to evaluate program outcomes and cannot determine how successful these programs have been in helping ABAWDs obtain employment or even maintain food stamp benefits. It is evident, however, that they have been successful at engaging ABAWD clients and offering assistance designed to address some of their barriers to employment. Program staff believe many of these clients are being helped and often noted that this group has few options if it has to seek employment services elsewhere.