

## **Appendix B: Changes in State Food Stamp Employment and Training Programs Since the Balanced Budget Act of 1997**

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### **Local Food Stamp Employment and Training Case Study Reports**

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## San Francisco, California

This section provides an overview of the Food Stamp E&T Program in San Francisco and focuses on an innovative service model provided to ABAWDs through the Personal Assisted Employment Services (PAES) program.<sup>31</sup> The PAES program represents a unique attempt to provide a full range of services to ABAWDs in an urban area. It is very different in that it draws not only on food stamp E&T dollars, but also on several other Federal and local funding sources. The program is targeted to recipients of the local GA program who receive a locally funded cash grant. Most GA recipients also receive food stamps and are subject to ABAWD work requirements. GA participants who choose to enroll in PAES receive a higher cash grant than those who do not want to enroll in this employment and training focused program. PAES not only has a strong employment focus, but it also seeks to address a range of needs of what is often considered a challenging E&T program clientele. Important lessons can be learned from the PAES program and its approach to meeting the needs of the ABAWD population for the Food Stamp E&T Program across the county. These lessons apply even though the target population in San Francisco may consist of more homeless individuals than is typical, and other areas may not have a comparable level of non-Federal resources.

In 1998, the population of San Francisco was almost 750,000.<sup>32</sup> As a large urban center, San Francisco has many ABAWDs enrolled in the Food Stamp Program and many of them are homeless. Homeless participants in San Francisco are subject to the ABAWD work requirement and time limit. According to the city and county of San Francisco's Department of Human Services, in June 1999, 7,360 adults without dependents were receiving food stamps and 3,859 of these were subject to the ABAWD work requirement.<sup>33</sup> Most of these were referred to the PAES program. It is interesting to note that, while the number of adults without

dependents in the food stamp caseload was large at the time of the site visit, this number represents a considerable drop from the 10,000 whom the Department estimates were on the food stamp rolls in 1997.

The findings are based on 2 days of interviews and observations during a site visit that took place in August 1999. Additional information was gathered through review of local program material, program participation, and population data. During the site visit, researchers interviewed the county adult assistance program (CAAP) director, the food stamp program manager, the CAAP budget and fiscal operations manager, the director of planning and budgeting, the senior administrative analyst for the employment and training services division, the CAAP program analyst, the PAES manager, the PAES psychologist, three supervisors, and five employment specialists. In addition, researchers attended a Group Employment Preparation Session for clients and a staff training seminar. They were also given a full tour of the facility by the PAES manager.

The next four sections provide contextual information about the overall Food Stamp E&T Program in San Francisco, describe the characteristics of the PAES clientele and the E&T activities offered to ABAWDs, present the views of PAES staff on the challenges of serving ABAWDs and how the program has addressed some of these challenges, and discuss the implications of the case study findings for other Food Stamp E&T Programs seeking to serve ABAWDs with similar characteristics to the San Francisco population.

### Program Context

Before discussing the PAES program, it is important to understand the environment in which the program is run. This section provides an overview of the local economy, the administration of the overall Food Stamp E&T Program in San Francisco, its staffing, the support services available to clients, and the program funding sources.

### The Local Economy

At the time of the site visit, San Francisco's economy was doing very well. The average unemployment rate for 1999 was 3 percent, which was the fifth lowest of

<sup>31</sup>Other food stamp E&T services provided for clients not in PAES will be described briefly in this report to provide context and explain what distinguishes them from PAES.

<sup>32</sup>U.S. Census Bureau. *Population Estimates for Cities and Populations of 10,000 and Greater*. <http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/metro-city/SC10K98-T4-DR.txt>.

<sup>33</sup>City and County of San Francisco Department of Human Services. *June 1999 CAAP Snapshot Quarterly Report*. <http://www.ci.sf.ca.us/dhs/caap699c.htm>.

any county in California. Unemployment was also low in surrounding counties, with Marin County having an unemployment rate of 1.9 percent, San Mateo at 2 percent, and Alameda at 3.4 percent.<sup>34</sup> Despite the strong economy, the city faces a highly visible problem with homelessness. Housing issues for these individuals must be dealt with in the context of a booming housing market characterized by high and increasing costs for both renting and purchasing a home.

## Program Administration

The Food Stamp E&T Program in San Francisco is administered by the City and County of San Francisco Department of Human Services (DHS). California's Food Stamp Program as a whole is extremely decentralized and counties have tremendous flexibility in designing their Food Stamp E&T Programs. The State government does make key decisions such as the choice made in 1997 not to renew or apply for local area waivers to the ABAWD work requirement.

DHS has operated a Food Stamp E&T Program since 1987. Prior to 1998, all food stamp E&T services were offered through the General Assistance Training and Employment Services (GATES) Program. In 1998, when San Francisco redesigned its GA program for low-income adults without dependents as part of its overall welfare reform efforts, the local Food Stamp E&T Program was divided into different service models targeted to the following three categories of food stamp clients:

- Non-TANF food stamp clients who are not receiving any cash assistance from the city and county but are required to participate in work experience and training components.
- Food stamp clients enrolled in PAES, a comprehensive job readiness program the participants of which receive \$364 in cash assistance. ABAWDs make up a large portion of this group.
- Food stamp clients who are similar in characteristics to the PAES group but who choose not to participate in the comprehensive job readiness program and thus receive only \$294 in cash assistance. This group is also required to participate in an E&T activity, usually workfare. Many of these clients are

also persons subject to the ABAWD work requirement if they participate in food stamps.

DHS does not administer its Food Stamp E&T Program in isolation from other services available to the food stamp work registrant population. The DHS has formed partnerships with multiple agencies, both public and private, throughout the city. Among its key partners are the San Francisco Private Industry Council (PIC), which serves as the Job Training Partnership Act umbrella agency for the county, the County Department of Public Health, and City College of San Francisco. As will be discussed in more detail in section four, the program also has links with dozens of other public and community-based organizations.

## Staffing

A number of different types of staff serve clients in San Francisco's Food Stamp E&T Program. Their specific functions are described below.

- **Eligibility Workers.** These workers determine initial food stamp eligibility for clients, whether they are required to participate in E&T activities, and whether they are interested in taking part in the PAES Program. For ABAWDs and other mandatory E&T clients not participating in PAES, eligibility workers are responsible for assigning clients to workfare, where they are required to work a set number of hours as a condition of eligibility for benefits. The eligibility workers have caseloads of approximately 200 participants.
- **Group Employment Preparation (GEP) Trainers.** Most PAES clients are initially assigned to GEP classes led by GEP trainers, with 20 clients per class. Because some clients end up not continuing in the program, 16 to 18 clients usually attend the initial classes and approximately 10 clients participate in each class by the time of graduation 12 weeks later. Six GEP trainers and one supervisor are in the program.
- **Employment Specialists.** After a client completes the GEP training, he or she develops an employment plan with an employment specialist. The employment specialists are also responsible for ongoing client eligibility. They handle recertifications and any penalties for noncompliance. The employment specialist helps facilitate contacts between the client and other program providers, such as the PIC and City College. The employment

<sup>34</sup>California Employment Development Department. *Monthly Civilian Labor Force Data for Counties Annual Average 1999*. <http://www.calmis.cahwnet.gov/file/lfhist/99AACOU.Txt>. March 10, 2000.

specialist caseload is limited to 60 clients per worker. A total of 29 employment specialists are in the PAES program, with 5 supervisors overseeing these staff members.

- **Job Developers and Assessors.** These employees work together with clients and employment specialists in the PAES program to find the most appropriate E&T placements for clients and to locate permanent employment opportunities whenever possible. The job development staff spend a large portion of their time dealing with the broader community through activities such as presentations and job fairs with employers. They have the responsibility of creating new opportunities for work activities and training and, ultimately, paid employment. Job developers and assessors are part of the Employment Services Division of DHS and also provide services to TANF clients.

The PAES program also funds client advocates who work with two local advocacy agencies. Clients may request the intervention of an advocate if they feel the department is not living up to its responsibilities, disagree with their employment plan, or feel they are not being given the services they need to assist them in getting a job.

### Support Services

The PAES program offers a wide array of support services. All clients who are assigned to work activities and those PAES clients who have completed an employment plan are provided with transportation passes (MUNI Fast Passes), which can be used on the city's buses and street cars. The pass costs the program \$35 a month. Though this is above the \$25-a-month cap on federally reimbursable transportation assistance for food stamp E&T clients, the \$10 difference is covered fully by city and county funds. In addition to the transportation reimbursement, a wide range of other supportive services is provided for PAES participants and for participants who find employment for up to 12 months after they find a job. These include the following:

- **Mental Health and Substance Abuse Treatment.** 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.
- **Dental and Vision Care.** At the time of the site visit, the program was about to begin offering dental care and eye glasses to PAES clients.
- **Housing Assistance.** Assistance with securing stable housing is provided to homeless clients. Vouchers are provided to help clients pay for housing.
- **Coverage of Job-Related Expenses.** Job-related expenses are covered for ABAWDs who find employment. Covered expenses include clothing, union dues, books, licenses, tools, and equipment.

Additional details regarding these supportive services are provided in the section on the PAES Program.

### Funding

The total budget for CAAP for FY 1999 and FY 2000 is \$56.7 million. This includes \$39.2 million for cash assistance payments, which are fully funded by the county. The additional \$17.5 million is funded through a variety of sources, including the Food Stamp E&T Program. The county food stamp E&T plan indicated that planned spending for FY 1999 and 2000 would be \$8.9 million. The Federal food stamp E&T grant accounted for \$600,000 of these funds. The remaining \$8.3 million were State and local food stamp administrative dollars, 50 percent of which would be reimbursed by Federal dollars. The county was budgeted to provide \$4.1 million and the State \$60,000. However, the county budget staff indicated that the actual funds expended would likely be less than the full budget, because the full budget was based on high-end assumptions of participation by ABAWDs.

Items other than cash assistance in the CAAP budget include:

- **Staff Salaries and Fringe Benefits.** The largest category of spending other than cash assistance is the \$12.8 million for staff salaries and benefits.
- **Transportation Assistance.** Transportation assistance is budgeted at \$1.5 million. For each free transportation pass provided to participants, the county pays \$13.75, the State pays \$8.75, and the Federal Government pays \$12.50.
- **Job-Related Expenses.** \$424,000 is budgeted for other job-related supportive services.

- **Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services.** The county provides \$1.2 million to the City and County Department of Public Health, which contracts for mental health and substance abuse services for program clients.
- **Contributions From Other Employment and Training Funding Sources.** In addition to the budgeted items, some of the services provided do not cost the program any funds. For example, services provided through the PIC, which receives the county's JTPA funding, are provided free of charge to CAAP.

## The PAES Program

This section describes the characteristics of PAES clients, program goals, and the major E&T activities in PAES. In addition, the work activities completed by food stamp E&T clients not involved in PAES are briefly described.

### Client Characteristics

In June 1999, the PAES program served 3,355 clients, most of whom were also ABAWDs enrolled in the Food Stamp Program.<sup>35</sup> The PAES clientele had the following characteristics.

- **Nearly Two-Thirds Were Men.** Men made up 65 percent of the caseload, while women accounted for 35 percent.
- **English Was Not the Primary Language of Almost One-Quarter of the Clients.** The percentage of clients who primarily spoke a language other than English was 24.3 percent. Russian was most common at 8.7 percent, followed by Cantonese at 6.2 percent, Spanish at 3.2 percent, and Vietnamese at 2.2 percent.
- **More Than One-Third of the Participants Were Homeless.** Homeless clients made up 36 percent of the participants in the PAES program.
- **A Wide Range of Age Groups Were Represented, Though Few Were Under Age 30.** Only 10 percent of participants were under age 30, 23 percent were between 30 and 39, 34 percent were between 40 and 49, 20 percent were between 50 and 59, and 13 per-

cent were over 60.<sup>36</sup> Clients over age 50 can be exempted from any work requirements if it is determined that they are unlikely to find employment.

### Goals

The objective of the PAES program is to move clients toward self-sufficiency. The program design is based on the idea that the target population needs extensive support services. Transitions to unsubsidized employment are not expected to occur quickly. Clients with substance abuse and/or mental health problems are given treatment designed to address those issues while simultaneously beginning preparation for employment. Clients with housing problems have those issues addressed up front. The ultimate focus is employment, but the steps along the way are considered just as important for the client's ultimate success.

### Employment and Training Activities

#### Group Employment Preparation Sessions

Almost all PAES clients are initially assigned to GEP. This is a life skills training course designed to prepare the client for the assessment process and the development of a personal employment plan. GEP lasts for 12 weeks and involves 4 hours of classroom sessions each week. Clients are assigned additional work or education activities totaling 20 hours a week while they are participating in GEP.

GEP uses the Adkins® Life Skills Program developed by The Institute for Life Coping Skills at Teachers College, Columbia University. The program was selected by the county based on a review of various models. The Adkins program had been successfully used with hard-to-serve populations, including some with a high percentage of substance abuse problems, and was seen as most appropriate for the San Francisco ABAWD population. The program includes the use of videotapes, audio cassettes, self-assessment forms, articles, and role play exercises.

Ten of the 12 weeks consist of the Adkins sessions. Among the topics covered in GEP are:

- The types of jobs that are appropriate based on a client's abilities, interests, values, personal characteristics and experiences;

<sup>35</sup>City and County of San Francisco Department of Human Services. June 1999 CAAP Snapshot Quarterly Report. <http://www.ci.sf.ca.us/dhs/caap699c.htm>.

<sup>36</sup>City and County of San Francisco Department of Human Services. June 1999 CAAP Snapshot Quarterly Report. <http://www.ci.sf.ca.us/dhs/caap699c.htm>.

- How to find out about occupations and specific jobs;
- How to begin looking for a job and how to get further information once a job opportunity is located;
- How to fill out job applications and develop a resume;
- What to do during a job interview; and
- How to keep a job.

In addition, a program is devoted to having guest speakers explain some of the services clients can access, including job training, PIC, domestic violence, substance abuse treatment, and mental health treatment. A final session includes a graduation celebration in which clients are given certificates indicating they completed the course.

### **Assessment and the Development of an Employment Plan**

After completing GEP, clients are assigned an employment specialist. The specialist works with the client to develop an employment plan describing the specific steps that will be taken towards employment. Clients usually meet with an employment specialist about once a week, though some clients come in as frequently as twice a week. The development of the employment plan can take as long as 60 days. During that time, the client is also involved in workfare or another E&T activity. The plan includes the client's participation requirements and the types of services that the department will provide to help the client move toward the goal of employment. During this time period, the client will also meet with a job developer and spend about an hour going over the client's employment history. They develop a master application covering the client's experience, which can be used when the client begins to look for work. Appropriate assessments are conducted depending on the clients' interests or specific problems.

Employment specialists stressed the importance of the assessment process. While they could assign clients to components in a shorter amount of time, they believe this would not be beneficial. Many clients come into the initial meeting with unrealistic job or training goals, and part of the process involves arriving at a more realistic goal that is embraced by the client. Both substance abuse and mental health problems are quite common among the San Francisco ABAWD popula-

tion, but most clients will not discuss the need to address them until they have established a trusting relationship with an employment specialist, which often takes a few weeks. Homeless clients are far more likely to continue to participate in the program if they have a stable housing situation, and it often takes a while before the client is willing to accept help in this area and the employment specialist is able to obtain the assistance.

### **Job Club**

After assessment and the development of the employment plan, clients who are determined to have good job-seeking skills and adequate work experience that will likely lead to immediate employment are referred to job search training. There are two different options for clients who fit this category.

- **The Compass Program.** Clients who are job-ready and do not face specific challenges are assigned to Compass, which consists of 10 days of classroom training on job-seeking skills, followed by 4 to 6 weeks of a supported job search. This is the same program developed for TANF clients, and it is run by the Division of Employment Services within the City and County DHS.
- **PAES Job Readiness Training.** Clients who have specific problems related to job readiness and placement are referred to this component. The PAES program contracts with community-based organizations, which target specific populations to provide job readiness training. Among the programs available are those targeted to ex-offenders and non-English-speaking clients. Services provided include training in job-seeking skills, job development and placement, and job retention.

The job club component is not an allowable activity for ABAWDs. Clients who are assigned to this activity are exempted from the ABAWD requirement through San Francisco's share of the 15-percent discretionary exemption provided in BBA. If a client does not find employment after participating in the job club, the employment specialist will assign the client a different activity.

### **Vocational Training**

PAES clients who are not considered job-ready are likely to be assigned vocational training after the assessment. There is a wide variety of vocational train-

ing opportunities available in San Francisco. Among the organizations providing training are City College of San Francisco and several community-based organizations. The San Francisco PIC provides assistance to the PAES program in identifying vocational training programs, which are funded by other sources and for which ABAWDs are eligible. The PIC also serves as a liaison between the PAES program and training providers.

Among the training programs available to ABAWDs are automotive repair, child care, certified nursing assistant, computers, computer repair, construction, cosmetology, culinary arts, building maintenance, health care, nutrition assistant, and retail or customer service. There are training opportunities targeted to participants for whom English is a second language and those with low literacy skills. Many of the programs offer on-the-job training. Some programs offer case management services, though all PAES clients continue to receive case management from their employment specialist and supportive services from the PAES program while in training.

### **Education**

Clients who are not ready to benefit from vocational training may be assigned to an education component first. This component includes remedial adult education programs, GED preparation, and high school degree programs. Classes are offered by City College and other community-based organizations. Education programs are considered the first step in a sequential employment plan and upon completion clients are referred to vocational training or job readiness programs.

Clients assigned to either vocational training or education are required to be in a work activity 32 hours a week. If their program does not meet the work requirement, they may also be required to participate in job club or job search. Clients may also volunteer for these activities if they are interested in immediate employment.

### **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Treatment**

Clients who are identified as having substance abuse or mental health problems will be referred to treatment. This activity counts as their program participation and like education is considered the first step in their employment plan. Treatment options include residential, outpatient, and methadone maintenance. Some

of the programs may allow or require clients to combine treatment with education or training classes. The PAES program pays for treatment and thus clients are able to avoid waiting lists. In addition, there is an assessment process designed to get clients into appropriate treatment programs. PAES is working with providers to locate programs that can serve clients with combination substance abuse and mental health problems because this is very common among the San Francisco ABAWD population.

### **Workfare**

While workfare is an integral part of the work requirement for ABAWDs not in the PAES program, it is also an option in PAES. PAES clients may be assigned to workfare during GEP classes in order to fulfill the requirement that they participate in an activity 20 hours a week. They may also be assigned during the assessment period before they complete their employment plan in order to fulfill the requirement that they participate in an activity for 32 hours a week. Alternatively, PAES clients may be assigned to an education or training activity during these periods.

Most clients assigned to workfare are referred to the City and County Department of Public Works to sweep streets or the MUNI transit agency to clean buses and street cars. If a client is physically unable to do this work or wants to work with another organization, he or she is given a list of community-based, nonprofit organizations that have Memorandums of Understanding (MOU's) with DHS. Clients are responsible for contacting a nonprofit organization and arranging their own workfare slot. Once the nonprofit agency agrees, a contract is signed between the client and the agency and returned to the client's worker at CAAP.

Workfare was generally not viewed by PAES staff as a training opportunity. They report that many clients view workfare negatively, and this is reinforced by advocates in the city who object to clients having to work for their benefits. According to the staff, one of the selling points of the PAES program is that clients do not have to participate in workfare once they have an employment plan in place that outlines which E&T activities they will be participating in as they move towards employment.

This section has described some of the services available to the hard-to-serve population. When PAES was developed, officials recognized that some clients may cooperate with the program yet never be able to over-



come their barriers to employment. After participating in PAES for 27 months and completing all the activities in their employment plan, clients will be reappraised. If continued participation in employment services is likely to lead to employment, the client will be given an extra 6 months of employment services. After that time, if clients are unable to find a job through no fault of theirs, they will be allowed to retain the higher PAES stipend in return for participating in work activities, which likely means workfare. It is too early to tell how frequently this extension will be used, but the intent is to create a program that provides a client with every opportunity to overcome his or her barriers to employment.

## Challenges in Serving the ABAWD Population

### Main Perceived Challenges

Three main challenges to serving the ABAWD population in San Francisco were highlighted by local program staff during the site visit: developing a new program with few models, serving a diverse community, and addressing the needs of hard-to-serve clients.

#### *Developing a New Program With Few Models*

The PAES program began operating in the fall of 1998, though the full range of services to clients was not available until early 1999. Initial employment plans were completed in April of 1999. San Francisco's previous E&T program for its ABAWD population, the GATES Program, was very different than the program that replaced it because participation in GATES was not mandatory. The program mainly involved job search and job club and did not pay for substance abuse and mental health treatment.

PAES was part of the city and county's overall welfare reform effort. Funding was made available to create a comprehensive employment program for the ABAWD population. The county did not make exemptions from the ABAWD work requirement for the homeless, those with substance abuse, and many of the mentally ill who they felt were employable and were not certified as disabled. Quite the opposite, the local program saw these individuals as prime targets for the PAES employment and training program. While there are numerous

models for E&T programs for the AFDC/TANF population, as suggested in Chapter 3 of this study, there are far fewer models for the ABAWD population in general and even fewer for the hard-to-serve homeless population in particular.

PAES is faced with the challenge of training staff to focus on improving the employability of the ABAWD population. In addition, the program is working to win the trust of clients. There is a great deal of suspicion among clients, many of whom see the program as the latest fad and tend to be skeptical of any offer of assistance. In addition, many clients come in wanting to be given a job and PAES is based on the premise that they will be given a great deal of assistance, but in the end they need to help themselves.

#### *Serving a Diverse Community*

The San Francisco ABAWD population is tremendously diverse culturally, with many countries of origin. The program serves clients from very different communities, many of whom face language barriers. In June 1999, almost one-quarter of the PAES caseload did not speak English as their primary language. Specifically, there were 489 Russian speakers, 345 Cantonese, 180 Spanish, 121 Vietnamese, and 78 clients who spoke Filipino-Tagalog as their primary language.

#### *Hard-To-Serve Clients*

In addition to clients with language barriers, there are other hard-to-serve clients among the San Francisco ABAWD population. As noted earlier, 36 percent of the PAES participants were homeless in June 1999. Homeless clients represent a challenging population for E&T programs. Unstable housing situations are not conducive to meeting schedules or completing training programs.

The San Francisco ABAWD population appears to also have a high rate of substance abuse and mental illness. While it is impossible to provide an exact estimate because clients do not always admit the problem, a needs assessment found that approximately 60 percent of the PAES eligible population have received mental health or substance abuse services, primarily in the area of crisis management or detoxification. The PAES program has a goal of both helping these clients obtain treatment and focusing on their employability. Both of these represent serious challenges.

## Addressing Challenges

### ***Building a Comprehensive Employment Program***

The San Francisco program had been operating for less than a year at the time of the site visit for this project. Administrators and staff clearly viewed it as a work-in-progress. There are two key aspects of how the program is being built that are worth examining in detail. Strong partnerships are being developed with other public and private organizations in the community, and there is a major emphasis on staff training.

### ***Partnerships With Public and Private Organizations.***

The PAES program has developed numerous partnerships with both public and private organizations. The public partnerships include providing funding to the County Department of Public Health for substance abuse and mental health treatment for PAES clients. In addition, workfare slots are provided by the public transit agency and the Department of Public Works.

PAES and PIC are closely linked. PIC identifies training opportunities that ABAWDs are eligible to participate in and provides a part-time program coordinator who assists employment specialists and clients to determine the appropriate vocational training program for the individual participant. PIC also serves as a liaison between DHS and the training providers. This level of integration and coordination is far above what is typical for a JTPA and Food Stamp E&T agency. Because PAES is a program with an education and training rather than workfare focus, a close relationship with the JTPA agency is crucial. ABAWD clients have access to a far wider range of activities because of this close relationship.

There is also a wide array of partnerships with private social service agencies. Most of the JTPA providers are private nonprofits. Substance abuse and mental health services are also provided by private nonprofits. Managing relationships with these organizations is made easier because the PIC serves as a liaison with employment and training providers and the Department of Public Health is a liaison with substance abuse and mental health providers. These organizations have a good relationship with the CAAP program and have long-standing relationships with the nonprofit service providers.

Major service providers have been regularly invited to give presentations to program staff and clients explain-

ing the services available at their organizations. For example, at the GEP session attended during the site visit, a presentation was given by the PIC staff person who works part-time at the PAES agency and by a domestic violence advocate whose agency offers services to PAES clients. In addition, a staff training session that was observed on the same day was led by two staff members affiliated with the agency that is responsible for substance abuse and mental health assessment.

Overall, the level of coordination and integration of services is very impressive. Program staff are becoming very knowledgeable about the services available to clients. This is essential if the program is to succeed in its goal of building a comprehensive employment program for the ABAWD population.

***Staff Training and Use.*** Staff training is seen as an essential component of building a successful program. Most of the employment specialists previously served as eligibility workers. When PAES was created, the focus of their jobs changed and they now must provide a much more comprehensive array of services. Administrators stress the importance of staff learning about the wide array of services available to clients and then teaching each other. The employment specialists are responsible for working closely with clients and are expected to maintain involvement with the case even if they refer the client to other agencies. For example, case conferences are held between employment specialists and job developers and assessors during the time period when an employment plan is being developed. Employment specialists are also expected to work closely with trained behavioral health staff when arriving at a treatment plan for clients with substance abuse or mental health problems.

Weekly seminars are held 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. This seminar was led by staff from the organization responsible for assessing clients and providing outpatient services for PAES clients with substance

abuse or mental health problems. The contract with this organization requires it to provide ongoing training for employment specialists.

Training 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. The session held during the site visit was attended by the CAAP program director who addressed staff concerns over various issues and promised to look into reworking policies and procedures to address some of the challenges workers were facing.

Program staff are very positive about the training opportunities and the level of input they are given in the program. This input has had an effect. The staff have played a major role in pushing administrators to make eye and dental care available to clients since they have come to see this as a major obstacle to helping clients find employment.

### ***Serving a Diverse Community***

The PAES program has employment specialists who specialize in serving non-English speakers. One unit of six workers serves Russian speakers, the largest non-English-speaking group. Workers who speak Chinese, Vietnamese, and Spanish are also integrated into different units. These workers face the challenge of finding services that can accommodate non-English speakers.

Program managers and staff indicate that the most useful English as a Second Language (ESL) classes are vocational ESL classes that provide clients with enough English to allow them to function in the workplace. While there are number of these classes in San Francisco, there are not enough. Program administrators were in the process of trying to expand existing classes by working with City College.

Staff are also using community resources when serving the non-English-speaking population. An employment specialist who works with the Cantonese population indicated that she faced serious challenges in locating services for her Cantonese clients. They tend to be older than the nonimmigrant population, and services available for them within the Chinese community are limited. Most of them are estranged from their family and thus lack strong ties within the immigrant community. She also mentioned serious problems with domestic violence. She said there need to be more vocational training opportunities for them and that it is

difficult to access mental health services that provide multilingual counseling. In addition, some of the organizations that serve the community do not accept referrals, and clients need to enroll themselves. This often means clients do not access those services.

Staff indicated that the Cantonese clients represent one of the biggest challenges because of their age and lack of formal education. The Vietnamese- and Russian-speaking populations are more likely to have had some formal education and tend to be younger. Administrators and staff recognize the need to provide more comprehensive employment-oriented services to the non-English-speaking population and are working with providers to develop such services.

### ***Creating an Employment-Focused Program for Hard-To-Serve Clients***

The PAES program enrolls a large number of hard-to-serve clients. PAES has been designed to overcome employability barriers among these groups. This section focuses on two hard-to-serve groups: the homeless and clients with substance abuse and/or mental health problems.

***The Homeless Population.*** As noted previously, homeless clients account for over one-third of PAES participants. Program administrators and staff are focused on providing services to address the particular needs of homeless clientele. One of the first priorities with homeless clients is to attempt to stabilize their housing situation. Clients are offered housing subsidies that enable them to become steady renters in single-room-occupancy housing. Staff who work directly with clients have been urged to convince homeless clients to accept housing assistance. The reason for this is that homeless clients face serious barriers to active participation in an employment program. As long as they are homeless, they are more likely to miss activities and face crises that prevent their continued participation in the program.

Convincing homeless clients to accept housing assistance has proven more difficult than expected. Clients are suspicious of these offers of help and often reluctant to move into the housing that is available to them. One of the advantages of the length of time it takes to develop an employment plan is that employment specialists have an opportunity to gain the trust of clients and are more likely to be able to convince them of the need to find more stable housing if they are to fulfill their employment plan.

In addition to housing subsidies, the PAES program is able to help clients access the wide array of homeless services that are available within the City of San Francisco. There are places where clients can find shelter, clothing, bath facilities, and set up a voice mail account that enables them to have a contact number for potential employers. The CAAP director was previously the director of homeless services in San Francisco, and this has helped facilitate the emphasis on working with homeless clients. She strongly emphasizes educating employment specialists about these services and urging the workers to learn from each other and to find out from clients what types of services they are using so this information can be shared with other clients and workers.

***Clients With Substance Abuse and/or Mental Health Problems.*** The PAES program has placed a strong emphasis on helping clients with substance abuse and/or mental health problems. The program has a psychologist on staff who assists employment specialists and GEP trainers with substance abuse and mental health issues and who works with service providers to ensure that clients receive appropriate services. The program has set aside \$1.16 million for a counseling program designed to remove barriers to employment. These funds are provided to the Department of Public Health, which contracts with service providers for both TANF and PAES clients.

Outpatient services are provided through San Francisco's Target Cities Program. Target Cities receives Federal funding to enhance substance abuse services. In San Francisco, Target Cities provides staff consultations and ongoing training for employment specialists. Clinicians consult in weekly vocational case conferences held by each unit of workers. Target Cities also provides client assessments and evaluations as well as treatment. The program has a contract with a residential treatment center, which provides 10 beds for PAES clients who are enrolled in a 6-month program that includes vocational training and job placement services. PAES also contracts for 30 slots in a methadone maintenance program.

The staff psychologist is working with service providers to provide appropriate treatment for clients who are exhibiting both substance abuse and mental

health problems. This has proved challenging because counseling education tends to treat the two as distinct sets of problems. However, many PAES clients are experiencing problems in both areas. In addition, PAES staff are working to locate and develop programs with a vocational focus. Traditional treatment programs do not consider the importance of helping clients with job-related skills as a component in the recovery process. Thus, the PAES program is not only offering services to clients but trying to reshape those services to make them more appropriate for program clientele.

The first PAES client assessment took place in November 1998. Between November and May 1999, 140 clients received assessments and referrals for treatment. An initial analysis of these cases indicate that compared with similar population groups, PAES clients were twice as likely to attend assessment appointments.

## Discussion

At the time of the site visit, PAES had been operating for less than a year. Program administrators and staff are continuing to refine the program. They are in the process of developing job retention services that will become more of an issue as clients make their way through the program. They are seeking feedback from employment specialists and GEP trainers in order to try to address any gaps in services they have not covered.

PAES is unlike any of the other programs that were visited for this study. It represents an effort to provide comprehensive integrated services for the ABAWD population using a combination of food stamp E&T and other funding. This program may be difficult to duplicate elsewhere because of the level of the local financial commitment; however, it does provide an example of how food stamp E&T funding can be used within a larger effort to provide services to ABAWDs. Many of the programs used in San Francisco are available elsewhere. The potential exists to build links with substance abuse, mental health, and employment and training services that receive funding from other sources. The challenge for local offices is how best to build links between programs that can enhance the employability of ABAWD clients.

## Colorado Springs, Colorado

This section focuses on Employment First, the Food Stamp E&T Program in El Paso County, Colorado. This program, the only one of the five local programs visited for this study where all E&T functions have been privatized, is operated by Goodwill Industries. It is co-located within the County Department of Social Services office in Colorado Springs, where the overall food stamp and TANF program services are provided. Unlike the other sites visited for this report, Employment First serves not only ABAWDs, but also other food stamp participants whom the county has decided to subject to mandatory E&T requirements. The mandatory participants include families with children who are not receiving TANF benefits.

Though located in Colorado Springs, the Employment First program serves all of El Paso County. The county has a population estimated at 490,000 in 1998. This represents an increase of almost 100,000 people compared with the 1990 population of 397,000.<sup>37</sup> During this period the county population grew more than in any other county in Colorado and it is the 37th fastest growing county in the country.<sup>38</sup> The city of Colorado Springs has experienced a comparable rate of increase in population from 280,000 in 1990 to 345,000 in 1998.<sup>39</sup> During the site visit interviews, staff noted that there is a considerable and increasing homeless population in Colorado Springs. Because case managers are given the discretion to exempt homeless clients from the ABAWD work requirement, using the 15-percent discretionary exemption granted to each State, some individuals who are homeless are subject to the ABAWD work requirement, while others are exempted.

Employment First has been providing employment and training services for food stamp clients for over a decade. The program was one of the early sites to take on the Federal workfare option under Section 20E of the Food Stamp Act. Today, Employment First offers an array of

E&T services for food stamp clients, though the vast majority of ABAWD participants do take part in workfare.

The findings are based on information gathered during a site visit to Employment First in June 1999. At that time, the researchers interviewed the director of the career development center, the program supervisor, the case manager who serves as workfare/GED coordinator, two other case managers, and the El Paso County Department of Human Services staff person in charge of overseeing the contract between the Department and Goodwill Industries. In addition, the researchers attended an orientation for the Food Stamp E&T Program, a client assessment, an orientation for the workfare program, and a meeting between the workfare/GED coordinator and a representative of the City of Colorado Springs Department of Parks and Recreation, which was being recruited to be a workfare provider.

The next four sections describe the context in which the Employment First services are provided; focus on the program's goals, its services, and data provided by the agency on client outcomes; outline the challenges facing program staff and how some of these have been addressed; and highlight the characteristics of the program that appear to help the program run smoothly and successfully.

### Program Context

#### The Local Economy

The unemployment rate for the Colorado Springs metropolitan area at the time of the site visit was 4.4 percent.<sup>40</sup> Program staff indicated that the overall economy was very strong, and despite the large population growth in the area, jobs were available for program participants.

#### Program Administration

Employment First has been administered by Goodwill Industries of Colorado Springs since the El Paso County

<sup>37</sup>U.S. Census Bureau. *County Population Estimates for July 1, 1998 and Population Change for April 1, 1990 to July 1, 1998*. [http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/county/co-98-2/98C2\\_08.txt](http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/county/co-98-2/98C2_08.txt).

<sup>38</sup>U.S. Census Bureau. *Numeric and Percent Population Change for Counties: Within-State and National Rankings for April 1, 1990 to July 1, 1998*. [http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/county/co-98-6/98C6\\_08](http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/county/co-98-6/98C6_08).

<sup>39</sup>U.S. Census Bureau. *Population Estimates for Cities with Populations of 10,000 and Greater*. <http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/metro-city/SC10K98-T4-DR.txt>.

<sup>40</sup>Colorado Department of Labor and Employment. *June 1999 Not Seasonally Adjusted Labor Force Data*. <http://lmi.cdle.state.co.us/ali/jun99lf.htm>

Food Stamp E&T Program first began in 1989. Goodwill ran the optional food stamp workfare program initiated first in Colorado Springs before it went statewide. Starting in the early-1990s, Goodwill also operated the Job Opportunity and Basic Skills Program (JOBS) for TANF recipients. In 1998, Goodwill Industries was awarded a 5-year contract to continue providing Employment First services and giving it full responsibility for providing case management and placement services for the county's TANF program. This award reflects Goodwill's track record of providing employment and training services for the county and its willingness to promise future success in job placements.

### Program Staffing

The Employment First staff at Goodwill consists of a program supervisor and five case managers, one of whom serves as the workfare/GED coordinator. The program supervisor oversees operations and is responsible for managing the budget. The entire operation is supervised by the director of the Career Development Center for Goodwill Industries. Four of the case managers are assigned clients and rotate responsibilities for program orientation. The workfare/GED coordinator recruits workfare sites and handles case management for clients participating in the GED program. Notably, all the case managers have participated in employment and training programs as former AFDC, TANF, or Employment First clients.

### Support Services

Employment First offers clients \$25 a month in transportation assistance, which is the cap on reimbursable transportation assistance from the Federal Government. Non-ABAWD food stamp E&T clients are provided with child care while they look for work or participate in workfare or other E&T activities. The program is also able to provide supplemental support services beyond transportation and child care assistance. Goodwill pays for haircuts provided by the local beauty college. Clothing vouchers for use at Goodwill's consignment shops are donated to clients who need clothing for interviews or for jobs. Clients have access to phones and a voice mail service at the Employment First office so that they can contact employers and receive messages. Employment First clients who participate in a workfare slot are also able to attend computer classes for free. However, program staff did stress that the services available to Employment First clients are far more limited than those available to the TANF clients enrolled in Colorado Works. TANF par-

ticipants can be provided with additional services, including financial assistance for purchasing a vehicle and direct help with needs such as housing and medical assistance. While Employment First clients are provided with referrals for housing assistance and a list of low-cost apartments, the program does not provide direct assistance.

### Funding

The Employment First budget for calendar year 1999 was \$335,000, not including the cost of participant reimbursement for support services (i.e., transportation and day care). This budget was divided into two main categories: personnel costs of \$225,000 and operating costs totaling \$110,000.

The program is funded through a combination of Federal, State and county funds. It receives an allocation of the State's Food Stamp E&T grant from the Federal Government and also matching funds for food stamp administrative dollars, reimbursement for transportation and child care assistance, and matching funds for the optional workfare program under Section 20E of the Food Stamp Act. Unlike in most other States, the counties in Colorado contribute funding to the Food Stamp E&T Program. The State agrees to provide each county with a set amount of funds that can then be matched with Federal food stamp E&T funds. Because of the requirement in BBA that States maintain their spending on the Food Stamp E&T Program at their FY 1996 level, Colorado requires counties to maintain their FY 1996 level of local expenditures. For the matching funds, the State generally provides 30 percent of the dollars, the counties provide 20 percent, and the Federal Government provides 50 percent. If a county wants to provide additional funding beyond the State ceiling for matching funds, it can do so. The State will not contribute any funds, but the county will get the Federal matching funds.

In FY 1998, the State allocated \$128,000 in Federal grant funds to El Paso County.<sup>41</sup> As a result of the funding-level reductions enacted by Congress in the Agricultural Research, Extension and Education Reform Act of 1998, El Paso County was informed by the State in September 1998 that the Federal grant funds available to the county for July 1998-June 1999 would be \$87,000. The letter informing the county of

<sup>41</sup>The State fiscal year in Colorado runs from July 1 through June 30. The State makes its allocations for the year based on what it expects for the Federal fiscal year, which does not begin until October.

this amount noted that the State planned to seek additional Federal funding in the event that money was unused by other States and available for reallocation but that there was no guarantee these funds would be available.<sup>42</sup> The county was already expecting to make a major contribution to the program because its contract with Goodwill was for over \$300,000, but the unexpected cuts in Federal food stamp E&T grant funds meant that the county would have to contribute additional funds if it was not going to cut back the program. The county's financial commitment reflects a strong endorsement of the goals of the Employment First program. The next section describes those goals and the E&T components that have been developed to try to attain those goals.

## Employment First

### Goals

The goal of Employment First is to facilitate employment among clients. Most of the food stamp E&T participants are placed first in a workfare component; however, all workfare participants are required to attend a workfare support group that is held on the last Thursday of every month. The goal of this support group is to learn about employment opportunities and to improve their job seeking skills. The general expectation is that clients will need to attend no more than one of these support groups before they find a job. Clients who come in for a second workfare support group are targeted for additional case management services. Staff reevaluate any barriers to work the clients face and determine if they need to be given additional services or placed in a different component. The focus on finding most clients employment quickly is based on the general philosophy of the program that regular employment is positive, can help a client obtain a better job in the future, and is easily achievable given the local economic climate.

Goodwill's goals are laid out in its contract with the county. The contract outlines the following performance standards for the Employment First program:

- Assess all referred food stamp clients within 2 working days.

- Secure employment for 35 percent of able-bodied, single adults<sup>43</sup> within 30 days following assessment. In order for the employment to count under this provision, the client must earn enough to have his or her food stamp benefits reduced by 50 percent over the initial benefit amount.
- Secure employment for 60 percent of able-bodied, single adults within 60 days following assessment.
- Secure employment for 75 percent of able-bodied, single adults within 90 days following assessment.

Both the county and Goodwill view the Food Stamp E&T Program as a resource for helping clients obtain employment. The program is not viewed as a means for ABAWDs to maintain food stamps. Observations of program activities during the site visit and staff comments indicate a consistent message from staff that clients should be moving towards permanent employment.

### Employment and Training Activities

Food stamp applicants who are determined to be subject to the ABAWD work requirement or otherwise mandatory food stamp E&T participants are accompanied by the Department of Human Services food stamp worker to the Employment First office at the time eligibility is determined. The client is assigned a case manager and signed up immediately for a group orientation session within 2 weeks. During the orientation session, the program is explained and the work and training options are described. After orientation, clients complete an assessment with a case manager that covers various services available in the area and what kind of work the client is interested in obtaining. Clients and case managers together determine what component will be assigned. During this initial visit, clients also complete an hour of calling employers to find out whether any positions are available. These positions are then put on a list of available jobs that is accessible to all goodwill clients. The purpose of these calls is to get the client accustomed to talking to employers in a nonthreatening situation, since the client is calling as a representative of Goodwill and is not personally seeking employment at this point.

<sup>42</sup>In the summer of 1999, the State received notice of additional Federal grant funding reallocated from the amount that was unspent by other States in FY 1998. This issue is discussed further in the "Challenges in Serving ABAWDs" section of this report.

<sup>43</sup>This includes both ABAWDs and able-bodied adults between ages 50 and 60 who are required to participate in food stamp E&T in El Paso County, but are not subject to the ABAWD work requirement.

The Colorado Springs office offers a variety of employment and training activities. While awaiting their final E&T assignment, food stamp E&T clients may be assigned various job search activities, including attendance at a weekly job fair or various employability workshops. However, if they do not find employment on their own through this job search effort, most clients enter workfare. The county has always placed a large emphasis on workfare using the Federal matching funding available through the optional workfare program. However, since the implementation of the ABAWD work requirement, staff report that there has been a further shift in policy to emphasize workfare placements. This emphasis is clearly evident in the program participation data summarized in the following table:

**Participation in Employment First,  
January 1999-May 1999**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Workfare	993
Employability workshops	34
Education (including GED, English as a Second Language, adult basic education, and literacy classes)	36
Vocational training	4
JTPA	3
Vocational Rehabilitation	2

The following are descriptions of the major activities that Employment First clients are participating in, with an emphasis on workfare because it is the activity with the largest number of participants.

**Workfare**

After it is determined that a client should be assigned to workfare, the case manager reviews the client's assessment form. The program supervisor and the case managers hold a weekly lunch meeting where they 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 also help foster a sense of teamwork and provide an opportunity for professional development while giving clients the opportunity to benefit from the experience of multiple case managers.

When clients are referred to a workfare site, they are first required to attend an orientation class, where they are provided with a detailed description of the program.

They are told what is expected of them, what is expected of employers, and what to do if they experience a problem. As noted above, all clients are required to participate in a workfare support group once a month. During these group sessions, clients describe their experiences with workfare and are given an opportunity to describe any problems they are having in their current placement. This allows case managers to address any problems with particular work sites and gives clients the opportunity to learn from each other.

Key features of the workfare program in Colorado Springs that the staff believe lead to its successes are as follows.

- ***The Majority of Workfare Placements Have Been With Organizations Operated by Goodwill Industries.*** Goodwill's commitment to its clients extends beyond providing these positions to fill workfare slots. These clients are given serious consideration when positions open up within Goodwill Industries. All of the case managers for the Employment First program are former TANF or Employment First participants, and they had very positive things to say about Goodwill's willingness to hire public assistance recipients.
- ***A Variety of Other Workfare Placements Have Been Developed.*** Among the organizations offering workfare slots are the American Red Cross, the Better Business Bureau, the zoo, the Department of Human Services, the county courts, a local military base, the humane society, a radio station, the March of Dimes, the Olympic Training Center, the Community Action Agency, the community mental health center, the Salvation Army, schools, churches, and youth programs. The type of workfare positions include maintenance and janitorial, clerical, warehouse, customer service, reception, groundskeeping, counseling, bookkeeping, food preparation, and assisting case managers in an employment support program. Occasional positions have included a youth counselor, kennel assistant, and zookeeper's assistant. Case managers try to match clients with those positions that most interest them. There is enough variety that they are generally able to do so.
- ***Employer Recruitment Plays an Important Role in the Workfare Program.*** The workfare coordinator has joined a community organization that brings together representatives from the nonprofit commu-



nity in the Colorado Springs area. Her membership in this organization allows her to network with a wide range of organizations, and numerous employer recruiting opportunities have resulted.

Researchers accompanied the coordinator on a recruitment visit to the local parks and recreation agency. Her attempt to convince the agency to participate had two facets. She stressed the advantages for the parks and recreation department of using workfare participants. These included having the participants serve as a ready pool of volunteer labor. However, she also stressed that Goodwill Industries expects that its clients will be given serious consideration when paid positions open up.

- ***Workfare Offers Opportunities to Employers.*** Goodwill is able to offer employers the opportunity to work with clients who may turn into permanent employees. This opportunity has a strong appeal to employers in a tight labor market. Goodwill is also able to offer worker's compensation and liability insurance for its workfare sites, thus removing a concern many employers have about participating in the program.
- ***Indirect Benefits of Workfare Are Also Stressed.*** While the agency looks for workfare positions that present opportunities for permanent employment, case managers stress that workfare also has indirect benefits. Workfare employers can serve as references for clients, and the experience gained in workfare positions makes clients more attractive job applicants.
- ***The Goal of Workfare Is To Move Clients Toward Self-Sufficiency.*** The Employment First office in Colorado Springs stresses to both clients and staff that workfare is primarily designed to help clients move toward employment and only secondarily is a means of helping clients maintain benefits.

While workfare is the component most participants are involved in at Employment First, the program uses a number of other E&T activities, including employability workshops, education components, training-related components, and additional job search resources that participants are encouraged to use. These activities are described.

### ***Employability Workshops***

Goodwill Industries offers numerous employability workshops to its public assistance clients. Most of

these workshops are also offered to Employment First clients. Available workshops cover job applications, development of a job search plan, mock interviews, use of the Goodwill resource room, self-esteem, anger management, stress management, domestic violence, nutrition, money management, and health education. ABAWDs participating in this component can combine a number of different workshops to meet their 20-hour-a-week requirement. Program staff noted that, in recent years, there has been a shift away from participation in this component towards workfare, as a result of the definition of the ABAWD work requirement.

### ***Education***

The local school district offers classes in GED preparation, adult basic education, literacy, and English as a Second Language to Employment First clients. These classes are offered Monday through Thursday for 16 hours a week. In addition, clients are required to complete at least 4 hours of homework each week. Class time and homework time are both counted toward the 20-hour-a-week education requirement for ABAWD participants. These classes serve both food stamp E&T and TANF clients.

A local principal offered the classroom space free of charge to the program. The school offers clients free breakfast and free lunch. Day care is provided onsite. Case management services for these clients are provided by the case manager who serves as workfare/GED coordinator. She goes to the school once or twice a week to meet with clients, make sure they are attending, and provide assistance with any problems they may be having. The availability of onsite case management means clients do not have to take time out from their schedules to go to the Employment First office. The coordinator is also kept informed of any problems the client may be having or any attendance issues and can address them quickly.

### ***Other E&T Components***

The program makes minimal use of other components. A small number of clients participate in the Job Training and Partnership Act programs and other sources of vocational training. However, the Employment First program in Colorado overall does not have strong links to JTPA. Clients who fulfill their workfare hours are able to take advantage of free computer classes that Goodwill has arranged. Clients interested in receiving vocational training are also urged to visit the JTPA office. In addition, potentially eligible

clients are told about the Parent Opportunity Program (POPs) and are urged to find out what is available. POPs is funded through the Federal Welfare-to-Work grant and mainly serves noncustodial fathers who are behind on their child support. The program provides its clients with job training, assistance finding employment, fatherhood classes, and support services, including transportation assistance. POPs clients also get assistance accessing JTPA-funded services. At the time of the site visit, only a few Employment First clients were participating in POPs, but the case managers were hoping to increase these numbers.

### **Additional Job Search Resources**

In addition to the main activities that food stamp E&T participants are assigned to, Employment First has other resources to help people find employment, as highlighted:

- **Employment Resource Room.** A resource room is located on the first floor of the welfare agency. Goodwill Industries provides the funding and staff for the room, which is used by both Employment First and TANF participants. The room includes personal computers, books on job hunting, a job bulletin board, and telephones for making job contacts. Clients are also provided with free voice mail boxes that can be used to accept messages from prospective employers.
- **Job Fair.** Goodwill organizes a weekly job fair at a local church. This is also open to both Employment First and TANF participants. At these job fairs, employers make a presentation about their organization, seek interested job applicants, and distribute applications. Clients can get credit toward their work requirement for attendance. Clients are urged to attend the job fair and use it as an opportunity to ask questions of employers to get a better sense of what types of qualities employers are seeking.
- **Goodwill Temporary Services.** In addition to hiring some clients on a permanent basis, Goodwill offers clients direct employment opportunities through its temporary agency. Goodwill began the agency as a way to help public assistance clients gain on-the-job experience and give them opportunities that may lead to permanent employment. Goodwill has sought to improve the living standard for its temporary employees by making temporary employees eligible for medical benefits after a probationary period.

### **Program Outcomes**

Goodwill Industries has compiled statistics on outcomes for Employment First recipients in order to fulfill its contract with El Paso County and to inform program development. Statistics for 1998 reveal a very positive picture of both program participation and employment outcomes.

- **Most Clients Assigned to the Program Participate.** In 1998, of 2,547 clients referred to the Employment First Program, 2,060 attended their assessment meeting. The number assessed represents 81 percent of the referred clients. This rate compares extremely favorably with what is assumed to be a very low participation rate of food stamp clients in E&T programs.
- **Many Clients Report Becoming Employed While on the Program.** In 1998, 1,387 clients reported becoming employed in 1998 while in the program. This figure represents 67 percent of all assessed clients. Further, it may be an underestimate since some portion of the 2,060 Employment First clients were assessed in December 1998 and may have subsequently become employed in 1999, and other clients may have become employed and just not returned to the office to report their new employment. Program staff indicated that, at the time of the visit, over 90 percent of clients who were leaving the program were doing so because they were successful in finding employment.
- **The Average Wage of Clients Is Considerably Above Minimum Wage.** The average hourly wage of the clients who found employment in 1998 was \$6.78, more than \$1 above the Federal minimum wage.
- **Some Clients Are Also Obtaining GEDs.** In 1998, 82 clients obtained their GED while participating in the Employment First program.

While these figures do not allow us to compare participants to nonparticipants with the same characteristics, they do suggest that many program clients are achieving positive results and increasing their employability for the longer term. Based on these figures, the assessment of staff, and what appeared to be generally enthusiastic participation among clients, the evidence suggests that the program provides considerable benefits.

## Challenges in Serving the ABAWD Population

The Food Stamp E&T Program in Colorado Springs makes few distinctions between ABAWDs and non-ABAWDs. While ABAWD clients are informed of their work requirement and time limit, staff did not describe challenges that were exclusive to ABAWDs. Staff at Goodwill Industries and the El Paso County Department of Human Services described some overall challenges to meeting their program goals.

### Main Perceived Challenges

The key challenges described by program staff in Colorado Springs are what to do about hard-to-serve clients, the need for improved coordination between the Department of Human Services and Goodwill, and budget uncertainties.

### Hard-To-Serve E&T Clients

Staff indicated that homeless clients and clients living in rural areas were particularly hard to serve in the Employment First program. Staff found that many of the homeless clients faced enormous barriers to work, including substance abuse and mental illness. The types of services that these clients needed go well beyond what could be offered through Employment First. Further, many of the homeless in Colorado Springs are transient and do not remain in Colorado Springs long enough to benefit from the employment and training provided through the program. Another difficult-to-serve group was rural clients lacking transportation. Staff said that the public transportation system in the county does not effectively serve rural areas and clients without cars face considerable obstacles in terms of participating in the program.

### Funding Uncertainty

Unlike other States that received substantial increases in grant funding after the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 (BBA), Colorado received the smallest percentage increase in Federal Food Stamp E&T grant funds between FY 1997 and FY 1998. The main reason for the small increase was that after BBA, the State's Federal food stamp E&T grant allocation was based on the number of ABAWDs in the State compared with the national total, rather than the number of food stamp work registrants participating in E&T. As a result, Colorado received only a 14-percent increase in Federal Food Stamp E&T Program grant funds

between FY 1997 and FY 1998, the lowest of any State. The initial cuts in the Federal allocation in FY 1999 were a particular problem for Colorado because it was one of the few States that used 100 percent of its grant funds in FY 1998. At the time of the site visit, Colorado officials had informed county offices that the State's FY 1999 allocation was anticipated to fall 34 percent below the FY 1997 funding level. Thus, the counties' Food Stamp E&T Program faced a substantial reduction in funding in FY 1999.

One of the challenges noted by the county staff person in charge of budgeting was how to conduct program planning when the funding level for the year was uncertain. As just noted, in fall of 1998, the State Department of Human Services informed the county that the amount of Federal grant funds coming to the State for FY 1999 would be substantially cut. On the county level this cut totaled \$41,000, or 32 percent of the grant funding received by El Paso County in FY 1998. The State DHS office indicated that it would seek to make up the gap in funding due to Federal cuts by seeking additional funds from both the Federal and State governments, but could not guarantee any additional funds would be available. Thus, if the county wanted to maintain funding for the program, it needed to be willing to risk paying the amount lost in Federal funds in the hopes that the monies would be reallocated to Colorado later in the year.

### Increased Emphasis on Placing Clients in Workfare

While workfare had always been a major component of the county's welfare-to-work strategy for food stamp clients, Employment First Program staff expressed some ambivalence about the extent of the emphasis on placing food stamp clients, particularly ABAWDs, in workfare positions. The staff thought that this shift may have resulted in lost opportunities for some clients who could have also benefited from skills training workshops. Most of the caseworkers attended at least some of the workshops when they were clients and felt that they benefited from what was covered. The one workshop singled out as especially beneficial was money management. The caseworkers said this class helped them gain the skills they needed to budget their wages when they became employed. They felt that many of their current food stamp clients would also benefit from this workshop and other employability workshops, but as illustrated in the earlier participation table, very few food stamp clients participate because it is much harder to meet the 20

hours a week of participation required in education and training activities than the 20 hours a month required for workfare placement.

### ***Limited Funding for Support Services***

Differences in available funding for the TANF program and the Food Stamp E&T Program are very apparent. Staff believe that the Food Stamp Program should raise the cap on Federal reimbursement for supportive services and offer more support services similar to those available for TANF clients, such as assistance with housing and the purchase or maintenance of a vehicle.

### ***Coordination Between the Department of Human Services and Goodwill***

Another challenge expressed by the Employment First case managers was the need for coordination between the eligibility and employment and training functions in the Food Stamp Program. These two functions are carried out by two separate agencies, though they are co-located in Colorado Springs. While the referral process appears smooth and coordination between the public and private agency staff appears to be a priority, the case managers in Employment First indicated that it remains a challenge to ensure ongoing communication and coordination of services for the clients both agencies serve.

### **Addressing Challenges**

This section describes how the Colorado Springs Food Stamp E&T Program has addressed the challenges of serving the food stamp E&T population.

#### ***Case Managers Were Given Discretion To Exempt Homeless and Rural Clients From the ABAWD Work Requirement***

Case managers have been given the option of exempting homeless clients from the work requirement and ABAWD time limit using Colorado Springs' share of the 15-percent exemption allowed under BBA. This allows the worker to determine whether a client can benefit from the services available through the Employment First program. If the services do not match the client's needs, a decision can be made that allows the client to continue receiving food stamps without participating in an inappropriate program. Rural clients who lack transportation are also exempted from the work requirement and ABAWD time limit.

Because the program does not have the resources to adequately serve these clients, the decision was made that it would be unfair to penalize them for their inability to participate in the program.

#### ***The County Put Up Funds To Protect Against the Shortfall in Federal Funding***

After being notified of the cut in Federal food stamp E&T grant funds for FY 1999, El Paso County had the option of reducing the funding provided to Goodwill because its contract was contingent on the amount of State and Federal funding received. The county government decided that passing on the cuts would threaten the program and make it difficult to achieve the goals set forth in the contract with Goodwill. Therefore, the county put up the additional funds to make up for the reduction in Federal funding.

Colorado was notified in late spring of 1999 that it would receive a FY 1999 reallocation of Federal food stamp E&T grant funds unspent by other States in FY 1998. This reallocation totaled \$950,000 and was larger than the State's initial allocation of \$640,000. The reallocated funds were then made available to counties. However, at the time of our visit in May 1999, the county staff were unaware of the pending reallocation. It is important to note that the reallocation did not occur until the last 2 months of the State fiscal year, so program planning based on the original reduction in funds was still a major issue for El Paso County. According to Department of Human Services staff, the county's willingness to risk its own funds resulted from a political commitment to a welfare-to-work philosophy for both food stamp and TANF recipients and a concern that a substantial budget cut would undermine the success of its private contractor.

#### ***Commitment to Making Workfare an Effective E&T Component***

While case managers expressed some ambivalence to the researchers about the focus on workfare, they did not display any of this towards clients. Program staff send a clear message that they see workfare as an opportunity to help clients obtain permanent employment. The staff are devoted to making the workfare component successful and they emphasize the benefits to clients. The staff do encourage clients to attend workshops and note how they themselves benefited from them, but this is not done in a way that discounts the benefits of workfare. Staff are greatly enthused about some of the recent workfare employers that have

been recruited. The case managers say that the increased variety in workfare positions has given them more options for matching client's interests and skills with a workfare position.

### **Using Community Resources To Provide Support Services Not Available Through the Food Stamp E&T Program**

Goodwill Industries has been able to provide more support services to ABAWDs and other food stamp clients than those provided by most other Food Stamp E&T Programs visited by researchers for this study. They can provide clothing vouchers and haircuts, pay for certain licensing required by employers, and provide assistance with developing resumes. While the Employment First program cannot provide help purchasing or repairing a car, it has responded to the most critical transportation need by exempting clients who live in rural areas with no access to transportation. Housing represents a large, generally unmet need for program clients. The explosive growth in the Colorado Springs area has led to high housing costs. Employment First clients are given lists of low-cost rentals and are referred to organizations that offer housing assistance and vouchers.

### **Good Communication and Coordination Between Agencies**

Goodwill and the El Paso County Department of Human Services have developed a good working relationship. Employment First administrators indicate that the co-location of staff for the two agencies encourages cooperation and communication. The relationship has grown over the years that Goodwill has been providing employment services for food stamp, AFDC, and TANF clients. In addition, the State recently implemented a coordinated computer system for both agencies to track client eligibility and Employment First information in one data system.

## **Discussion**

Based on the site visit interviews and observations of the local program operations, the following characteristics of the local program appear to be important in helping the program run smoothly and successfully serve clients.

- **Case Managers Are Enthusiastic Advocates for the Program.** Case managers are very good at conveying their enthusiasm for the program. They are able to use their past experience as public assistance recipients to try and convince clients that they can benefit if they participate in the program. Because they found a job with Goodwill, they represent success stories for the organization.
- **Staff Input Is Valued.** The weekly lunches where workers help each other decide where to assign clients build cohesion and allow workers and supervisors to benefit from each other's experiences with clients. Goodwill Industries hosts "challenge days," which provide staff with the opportunity to meet with Goodwill's president, vice president, and director to discuss things that need to be changed and to offer new approaches.
- **Goodwill Industries Is Well-Established in Colorado Springs.** Goodwill has a strong presence and reputation in the community. The organization is affiliated with 72 other agencies providing social services to the community. It has the experience of having operated E&T programs for the public assistance population for over 10 years.
- **Food Stamp E&T Clients Are Able To Participate in Some of the Same Activities as TANF Clients.** As the contractor for both the TANF and Food Stamp E&T Program in El Paso County, Goodwill is able to offer more services to Food Stamp E&T clients. This dual coordination of programs allows Goodwill to provide a broader array of services, such as education and employability workshops, to the relatively small number of food stamp E&T clients participating in these services. Some of the workfare positions are also shared across programs.
- **The Agency Has Tailored the Program To Take Advantage of the Good Economy.** The Colorado Springs economy is doing very well and that helps clients. Goodwill also takes the healthy economy into account in managing the Employment First program. The workfare program is sold to employers as a possible source for finding permanent employees to meet their personnel needs. The agency can afford to concentrate its recruitment efforts on employers who are likely to hire participants because the good economy has created a larger pool of interested organizations. Goodwill's temporary service offers another avenue in which employers can audition employees without the costs associated with permanent hiring.

- ***Clients Are Given a Clear Message About Expectations and Consequences.*** Orientation sessions stress that clients need to participate in the program or they will face a loss of benefits. In addition, the case managers stress that the purpose of the program is to help clients find employment. They are able to use their personal experiences to convey that employment is obtainable and represents a better financial alternative than public assistance.
- ***The State Department of Human Services Is a Strong Advocate of the Employment First Program.*** The Department provides counties with additional funds beyond the Federal grant. In addition, the Department has assisted counties by helping them administer the requirement to spend 80 percent of funds on ABAWDs. Colorado has enthusiastically

pursued additional funding for the program from the Federal Government. The program serves a large enough population of ABAWDs and uses enough State and local funds that the State is able to meet the 80-percent requirement. The State has also filled enough ABAWD slots to draw down its full grant allocations. The State program also provides technical assistance and training that helps spread the enthusiasm for the program to the counties.

In closing, Goodwill Industries in Colorado Springs has developed a Food Stamp E&T Program that is implemented by an enthusiastic staff who have worked hard to create a workfare program that is employment-focused. The program appears to be successful in helping ABAWDs to find employment and gives them opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable.

## Belle Glade, Florida

This section focuses on the Food Stamp E&T Program that serves Belle Glade, Florida, a rural area a little over 30 miles west of the city of West Palm Beach. Belle Glade is the only one of the five sites visited that is not obviously benefiting from the strong national economy. The agriculture industry, and sugar cane production in particular, is the main source of employment. As a result, many individuals in Belle Glade are only seasonally employed.

The city of Belle Glade has a population estimated at 17,000 in 1998; this represents an increase from 16,000 in 1990 (though this may have partly resulted from changes in city boundaries).<sup>44</sup> The city is part of Palm Beach County, which had a population of just over 1 million in 1998 (U.S. Census Bureau 1999b).<sup>45</sup> 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 Food Stamp E&T Program faces the challenge of operating an employment program in a location with few permanent job opportunities. The main food stamp E&T services available for participants are a community work experience or workfare program and education.<sup>46</sup> The food stamp E&T office also refers clients to training programs available in the community and funded through other sources. Specifically, the program refers clients to training programs through the workforce development system and the Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker program.

The Belle Glade site visit took place in May 1999. Researchers interviewed the Jobs and Benefits manager, the two food stamp E&T staff, the program operations administrator for the Department of Children and Families (DCF) Belle Glade office, the job search workshop coordinator, and the manager of a Goodwill

Industries thrift shop that serves as a workfare site for food stamp E&T clients. Researchers also attended a food stamp E&T orientation and a job search workshop and toured the Goodwill Industries thrift shop.

The next four sections provide contextual information about the program, outline the program's goals and describe the services it provides, detail the problems the program faces in serving the ABAWD population and how it has addressed those challenges, and summarize the strengths and limitations of the program.

### Program Context

#### The Local Economy

Due to the local employment conditions, ABAWDs in Belle Glade are waived from the food stamp work requirement and 3-month time limit. However, the food stamp agency chooses to make all ABAWDs mandatory food stamp E&T participants and thus subject to having their benefits discontinued if they do not participate in assigned E&T activities. Program administrators think that it would be unfair to exempt the ABAWD population from work requirements given that single mothers with children are required to meet such requirements under the State TANF Program. ABAWDs are the only group of food stamp clients who are mandatory food stamp E&T participants in this office.

Program staff said that most of the ABAWDs in Belle Glade have experience as farm laborers. Some of them have health problems, which make it difficult to perform farm labor, but which are not serious enough to allow them to collect disability. There is a mix of men and women and no age group dominates. Some migrant workers are passing through Belle Glade, but most ABAWDs are local residents. The clientele did not change very much when the E&T program became restricted to only ABAWDs.

The average unemployment rate for Palm Beach County in 1999 was 5 percent.<sup>47</sup> This number is not a

<sup>44</sup>U.S. Census Bureau. *Population Estimates for Cities with Populations of 10,000 and Greater*. <http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/metro-city/SC10K98-T4-DR.txt>.

<sup>45</sup>U.S. Census Bureau. *County Population Estimates for July 1, 1998 and Population Change for July 1, 1997 to July 1, 1998*. [http://population/estimates/county/co-98-1/98C1\\_12.txt](http://population/estimates/county/co-98-1/98C1_12.txt).

<sup>46</sup>The workfare program in Belle Glade goes by the name Community Work Experience Program but will be referred to as workfare in this report.

<sup>47</sup>Florida Department of Labor and Employment Security, Office of Labor Market Statistics. *State of Florida Labor Force Summary 1999 Annual Averages*. <ftp://207.156.40.162/LAUS/avg99.prn>.

fair representation of unemployment in Belle Glade. Local Jobs and Benefits officials indicated that unemployment was probably 3 to 4 times higher in the area than it is in West Palm Beach. Belle Glade borders on Hendry County and shares a similar economy based in agriculture. Hendry County's average unemployment rate in 1999 was 12.2 percent.<sup>48</sup> Food stamp E&T staff indicated that Belle Glade had recently lost some key employers. They said that there were a number of packing houses and produce plants that had served the farmers in the area but had recently closed down as a result of companies centralizing operations.

### Program Administration

The Florida Department of Labor and Employment Security (DLES) operates the Food Stamp E&T Program under a contract with the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF). Eligibility for the Food Stamp E&T Program is determined by DCF caseworkers. Most of these caseworkers are located in a separate facility about 2 miles from the food stamp E&T offices. However, two DCF caseworkers are "outstationed" in the office where food stamp E&T services are provided. The DLES food stamp E&T workers are housed in a one-stop job center. This center also includes the Jobs and Benefits office, which provides unemployment benefits and is operated by DLES; WAGES employment services, which are the services offered under the Florida TANF Program; workforce development services, which include services offered under the JTPA Program;<sup>49</sup> Department of Vocational Rehabilitation services; child care assistance; and the Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker program. Both WAGES employment services and JTPA services are now contracted to Lockheed Martin.

### Program Staffing

The food stamp E&T staff consists of two DLES caseworkers who are responsible for conducting orientation sessions, assisting clients with job searches, including developing a list of potential jobs for the

clients, and determining with the client which E&T activity is most appropriate. The workers monitor client participation and notify DCF caseworkers if the client is not fulfilling their work requirement. Almost all clients are assigned to the job search workshop, which is run by a Jobs and Benefits counselor who mainly works with clients on unemployment assistance. Clients may also access services through the workforce development center, which is funded by JTPA and offers weekly orientations, workshops, and training opportunities for food stamp E&T clients who are eligible for JTPA assistance either through the regular JTPA Program or through the Migrant and Seasonal Farm Worker Program.

### Support Services

The Food Stamp E&T Program in Belle Glade offers participants the \$25 transportation reimbursement provided for under Federal law. Food stamp E&T clients can access further support services if they are eligible for JTPA or the Migrant and Seasonal Farm Worker Program. However, these are neither funded nor provided through the Food Stamp E&T Program.

### Funding

The Food Stamp E&T Program in Belle Glade has an annual budget of about \$38,000. About \$31,500 consists of salary and benefits for program staff. The rest involves basic program expenses. This does not include the transportation reimbursement, which, in May 1999, totaled \$1,050 for 42 clients.

## The Belle Glade E&T Program

### Goals

In the orientation session for new clients, the Food Stamp E&T Program is described as a work program. Clients are told to focus on finding employment or developing skills that make them more employable. The workers try to encourage participation in the education component, especially for clients eligible for additional assistance through the Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Program. During the job search workshop, clients are reminded that local job opportunities are severely limited and that they may need to consider the possibility of relocation in order to find steady employment. The food stamp E&T staff said that their main goal was to get clients involved in some activity in the hope that it would improve their employability.

<sup>48</sup>Florida Department of Labor and Employment Security, Office of Labor Market Statistics. *State of Florida Labor Force Summary 1999 Annual Averages*. <http://207.156.40.162/LAUS/avg99.prn>.

<sup>49</sup>At the time of the visit, Florida was in the process of making the transition from the JTPA Program to the new workforce development system that is required under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998. Activities funded through these sources will be described as JTPA in this report.



A list of E&T activities offered and the number of participants in each is detailed in the table below.

**May 1999 participation in Food Stamp E&T Program activities, Belle Glade, Florida**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Food stamp E&T orientation	45
Job search workshop	19
Job search	65
Education	8
Vocational training	6
Workfare	46

## **E&T Activities**

### **Job Search and Job Search Training**

ABAWDs are informed in writing that they are mandatory participants in the Food Stamp E&T Program. The letter also indicates that they are required to make six job contacts prior to attending orientation for the program. These contacts are subject to verification by food stamp E&T staff. If a client completes these contacts, they will receive a \$25 transportation reimbursement after the orientation session. If they do not complete the contacts, they will be required to do so after completing orientation.

After attending orientation, food stamp E&T clients are assigned to participate in a job search training class. This class includes both ABAWDs and individuals who are collecting unemployment benefits. The class covers the following subjects:

- Setting goals;
- Knowing your skills;
- Job applications;
- Interviewing; and
- Job retention skills.

Workshop participants are provided with information regarding Florida's job market to assist them in determining which industries might provide the best employment opportunities. The workshop facilitator reminds participants that the local job market offers few opportunities and that relocation may be the best option for some of them. There is a brief discussion about developing a resume, though clients are urged to sign up for a separate workshop that deals with the issue in more depth. Participants are asked to describe how the information presented by the facilitator and through videos applies to their own situations. The facilitator offers

suggestions for finding employment or using services available through the workforce development center.

After food stamp E&T clients attend the required job search workshop, they may be required to continue to engage in job search activities. This job search requirement can last up to 3 months with clients required to make three job contacts per week. ABAWDs in Belle Glade can be required to conduct a longer job search than allowed under PRWORA because they are exempt from the 3-month time limit.

## **Education and Vocational Training**

Education activities consist of remedial or adult basic education, high school or GED preparation, and English as a Second Language. Classes are offered at the food stamp E&T offices and through the Palm Beach County school system at the local technical school and adult education center, which is located in Belle Glade.

Vocational training opportunities are available to ABAWDs through the local school system, the county community college, the JTPA Program, and the Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Program. The types of training available include programs for accounting, air conditioning, auto body work, auto mechanics, building maintenance, bus driving, business office systems, certified nurse's aides, commercial art, food preparation, computers, cosmetology, data entry, dental assistance, electronics, home health aides, licensed practical nurses, medical secretary, registered nurses, patient care assistants, police officers, secretarial work, security officers, social workers, truck driving, and word processing. Though all of these are at least a possibility for ABAWDs, the reality is that many of them are unavailable for one or more of the following reasons: they require an aptitude test that many ABAWDs are unable to pass; they are not paid for by food stamp E&T and may only be partially paid for by JTPA; or the training site is inaccessible because of transportation issues. The most common training programs that ABAWDs participate in are those for certified nurses' aides, home health aides, and building maintenance.

### **Workfare**

Other than job search or job search training, the most common activity among ABAWDs in Belle Glade is workfare. Clients who remain in the program beyond a few months are likely to participate in workfare. Workfare positions are available in the Goodwill thrift shop, a program that feeds the homeless and delivers

food to the needy, the school system, as child care aides, a local city government, the DCF office, and the food stamp E&T and workforce development center office. Most of the workfare sites are under contract with the Food Stamp E&T Program; however, there is an option for clients to find self-initiated workfare slots. Clients can locate a government or nonprofit entity willing to provide workfare positions, and the food stamp E&T workers will set up an agreement with the provider. In May 1999, 11 of the 46 workfare positions were with self-initiated workfare providers. Self-initiated workfare is often used by individuals who have transportation limitations and are able to locate a workfare opportunity closer to their place of residence than those available through regular workfare.

## Challenges in Serving the ABAWD Population

### Main Perceived Challenges

The Belle Glade office faces some serious challenges serving the ABAWD population. These include the difficulty of running an employment program in a place with limited opportunities, limited available services for E&T clients, and the level of education and work experience of the ABAWD population. These challenges are discussed.

#### *Running an Employment Program in a Location With Limited Opportunities*

The largest and most difficult challenge for the Belle Glade office to overcome is the limited job opportunities in the area. As previously noted, there is no official unemployment figure for Belle Glade, but local staff and the figures for a surrounding county suggest that unemployment is probably in the double digits. Many of the jobs that do exist are seasonal and physically strenuous. ABAWDs who have mainly worked in farm work are often unable to continue this work as they age, and the intense physical labor takes its toll over time.

Unemployment is much lower in the West Palm Beach metropolitan area; however, this is over a 30-mile drive and many clients do not have access to a car. A public bus system connects Belle Glade and West Palm Beach, but the trip takes 2 hours by bus and the buses only run every 1½ hours. In addition, the bus system provides limited access to West Palm Beach because many of the businesses and manufacturing centers are not on the bus line.

### *Limited Available E&T Services*

Caseworkers direct clients toward training opportunities because many of them need training to be able to access available jobs, especially nonfarm labor. However, the Food Stamp E&T Program has a limited number of training opportunities. In addition, ability to provide financial support for clients to cover training costs or to cover expenses while in training is limited. Additional opportunities are available in the West Palm Beach area, but transportation is a problem. A food stamp E&T caseworker also suggested that ABAWDs could really use a course or workshop in handling their personal finances; however, the program does not have the resources to fund its own workshops.

In addition to limits on training opportunities, the limits on support services present an obstacle to serving ABAWDs in Belle Glade. As just noted, public transportation options are limited and many clients do not own a car. TANF clients can be provided with assistance purchasing a car, but food stamp E&T clients are limited to the \$25 Food Stamp Program's cap on reimbursable assistance. Training expenses, such as tools, uniforms, and licensing fees, are not reimbursable by Federal food stamp E&T funds.

### *Limited Education and Work Experience Among the ABAWD Population*

Many of the ABAWDs in Belle Glade have limited education and work experience. While opportunities are available for adult basic education and GED courses, many ABAWDs are in need of finding a job quickly and thus are more interested in vocational training. However, many quickly become discouraged when they take assessment tests that are often required for training programs. ABAWD test scores are often too low to allow them to get immediate access to vocational training. The results often discourage them from even entering GED classes, and they either drop out of the program or request a workfare assignment. Many ABAWDs' work experience is limited to farm work. There are enough unemployed people in the Belle Glade area that employers can pick people with more experience. This becomes a real problem for ABAWDs with farm experience during the off-season or when they become unable to perform farm work because of the physical toll of aging and years of hard labor. In addition, opportunities in agriculture have declined somewhat because of mechanization and the closing of packing plants in the area.

## Addressing Challenges

The Belle Glade office has developed a number of strategies for trying to address the challenges they face in administering an E&T Program. The two key strategies are an attempt to locate workfare sites that will hire public assistance recipients and coordination and partnerships with other government-funded programs.

### ***Locating Workfare Sites That May Provide Permanent Employment***

The food stamp E&T office has attempted to find workfare sites that offer opportunities for permanent employment. One of the major workfare providers in Belle Glade is a Goodwill Industries Thrift Shop. Goodwill frequently hires food stamp clients when positions are opened. However, it should be noted that ABAWDs have had to compete for positions with TANF clients. Because TANF clients are assigned more workfare hours, employers have a longer period of time to observe their work, and Goodwill and other organizations have tended to hire more TANF clients when job opportunities open up.

### ***Partnerships With Other Government-Funded Programs***

The most successful strategy used by the Belle Glade food stamp E&T office is forming partnerships with other government-funded programs. The food stamp E&T workers have a good relationship with the employees of the workforce development center. They have been able to obtain JTPA-funded training for a considerable number of clients. At the time of the site visit, two clients were in JTPA-funded training and five others had been referred. The workforce development center is able to offer additional support services, pay for uniforms and equipment, and offer a wider variety of classes. ABAWDs still face challenges accessing these services because of transportation limitations and low levels of education, which make it difficult to pass the tests necessary for entry into many programs. However, if an ABAWD meets the criteria for training assignments, the food stamp E&T workers are able to help them access that training. JTPA funding does run out regularly. At the time of the site visit, the funding for the fiscal year was largely exhausted and clients were not being accepted into most training programs. However, other options exist.

The Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Program offers training opportunities for individuals who have been

employed in agriculture for 12 out of the last 24 months. One of the key advantages of enrolling clients in this program is that they may be eligible for a cash stipend. While it is generally a small amount, it may be enough to allow a client to complete training. Clients in this program are also eligible for more support services than are available through the Food Stamp E&T Program. Additional services may include paying for training expenses and emergency assistance grants. While this program also frequently runs out of funds, it usually does so when the JTPA Program still has funds available. Food stamp E&T workers help clients navigate the eligibility process for these programs. The workers indicated that many clients are not aware of their eligibility for these additional services and would not have accessed them had they not been required to participate in the Food Stamp E&T Program.

## Discussion

The Belle Glade Food Stamp E&T Program is attempting to provide E&T services under very difficult circumstances. The local job market provides limited permanent opportunities, and there are few options for individuals such as most ABAWDs who lack education and have limited employment histories. Farm work continues to be a major source of employment for the local population, but it is often seasonal and many individuals are unable to continue to perform this strenuous physical labor over time. During the job search training class, clients are told that they may want to consider relocation if they want to find greater job opportunities. This likely poses a difficulty for many clients who have a long history in Belle Glade and strong ties. Housing is also cheaper in Belle Glade than in West Palm Beach. ABAWDs can commute, but limited public transportation makes the option difficult for many people.

The food stamp E&T office in Belle Glade has attempted to create opportunities by building links to other programs that offer a wider array of supportive services. This strategy has helped a number of individuals who have been able to take advantage of training opportunities provided through the workforce development center and the Migrant and Seasonal Workers Program. In addition, many clients have been able to obtain GEDs and improve their basic skills through participation in the Food Stamp E&T Program. Program staff indicate that additional supportive services may be one tool for reaching more clients in a difficult environment.

## Chicago, Illinois

The Illinois Department of Human Services administers two related, but distinct, Food Stamp E&T Programs in Chicago. The first program is known as Earnfare and includes a State-funded cash grant for adults without children. Earnfare clients are only eligible for this cash assistance 6 months out of every 12. Clients “earn” their food stamp benefits and the cash grant by working for Earnfare employers. The Earnfare program is partially privatized. The Department of Human Services handles Earnfare assignments for a portion of the caseload. The Department also contracts with both for-profit and nonprofit private organizations to recruit participants and employers into the Earnfare program. The contractors assign participants to employers and are able to receive an enhanced reimbursement for clients placed in permanent employment. There is an additional employment and training program for mandatory food stamp E&T participants who are not on Earnfare. This program has a number of different components, though most participants are involved in job search or job readiness activities. While this site visit report provides some information on the regular Food Stamp E&T Program, the main focus is on the Earnfare program because it was identified as the more promising and innovative by State and local contacts.

The Earnfare Program serves the city of Chicago. After a period of decline, Chicago’s population has stabilized. In 1998, Chicago had a population of 2.8 million.<sup>50</sup> The city’s population has grown very slowly in the 1990s, but the Chicago metropolitan area continues to grow steadily, increasing from 7.4 to 7.9 million between 1990 and 1998, or 7.1 percent.<sup>51</sup>

All of Cook County, which includes the City of Chicago, is waived from the ABAWD work requirement. However, most ABAWDs are categorized as mandatory work registrants and are thus required to participate in the Food Stamp E&T Program. The Food Stamp E&T Program in Chicago serves ABAWDs from age 18 to 50. Individuals over age 50

can volunteer to participate in the program. Case managers report that the majority of their clients are male, with estimates ranging from 60 to 70 percent. The clients were described as generally having a poor and discontinuous work history, lacking a high school education, with a considerable number having substance abuse problems and/or serious health problems, and very few having a driver’s license. A considerable number of the clients have recently been released from prison; an even larger number have an arrest record from some point in their lives. Despite the fact that a large portion of the program clientele faces serious barriers to finding steady work, quite a few clients are willing to work and can find regular employment with the right kind of assistance.

The Chicago site visit took place in July 1999. Researchers interviewed the administrator of the Chicago Food Stamp E&T Program, the administrator of the south side food stamp E&T office, the field manager for the north region office, two caseworkers for the Earnfare Program, two caseworkers for the non-Earnfare Food Stamp E&T Program, the assistant managers responsible for program orientation, an Earnfare supervisor, the Department of Human Services staff person in charge of overseeing contracts with the Earnfare providers, and the executive director of a firm that holds an Earnfare contract with the State. Researchers also attended a program orientation and client assessment interviews and visited the office of an Earnfare contractor.

The next four sections describe the context in which the program operates, program goals and employment and training opportunities, challenges the program faces, and some of the lessons Chicago has learned while running a work experience program focused on helping clients obtain unsubsidized employment.

### Program Context

#### The Local Economy

The Cook County unemployment rate in the third quarter of 1999 was 4.8 percent, which reflects a fairly strong economy. The overall metropolitan area econo-

<sup>50</sup>U.S. Census Bureau. *Population Estimates for Cities with Populations of 10,000 and Greater*. <http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/metro-city/SC10K98-T4-DR.txt>.

<sup>51</sup>U.S. Census Bureau. *Metropolitan Area Population Estimates, 1990 to 1998*. <http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/metro-city/ma98-01.txt>.

my is even more robust as reflected in unemployment rates for the suburban counties. For example, Lake County, just north of the city of Chicago, had an unemployment rate of 3.2 percent and the western suburbs of DuPage County had a 2.8 percent rate in the third quarter of 1999.<sup>52</sup>

### Program Administration

The Illinois Department of Human Services administers the Food Stamp E&T Program in Chicago. At the time of the visit, there were two food stamp E&T offices in Chicago, though plans had been made to consolidate these into a single office. The Department of Human Services contracts directly with Earnfare employers and assigns clients to Earnfare positions. In addition to the Department-operated segment of the Earnfare program, the Department has contracts with nonprofit and for-profit service providers who are responsible for recruiting eligible clients into the Earnfare Program, and for establishing Earnfare work sites. The Department also administers the regular Food Stamp E&T Program and assigns clients to a variety of components, with a focus on job search and job readiness training.

### Program Staffing

There are two food stamp E&T offices in the city of Chicago. The downtown office has 11 caseworkers staffing the Earnfare Program and 11 staffing the regular Food Stamp E&T Program. Another five workers staff orientation. The south side office has 14 Earnfare caseworkers, 14 regular food stamp E&T workers, and 4 orientation workers. Each office has separate supervisors for each group of caseworkers.

Both food stamp E&T offices provide only employment and training services. There are separate offices for eligibility and recertification. Clients are told to report to the E&T office within 3 weeks after they are approved for food stamp benefits. Orientation workers hold daily orientations in which clients are informed about the program and the option of volunteering for Earnfare if they are eligible. Earnfare caseworkers conduct all orientations and assign clients to an Earnfare employer or work activity. The Earnfare caseworkers have a caseload of approximately 90 clients and the regular food stamp E&T workers have approximately 100 clients. Workers noted this number has

<sup>52</sup>Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs. *County Unemployment Data*. [http://www.commerce.state.il.us/doingbusiness/research/Econ\\_Summ/Cntyunem.htm](http://www.commerce.state.il.us/doingbusiness/research/Econ_Summ/Cntyunem.htm)

dropped partly as a result of a decline in caseloads but also because the department computers were experiencing problems and not all mandatory clients were receiving their E&T referral notices on a weekly basis. Earnfare caseworkers contact organizations that provide Earnfare slots, so workers can obtain a list of clients who reported. Clients who do not report are dropped from the Earnfare program and referred to the regular Food Stamp E&T Program. The regular food stamp E&T caseworkers also monitor client compliance, send notices if the client fails to comply, have them come in and sign a cooperation form if they agree to comply, or send a notice of disqualification if they fail to respond.

### Support Services

Earnfare clients receive up to \$66 per month in transportation expenses to enable them to participate in the program. This reimbursement is given in the form of a transit pass that is usable on buses and “the El.” The cost of this pass is mainly paid with State funds because USDA reimburses the State only \$12.50 a month per participant. In addition, clients participating in job search, as a component or while on Earnfare, are given a flat allowance of \$20 a month to cover transportation costs. Earnfare clients are provided with a \$100 clothing allowance each year to allow them to purchase clothing for use at their work site. This allowance is provided in the form of a voucher usable at a national discount chain store. Clients who find employment are also eligible for a reimbursement of up to \$400 a year for initial employment expenses, such as uniforms and tools. These support services are considered essential in enabling clients to participate in the program.

### Funding

In State FY 1998, Chicago Earnfare contracts totaled \$7.95 million. The cost of administering the State-staffed program was approximately \$4.4 million. This includes cash benefits that are paid exclusively from State funds. Researchers were unable to obtain a cost breakdown of the Food Stamp E&T Food Stamp Program for Chicago specifically. However, in FY 1998, the total Food Stamp E&T Program costs for Illinois were approximately \$33.4 million, with \$7.5 million provided through the Federal grant. The State spent \$6.8 million that was matched by additional Federal dollars. Researchers were informed that more than half of the State food stamp E&T expenditures were used for the program in the city of Chicago.

Clearly, the State of Illinois has made a substantial investment in the Food Stamp E&T Program and in services to the ABAWD population.

## The Earnfare Program

### Goals

Earnfare is designed to give food stamp E&T clients an opportunity to gain work experience and earn cash assistance. The intent is for clients to use the experience gained to transition into unsubsidized employment either at the Earnfare site or elsewhere. Clients are allowed to participate in Earnfare for only 6 consecutive months. The program was developed at a time when Illinois had discontinued its GA Program for able-bodied adults. The 6-month time limit was intended to distinguish the program from GA and reinforce the emphasis on using the program as a transition to employment. Earnfare contractors earn a bonus for clients who become employed while an Earnfare client. The bonus is highest when clients obtain full-time employment with benefits.

Clients can continue to receive food stamps when they have used up their 6 months on Earnfare by participating in the Food Stamp E&T Program, but at that time, they no longer receive cash assistance. The regular Food Stamp E&T Program offers a wider variety of components and serves those who decline to participate in Earnfare, who are not eligible for it because they have already been in the program 6 out of the previous 12 months, or who failed to comply with their Earnfare requirement. As noted earlier, this program focuses on job search and job readiness, though both work experience and education components are available. The regular program also has a stated goal of assisting with the transition to unsubsidized employment.

### Employment and Training Activities

The Earnfare program provides State-funded cash assistance to food stamp recipients. In return for the assistance, clients are required to work at either a for-profit or not-for-profit employer who has agreed to provide Earnfare positions. This program fulfills a client's food stamp E&T requirement. Participants earn up to a maximum of \$294 a month after working off the value of their food stamp benefits. Earnings are computed based on the value of the Federal minimum wage times the number of hours worked. Clients may be required to participate up to a maximum of 80 hours per month in

Earnfare. The State has a ceiling on the number of monthly participants in the Earnfare program; however, only rarely has the program hit that ceiling. In State FY 1998, the average number of Earnfare participants in Chicago was 2,878 per month. This included an average of 1,375 per month in the State-staffed program and 1,503 who were served by the Earnfare contractors. The State-staffed program reported placing 2,276 clients in unsubsidized employment, and the contractors reported 1,012 placements. The next sections describe the two facets of the program and how they operate.

### Services Provided by the State Staff

After they have been found eligible for food stamps, clients are notified by a computer-generated letter that they are required to meet food stamp E&T requirements. Clients report to the food stamp E&T office where they can sign up for Earnfare. All eligible clients are encouraged to sign up for Earnfare.

Clients are assessed by the Earnfare case manager and assigned to an appropriate work site based on that assessment. Specialized staff from the Department of Human Services develop contracts with the work sites which agree to take a certain number of Earnfare participants. In FY 1998, the following work sites were used in the State-staffed program.

- **For-Profit Employers.** There were 110 for-profit employers providing 868 positions. This represented a wide variety of types of employers, including manufacturing, accounting, truck rental, day care, nursing home, food preparation, and the hospitality industry. The main drug store chain in Chicago and a major hotel chain provided the largest number of positions, with each accounting for over 100 slots for Earnfare clients.
- **Nonprofit Employers.** In FY 1998, 39 nonprofit employers provided 503 slots. These included community centers, nursing homes, family service centers, homeless shelters, churches, youth service organizations, and a community hospital. The most slots were with Suburban Job Links, Inc., which provided 155 positions. Suburban Job Links operates an employment service for companies in the Chicago suburbs. The organization works only with companies that provide health insurance to these employees. In addition to finding positions for clients, the organization provides transportation from the city to each work site.

- **The Chicago Housing Authority (CHA).** CHA was the only government agency providing Earnfare positions in FY 1998. A total of 125 slots were available. In FY 1999, CHA discontinued participation in the program as part of a general withdrawal from providing public assistance recipients with work experience positions.

Thus, in FY 1998, the State had direct contracts with 150 employers providing 1,496 positions. Private for-profit employers provided 58 percent of the slots. The State has increased its recruitment of private for-profit employers because it has found that they are much more likely to hire participants than nonprofits or government agencies.

### **Services Provided by Contractors**

In addition to the State-staffed program, in FY 1998, the State had contracts with 16 organizations that provided their own Earnfare services for food stamp participants. The number of total monthly participants budgeted in the contracts was 1,435, with contracts totaling \$7.95 million. The largest contract was for \$3.2 million and allowed the contractor to serve 550 clients per month. Most of the remaining contracts were much smaller, for under \$500,000 and involving fewer than 100 clients per month. The contractors are responsible for recruiting their own clients and work sites. They also provide case management services and distribute transit passes. Contractors are provided with lists of clients required to participate in food stamp E&T and can send them notices informing them of the availability of services. Contractors also recruit clients at food stamp eligibility offices and community organizations. Clients can choose between the State-staffed program or one of the contractors. State staff indicated that the choice often depends on the proximity between the client's residence and the State or contractor's office.

Contractors are reimbursed based upon the following payment schedule.

- A monthly reimbursement of \$72.10 for administrative expenses is made for each Earnfare position filled. A position is counted as filled if a participant has been referred to the position and performs work for as many hours as are necessary to work off the value of his or her food stamps, plus at least 1 additional hour.
- The contractor receives a payment of \$515 for each client placed in an unsubsidized permanent position with between 20 and 34 work hours. The client must have been working a minimum of 30 days.
- A payment of \$772.50 is made for a full-time position of at least 35 hours a week, if there are no medical benefits provided with employment. For this payment, the client must have completed a minimum of 45 days of work.
- A \$1,030 payment is provided for a full-time position with medical benefits. The client must be employed for at least 60 days before this higher payment is provided.

The system is designed to provide an incentive for contractors to find permanent employment for Earnfare participants. Contractors are expected to keep an average of at least 75 percent of their slots filled. In addition, the State contract with Earnfare providers sets a target for unsubsidized placements. Renewal of the contract is contingent on how well a contractor performs in terms of meeting these targets.

One site visit with a contractor helped demonstrate the effectiveness of the incentives used in the Earnfare program. The site visited is a small for-profit communications and marketing firm with four employees, two of whom work part-time on the Earnfare contract. The company originally became involved in the program by serving as an Earnfare work site. The firm proposed to become a provider and won a contract in 1996. The company's Earnfare supervisor was hired through the Earnfare program when the organization was a work site.

The firm's director is highly motivated to find her clients employment. A large part of the motivation is financial. She says the \$72 reimbursement for administrative expenses does not cover her costs and she needs clients to find employment if her company is not going to lose money. The organization has developed some policies that facilitate this goal:

- The agency only contracts with employment sites that are going to hire clients.
- Contractors are asked to request only twice as many clients as they are planning to hire. If employers say they are planning to hire two people during the year, the agency will offer them four placements.
- Clients are limited to 3 months at any particular work site. The rationale is that after 3 months employers have had enough time to make a decision

about whether they will hire an Earnfare participant. Employers are contacted within 2 months to review the potential for permanent placement.

- Clients are removed from the program for a failure to arrive at work on time or attend scheduled appointments.
- Clients are required to participate in workshops that are designed and led by the company president. These workshops are intended to build job search skills, and they cover resume preparation, interviewing skills, appearance, hygiene, and motivation.
- Clients are generally required to complete their assigned work hours in the first 2 weeks of the month by working 40-hour weeks. They are then required to attend the workshops and conduct the job search.
- The contractor has been able to develop additional support services. Through contacts in the community, the company is able to offer clients a free eye exam through a local college and vouchers for eye-glasses through an optometry chain store.

### **The Full Service Food Stamp E&T Program**

Clients who decline to participate in Earnfare, who have been discontinued from Earnfare because of non-compliance, or who are not eligible for Earnfare because they have already participated in the program for 6 out of the last 12 months, are referred to the local “full-service” Food Stamp E&T Program. This program provides a full range of components, though most are only used by a small number of clients. The following components are included:

- **Job Search.** Clients are required to make 20 job contacts during a month of job search. Individuals can be assigned to job search for a maximum of 8 weeks in any 12-consecutive-month period.
- **Job Readiness.** This activity involves group activities designed to develop effective self-directed job search techniques. Classes are conducted by the Department of Human Services, the JTPA Program, and local community colleges. Case managers indicated that job search and job readiness are by far the most commonly assigned components for non-Earnfare clients in Chicago.

- **Work Experience.** Clients are required to work a limited number of hours determined by the value of their food stamp benefits divided by the minimum wage. Positions are with nonprofit organizations, including the Department of Human Services, the Salvation Army, various thrift shops, or clinics. The jobs mainly consist of building maintenance with some clerical positions. Case managers indicate that less than 5 percent of clients are assigned to this component.
- **Education.** This component includes GED preparation, adult basic education, literacy classes, and English as a Second Language courses. Classes are offered at city colleges and community organizations. The case managers who were interviewed indicated that usually between 6 to 8 of their clients are participating in an education component at any one time.
- **JTPA and Vocational Training.** A similarly small number of clients participate in job training through JTPA. Eligible and interested clients are referred to the program, which is operated out of the mayor’s office of the city of Chicago.

The full-service Food Stamp E&T Program and Earnfare program are part of Chicago’s history of serving the ABAWD population, which predates the BBA. The city continues to face challenges in designing a service strategy for the population and faces new challenges that have arisen as a result of the BBA. These are discussed in the following section.

## **Challenges in Serving the ABAWD Population**

Chicago did not have to retool its Food Stamp E&T Program to focus on ABAWDs because this was already the target group. Parents with dependent children have been exempted from food stamp work requirements. The main change in response to the ABAWD provisions in Chicago was to lower the mandatory age for participation in food stamp E&T from 60 to 50. Program staff described a number of challenges they face in providing E&T services to the ABAWD population.

### **Main Perceived Challenges**

- **Client Compliance With the Program.** Client compliance is a problem at all stages in the program. Many clients do not report to the food stamp E&T



office until they have had benefits discontinued for failing to respond to two notices to report. About half the clients who are assigned to an Earnfare position do not report.

- **Major Client Needs.** There are a number of client needs that administrators and caseworkers said the program had difficulties meeting. Those that were cited most often are described:
  - » **Lack of Access to Medical Services.** Many clients have unmet medical services needs. While they are able to access services through Cook County Hospital, there are often very long waits. Many clients allow medical problems to fester because of this. Under the GA Program, the clients were given medical assistance, but that is no longer available.
  - » **Retention Services.** Earnfare administrators express pride in their success at finding employment for Earnfare participants. However, the program lacks any long-term followup. Administrators believe they would be able to improve their results even further if they were able to offer services to clients after they find unsubsidized employment.
  - » **Substance Abuse Treatment.** Many clients have substance abuse problems. The caseworkers are able to refer them to a list of providers, but are unable to offer help beyond the referral. Many of the providers have waiting lists and it is difficult to access the programs. There was a time when providers accepted appointments for clients, but that is no longer done.
  - » **Work Slots and Employment for Former Prisoners.** Former prisoners represent a difficult population to serve because many Earnfare employers will not accept them and it is difficult for them to find permanent employment. The office does work with providers who focus on assisting former prisoners, but additional services are needed.
  - » **Transportation to the Suburbs.** The Chicago suburbs are experiencing extensive job growth, but clients often have trouble accessing the jobs. The transit cards cannot be used on the commuter railroads that serve the suburbs and many of the job sites are away from public transportation.
- **Managing Private Contractors and Earnfare Employers.** The State faces challenges in managing the employers in the State-staffed program and the private Earnfare contractors. In the past, the State has had contracts with over 200 employers in the State-staffed program, which presented problems in terms of maintaining oversight. In addition, many of these employers were not hiring Earnfare clients. While many providers in the contracted Earnfare program had performed quite well, there were others that had developed difficulties in serving clients and meeting administrative requirements. These included some of the largest contractors.
- **Consolidation of Services to a Single Office.** The State has decided to consolidate all food stamp E&T services into a single downtown office in Chicago. In addition, the workers in the office are going to be assigned responsibility for recertifying their clients. At the time of the site visit, there was a great deal of uncertainty regarding this change. While the building could clearly handle some additional clients, there was concern that adding clients from the second eligibility office and handling recertifications would create space problems.
- **Concerns Over Waiver Expiration.** As noted earlier, Chicago is waived from the ABAWD time limit. Program administrators expressed concern that the strong economy in Chicago will eventually result in the waiver renewal being turned down. Though the good economy does help clients find work, the Chicago program would face a serious challenge without the waiver. The loss of the waiver would require a major reconfiguration of services. While some of the activities, including the Earnfare program, clearly fulfill the ABAWD requirement, a large share of the regular food stamp E&T population participate in activities that do not count for the ABAWD work requirement. A large group of clients would have to be shifted into other activities. Moving more regular E&T clients into work experience slots could potentially undermine some of the strengths of the Earnfare program. More employers would have to be recruited who are willing to accept clients who would only be required to work between 20 to 25 hours a month. The size of the effort could require staff to be reassigned from the Earnfare program.

## Addressing Challenges

While the State has taken steps to address some of the challenges mentioned above, a number of them really concern uncertainty over the future and thus do not immediately require action. The State is also limited by budget concerns. While the Earnfare program has received steady funding, there is not enough slack in the budget to allow for any major expansion of services. This section describes some of the program features and actions taken by the State to address the challenges previously listed.

### Encouraging Compliance

Earnfare's cash benefit is designed as an incentive to encourage compliance. If clients fail to comply with their Earnfare requirement, they are removed from the Earnfare program and cannot return for 5 months. The client can keep food stamp benefits if he or she complies with the usually less-intensive food stamp E&T requirements. This provision allows caseworkers to penalize clients for noncompliance with Earnfare without having to worry about cutting off their food stamp benefits. Despite these efforts, clients frequently fail to comply with program requirements. Program staff indicate that many clients have so many problems in their lives that they are likely to continue to be inconsistent participants.

### Expanding Employment Opportunities

As just noted, the office is working with providers who focus on serving former prisoners. In addition, the office has an Earnfare contract with Suburban Job Link, which finds inner city residents jobs with benefits in the suburbs and then provides them with transportation to the work site. This organization is able to provide employers with workers in a tight job market and help ensure the workers' reliability by addressing their transportation needs.

### Reexamining Earnfare Contracts

The State has reexamined how it provides Earnfare services and has taken steps to improve the program by reducing the number of employers who provide services in the State-staffed program and taking a careful look at the performance of providers in the contracted program. The State has deliberately reduced the number of employers used in the State-staffed program. Those employers who only provided a very small number of positions have been eliminated. There has been a focus on increasing the percentage of slots

provided by for-profit companies because experience indicates that they are more likely to lead to a paid position for the client. The total number of employers had been reduced from 200 to 150 by State FY 1998. The State started FY 2000 with 90 employers and 65 of these were for-profit firms. The State had also found that its greatest success occurred when working with the headquarters of larger firms. Both the Marriott Corporation and Walgreens are providing multiple slots at various locations throughout the city as a result of decisions made to participate by corporate headquarters. This enables the State to provide a large number of Earnfare positions without having to manage multiple contracts.

The State has also taken a close look at Earnfare contractors. Providers who had failed to meet performance expectations included in their contracts were removed from the program. Experience indicated that some of the larger providers were some of the least successful and a few of these did not have their contracts renewed. Five out of 14 contracts were not renewed for FY 2000, and one new contractor was added. Some of the smaller firms were given additional Earnfare slots.

By taking a serious look at its contracts, the State is seeking to use experience to craft an Earnfare program that better serves the goal of finding unsubsidized employment for program participants.

## Discussion

Program administrators expressed great pride in their record of finding employment for Earnfare clients. They noted that the program served a challenging population that has few options for finding employment services beyond the Food Stamp E&T Program. They were aware that many States have stopped serving this population in GA Programs and were resistant to providing services through the Food Stamp E&T Program. Helping over 3,000 clients a year find unsubsidized employment is seen as a real accomplishment.

Earnfare's greatest successes have been with private companies. In a tight labor market, these companies have found it useful to participate in a program that allows them to "audition" employees on a trial basis. State staff and the Earnfare contractor who was visited both indicated that private companies are far more likely to hire clients than nonprofits. While Illinois has sought to use private employers, other States face obstacles in implementing such a strategy because

Federal regulations prohibit assigning food stamp E&T workfare clients to private for-profit employers.<sup>53</sup> Clients can be assigned to private employers in a work experience component, but FNS guidance on the Balanced Budget Act and proposed regulations covering PRWORA inform the States that great caution must be exercised to do so in a way that complies with the Food Stamp Act and other Federal laws such as the Fair Labor Standards Act.<sup>54</sup> Many States may be reluctant to develop work experience programs that use private for-profit

employers because they are uncertain how to do so without violating Federal law. This reluctance may lead to State and local offices passing up opportunities to recruit employers who can hire program participants.

The Chicago Food Stamp E&T Program has taken advantage of a growing economy and a tight labor market. Employers need entry-level workers and have often exhausted their usual sources. A workfare or work experience program focused on finding clients permanent employment can take advantage of this economic climate. The program also suggests that careful oversight of contractors and work sites is needed if programs that use either are to succeed. While employers are providing a service by offering work slots, there also should be an expectation that they will hire clients if openings exist. Especially when the economy is good, there may be a need to reconsider whether a particular work site is right for the program. Additional recruiting may result in work places more likely to hire clients. The Earnfare program suggests that strategies are available to improve workfare's usefulness as an employment and training tool.

<sup>53</sup>The distinction between workfare and work experience programs is not clear cut. In this report, food stamp E&T components involving a work assignment have generally been referred to as workfare. However, the type of employer that can be used in each type of program is an important distinction that is important to understanding Chicago's program. Thus, in the Chicago site visit report, the term workfare has not been used.

<sup>54</sup>FNS, USDA, *Balanced Budget Act of 1997 (Pub L. 105-33) Questions and Answers-Set 2*. April 23, 1998. FNS, USDA, Proposed Regulations "Food Stamp Program: Work Provisions of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996," *Federal Register*, Volume 64, No. 246, December 23, 1999

## Greenville County, South Carolina

This section summarizes the findings from a site visit to the Food Stamp E&T Program in Greenville County, South Carolina. Despite a relatively small budget, this program is able to provide many options for ABAWDs to meet their work requirements because most of the services are not provided directly through program funds, but instead services were provided through existing E&T programs in the community. These partnerships allow services to be provided to ABAWDs at little or no cost to the Food Stamp E&T Program. Greenville is the only site visited that opted not to provide workfare; instead, all of its allowable activities for ABAWDs are vocational training and education components. The county had previously provided food stamp E&T services for non-ABAWDs, but discontinued these as a result of the BBA changes.

Currently, services are available to ABAWDs through four different providers: Resources Services, Inc., a Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA)-funded vocational training site; United Ministries, a private not-for-profit organization funded primarily through the United Way; the local office of the South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department for clients medically documented to need specialized vocational rehabilitation in order to become employable; and the DSS Family Independence Program (the State TANF program), which provides job search and education services to ABAWDs who the food stamp caseworkers determine to need basic skills training before they can successfully seek out and obtain employment.

The Food Stamp E&T Program serves all of Greenville County. The county's population in 1998 was 353,845.<sup>55</sup> That year, the estimated population of the city of Greenville was approximately one-sixth of the county's population, or 56,463.<sup>56</sup> According to the South Carolina Employment Security Commission, the county's population growth in the 1990s was

<sup>55</sup>U.S. Census Bureau. *County Population Estimates for July 1, 1998 and Population Change for April 1, 1990 to July 1, 1998*. [http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/county/co-98-298C2\\_08.txt](http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/county/co-98-298C2_08.txt).

<sup>56</sup>U.S. Census Bureau. *Population Estimates for Cities and Populations of 10,000 and Greater*. <http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/metro-city/SC10K98-T4-DR.txt>.

concentrated in the five suburban municipalities surrounding the city of Greenville.<sup>57</sup>

The findings in this report are based on a 2-day site visit to the DSS office and several of its contracting agencies. During the visit, researchers interviewed the two case-work supervisors who oversee the food stamp eligibility staff who refer ABAWDs to E&T components. One of these supervisors is responsible for managing the Food Stamp E&T Program and its relations with contracting agencies. Also interviewed were the Director of the Greenville County DSS office and her management staff, the two DSS caseworkers who specialize in serving ABAWDs and tracking their work and E&T participation, the director of training for electrical and carpentry work at Resource Services, Inc., and the manager of the Employment Readiness program at United Ministries. Researchers also attended a "survival skills" class offered by DSS staff, which recently became available to both TANF clients and ABAWDs.

The next four sections provide information on the environment and program context in which the Food Stamp E&T Program operates; an overview of the characteristics of the ABAWD clientele as reported by the DSS staff and the program goals and specific E&T services offered for ABAWDs; the challenges faced by the Food Stamp E&T Program staff in assisting ABAWDs to meet their work requirements and how the program has addressed some of these challenges; and the major strengths and lessons learned from this case study.

### Program Context

#### The Local Economy

At the time of the site visit, Greenville County was benefiting from a strong economy. In 1996, the per capita income (PCI) in the county was \$24,058, almost 21 percent higher than the State per capita income. In 1999, the unemployment rates for the county and city of Greenville, at 2.5 and 3.1 percent, respectively, were below both the national average and State aver-

<sup>57</sup>South Carolina Employment Security Commission., *Monthly Employment Trends*, March 1999.

age.<sup>58</sup> In May 1999, the month before the site visit, the area's unemployment rate was the third lowest in the State.<sup>59</sup> According to the local DSS staff, the move of several auto manufacturing companies to the Greenville area, including a large BMW assembly plant, has played an important role in the county's recent economic success.

### Program Administration

The Food Stamp Program is administered under the Economic Services division of Greenville County's Department of Social Services. The array of services described and observed during this site visit represent a dramatic shift for the program, which also required a shift in the administration of the program and the types of agencies who provided direct services. In 1996, the large majority of food stamp clients subject to E&T requirements were assigned to job search services. These services were provided by the local office of Employment Security. As just noted, eligibility assessment and referrals of ABAWDs for the Food Stamp E&T Program are done in-house by DSS eligibility workers, at the time of the food stamp eligibility interview. The E&T services are still provided by non-food stamp personnel, but now they are provided primarily through new partnering organizations who have experience working with the ABAWD population and through staff of the Family Independence Program.

Each of the four organizations partnering with the Food Stamp Program to serve the ABAWD population and help them meet their work requirement is briefly described below. The services provided by agencies other than the Department of Social Services are not funded with Food Stamp E&T dollars, but instead are administered through existing programs, the funding sources of which are either private grants or State block grant funds.

- **The Department of Social Services.** The Family Independence Program (FIP) and the Food Stamp Program are both administered by the County DSS and are co-located in the same building complex. Since spring 1999, ABAWDs have been referred to an education component that DSS also provides to its FIP clients. ABAWDs referred to this component

are screened for their educational needs, participate in a series of job search training sessions (called Survival Skills) and receive individualized case management services—all of which are offered by the same staff who serve FIP clients.

- **United Ministries.** United Ministries, an interdenominational nonprofit organization in the City of Greenville, has an array of services for the poor. One of its services, primarily funded by the United Way, is an Employment Readiness program. This program assists unemployed and the underemployed in finding employment, and the newly employed in keeping their jobs. United Ministries has been serving food stamp clients since welfare reform and the implementation of the work requirements for ABAWDs. It began as a workfare component for nearly all ABAWDs when the Food Stamp E&T Program did not have the array of referral services available that it had at the time of the site visits. United Ministries no longer serves all ABAWDs, but instead targets those identified as "job ready" with intensive job search skills and placement services. These E&T services are funded through grants received by United Ministries and thus are provided at no cost to the Food Stamp Program.
- **Resource Services, Inc.** Resource Services, Inc., provides vocational training in the skilled trades (i.e., for electricians, carpenters, and plumbers) and in computer skills for low-income adults. The training is provided at no cost to the Food Stamp Program as it is funded by what at the time of the site visit were Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) funds. Every ABAWD who is referred for training is guaranteed a JTPA slot if a funding for a slot is still available at that time of the year.
- **Vocational Rehabilitation.** The local office of the South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department serves ABAWDs with physician-documented limitations, such as drug and/or alcohol abuse. These clients are then exempted from the ABAWD requirements until they complete vocational rehabilitation. After completing their rehabilitation, they can be referred to an E&T component if the vocational rehabilitation program has not successfully helped them find an appropriate job.

### Staffing

In the Greenville County Department of Social Services, the Food Stamp Program is served by 20 caseworkers

<sup>58</sup>South Carolina Employment Security Commission. *South Carolina Labor Market Information: Economic Data*. <http://www.sces.org/lmi/data/labor-force/greenville.asp>.

<sup>59</sup>South Carolina Employment Security Commission. *South Carolina Labor Market Information: Monthly Employment Trends Press Release*. <http://www.sces.org/lmi/news/met9905.htm>.

on site and 3 caseworkers at remote locations. Two food stamp supervisors manage the caseworkers. The supervisors answer policy-related questions and assist caseworkers in determining where clients should be referred. The supervisors also train staff on ABAWD policy and food stamp E&T requirements. In addition, the two supervisors train caseworkers in other counties about the Food Stamp E&T Program.

All of the caseworkers in Greenville County conduct intake of clients for the Food Stamp Program, determine client eligibility, and recertify participants. Each caseworker has a caseload of between 295 and 350 clients. Caseworkers assess whether clients are required to participate in the Food Stamp E&T Program. If a client is required to participate, the caseworker assesses his or her needs, skills, and abilities and determines which E&T component accepting clients best matches the client's needs. The caseworker offers clients one of the ABAWD qualifying activities offered by the county. The offer is made by giving the client a referral form that tells clients when and where to show up for the assigned E&T component.

Two of the Greenville County Food Stamp Program caseworkers were given training and the responsibility to specifically track program participation and E&T participation of all ABAWDs in the county. Caseworkers track ABAWDs by:

- Calling the programs offering the E&T component and determining whether each client assigned to a component is participating;
- Sending letters to clients who are not participating;
- Sanctioning clients if they are not complying;
- Completing a tracking form identifying employment and sanctioning status;
- Recertifying ABAWDs every 3 months; and
- Notifying ABAWDs not meeting the work requirement when their 3-month time limit is complete.

While they are responsible for tracking all ABAWDs and providing assistance to other caseworkers regarding ABAWD policies, these two caseworkers still maintain an ongoing caseload of non-ABAWD clients. If other caseworkers are unsure of which component an ABAWD should be assigned to, the caseworkers meet with their supervisor or one of the caseworkers specializing in ABAWD cases.

## Support Services

Clients in need of transportation can receive bus tickets or vouchers for bus tickets through either the organization providing the E&T component they have been offered or through the Family Independence Program. The Food Stamp E&T Program can also provide uniforms and tools. Eligibility for these support services is determined on a case-by-case basis. DSS workers are also able to offer clients Salvation Army vouchers for clothes. While DSS does not directly offer assistance with treatment for substance or mental illness, clients who exhibit these problems can be referred to vocational rehabilitation. Additional support services are offered by United Ministries for participants in the Employment Readiness Program.

## Funding

The county estimated that it was going to spend approximately \$51,000 on program costs in FY 1999. This included salary for two workers, purchase of a computer for tracking ABAWDs' adherence to the work requirements and their time limit, and for supportive services and material costs. In addition, each participant in the Survival Skills class costs approximately \$175. There are no costs to the Food Stamp E&T Program for direct services provided through Resource Services, Inc., or United Ministries, as these were funded through other sources. However, it is interesting to note that the vocational training cost was estimated at approximately \$2,250 per participant for 10 weeks and the cost of the Employment Readiness services was estimated at \$500 per participant for an average of 2 months; both costs are far above the maximum reimbursement rate per work slot from the Federal Food Stamp E&T Program.

## The Greenville E&T Program

As noted earlier, the Greenville County Food Stamp E&T Program only serves ABAWDs. According to the DSS staff, the ABAWD population that is targeted by this program is diverse, and includes single adults, single young adults in their late teens who recently graduated from high school and live with their families, and older women whose children have left the household and are now seeking to re-enter the labor market. There are some homeless individuals among the ABAWD caseload in this county, but this is not a predominant group as it is in the other urban programs visited for this study.

## Goals

The goal of caseworkers in Greenville County is to get ABAWDs into a qualified E&T activity as soon as possible. Caseworkers are being asked by their supervisors to get every ABAWD into a qualifying activity within the first month after eligibility is determined in order to maximize the State's reimbursement from the Federal Government for the provision of E&T services and prevent the ABAWDs from using up their 3-month time limit for receipt of food stamps. Besides meeting these goals, program managers, supervisors, and front-line staff concur that the true goal of their efforts is to help their clients find a job and become self-sufficient.

## E&T Activities

A variety of E&T components are offered in Greenville County, ranging from job search to intense vocational training or vocational rehabilitation. The largest number of ABAWDs participates in job-related education programs at DSS and at United Ministries. The following table illustrates the range of activities being offered ABAWDs, the number participating in each component for January to May 1999, and notes the components that qualify to meet the ABAWD work requirement.

**Participation in Greenville County Food Stamp E&T Program by component type, January 1999 to May 1999**

<b>Component</b>	<b>Is it a qualifying activity for ABAWDs?</b>	<b>Number of ABAWDs participating</b>
Assessment	No	21
Department of Alcohol and other Drug Abuse Services	No	1
Job-related education (through DSS and United Ministries)	Yes	157
Vocational training (through JTPA-funded provider)	Yes	22
Vocational rehabilitation	Yes	21

All ABAWDs in Greenville County are required to participate in an E&T component. Caseworkers assess clients and refer them to the component that they feel best meets the clients' needs. The sequencing of activities a client is placed in is based on the client's needs, skills, and abilities. Each of the qualifying activities available to ABAWDs is described in more detail.

### **Survival Skills Class**

The Survival Skills class is provided through the Department of Social Services. It had in the past pri-

marily served clients in the Family Independence Program but recently began serving food stamp E&T clients. This component focuses on job-related training. Individuals are trained in skills needed to become employed. Survival skills include job readiness training, family life skills training, and counseling from needed sources, such as the Department of Mental Health and the Department of Alcohol and other Drug Abuse Services. Training consists of three series of week-long classes, which include the opportunity for one-on-one sessions with a case manager.

The first series covers employment. Participants are trained in how to effectively conduct a job search and how to access labor market information. Participants assess their skills and develop career goals. Participants receive instruction on interviewing, job search techniques, use of telephone strategies to obtain job interviews, completing employment applications, and assertiveness training. The second series covers attitude. Issues discussed include developing and maintaining a positive attitude, working with a team, and coping with conflict. Resume writing and mock interviews are also covered in this series. The next portion of the class addresses the personal, social, and work-related needs of the individual. Topics discussed include financial issues (e.g., budgeting), stress management, goal setting, general communication skills, anger management, motivation, and self-esteem.

During this site visit, HSR staff observed one session of a series of classes offered to Survival Skills participants. The class, attended by approximately 20 FIP and food stamp clients, was facilitated by 3 staff members from DSS in a very interactive and participatory manner. During each Survival Skills session, the participants have a formal lesson and there is time for discussion of job goals, skills, job application experiences, and fears. At the class observed by researchers, the combination of mothers from FIP and single adults from the Food Stamp Program resulted in a mix of young adults with no significant job history and older adults who had been out of the job market for some time but clearly had job experience that was marketable. During this session, clients discussed what they perceived to be their barriers to employment and strategized as to how to address these barriers when completing an application. DSS staff report that all Survival Skill participants receive appropriate job referrals during the class, many are employed before the sessions are over, and participation is high for the entire 8-week session.

### Employment Readiness Program

Another option available to ABAWDs in Greenville is the Employment Readiness Program at United Ministries. The trained employment counselor at United Ministries works with ABAWDs as a group and one-on-one to help them secure the paperwork they need (e.g., forms of identification for the homeless) and confront the barriers which prevent people from getting and keeping jobs. The program focuses on assisting participants in finding permanent full-time employment with benefits and salary between \$6.00-\$10.00 per hour and on job training if skills, job stability, or job experience are lacking. The goal of the program is to help people become self-sufficient. The Employment Readiness Program consists of a four-step process. Clients must attend an orientation, complete intake materials, attend an employability skills workshop, and attend one-on-one counseling sessions for job referrals.

All ABAWDs referred from the Food Stamp Program, along with others who voluntarily participate or are referred from other agencies, come to United Ministries for their initial orientation with a social worker and attend an hour-long orientation. The rules of the program are discussed (e.g., keep appointments) and a video and discussion of work ethics is held. During orientation, staff determine if participants need any documents of identity, such as a birth certificate or driver's license. Clients lacking necessary verification of identity, such as a birth certificate, a social security card, or driver's license, can receive assistance to obtain these through United Ministries. Participants are informed that drug tests are a common procedure of job applications and they are informed of the length of time a drug will stay in the system. United Ministries explains drug tests because they don't want to set up a client for failure. Clients who admit their addiction problems are referred for treatment. Additional resources available to clients to help them become job-ready include clothing vouchers for Salvation Army, and bus tickets (\$350 a month is available for transportation to interviews and for 1 or 2 months of transportation to a job). Special services are available to the homeless. United Ministries provides shower facilities to those in need and a local church donates alarm clocks.

United Ministries has built an impressive network of companies willing to hire graduates of the Employment Readiness Program. United Ministries has an updated list of jobs available in the community and spends time ensuring that the jobs clients are referred to match their skills and abilities and the

employers' needs. One of the major employers is Goodwill. Approximately 10 percent of the clients are sent to Goodwill for paid on-the-job training. Goodwill has contracts with a number of companies in the area and holds a workshop where clients receive training and employers receive temporary help with manual labor tasks.

United Ministries provided data on program outcomes. The following table illustrates that over two-thirds of clients who attended an orientation session at Employment Readiness in 1998 and in the first quarter of 1999 went on to complete the training. Of those who completed the training, over one-half obtained a job paying between \$6.50 and \$10.00 an hour. In 1998, of all those employed, over one-half maintained their jobs for at least 90 days.

#### Employment Readiness Program participant outcomes\*

<i>Time period</i>	<i>Full year 1998</i>	<i>First quarter 1999</i>
Number of clients that attended orientation	556	110
Clients completing orientation and enrolling in Employment Readiness Program (percent of those attending orientation)	375 (67%)	79 (72%)
Percent of Employment Readiness participants obtaining jobs paying between \$6.50-\$10/hour	55%	75%
Job retention at 30 days	80%	90%
Job retention at 60 days	68%	58%
Job retention at 90 days	57%	Not yet available

\*Data provided from United Ministries of Greenville in summer 1999.

United Ministries staff believe their Employment Readiness program is extremely successful. Employers have expressed to United Ministries their high level of satisfaction with the clients whom they have hired. Employers appreciate that clients are screened before being sent to their organization. Another sign of the success of the program is the positive feedback staff receive from program graduates. Clients return to United Ministries to let staff know their success stories, such as remaining employed, purchasing a home, or going to college. An additional sign of the Employment Readiness Program's success is that it has contin-



ued to receive funding through United Way and has maintained strong working relationships with the Food Stamp E&T Program. The Employment Readiness Program director said that she continues to receive funds and program referrals because they have been able to demonstrate the program's continued success.

Although they are a contracting agency and expressed some difficulty completing all of the required paperwork for DSS, United Ministries believe they have a successful working relationship with the Food Stamp E&T Program and with the ABAWDs who are referred to them. Staff mention the respect, ease of communication, understanding, and cooperative atmosphere as the best attributes of their working relationship with program. FSP staff also mentioned a positive working relationship with United Ministries.

### **Resource Services**

Resource Services is a 10-week vocational training program funded through JTPA. Participants must attend hands-on training sessions lasting 10 hours for 4 days each week. Training is provided in electrical, carpentry, clerical, and computer skills. ABAWDs are primarily routed to the electrical and carpentry training classes. The Food Stamp E&T Program staff believe Resource Services provides excellent training in these manual trades. When clients complete training, they are ready for employment. Onsite hands-on training is provided using real equipment from the field. Training is continuous and open-entry. Instructors provide individual training as well as group instruction. As an added bonus, Resource Services provides \$300 worth of tools to those participants who complete 10 weeks of training and/or 400 hours. While only a handful of ABAWDs can participate in this resource-intensive training each session and a total of 22 participated in the first 5 months of 1999, the instructor noted that every food stamp client who has completed this course has gone on to obtain a skilled job.

The Resource Services program was viewed very positively by DSS staff. The caseworkers see the training and the tools provided as being very effective for helping clients with their long-term employability. At the time of the site visit, JTPA funding had been exhausted for the year, so referrals from the Food Stamp E&T Program to Resource Services were on hold until July. The DSS caseworkers were disappointed and felt that ABAWDs were missing out on an important opportunity when the program ran out of funding for the year and could no longer accept clients. They were very

much looking forward to being able to refer clients to the program again when the new fiscal year started.

### **Vocational Rehabilitation**

Food stamp E&T staff refer an ABAWD to the state Vocational Rehabilitation program when the ABAWD has a doctor's certification that he or she has a work limitation (e.g., substance abuse, mental health issues, work disability). DSS staff report that most of the food stamp E&T clients who have been referred to vocational rehabilitation have had substance abuse problems. In order not to be subject to the work requirement and time limit, referred clients are required to comply with the course of treatment and training determined by the Vocational Rehabilitation program. ABAWDs who complete a course of treatment and do not find employment are referred back to DSS for placement in another food stamp E&T component.

## **Challenges in Serving the ABAWD Population**

### **Main Perceived Challenges**

DSS caseworkers and contracting agency staff cited four main challenges in helping ABAWDs to meet their work requirements and in delivering a program that is operated in large part through contracting agencies. They are the multiple barriers to employment for ABAWDs and their resultant low compliance rate; funding issues; difficulties of tracking clients served by multiple partner agencies; and the size of the caseload for food stamp eligibility workers who are designated to work closely with ABAWDs and providers and encourage participation in E&T services.

### **Multiple Barriers to Employment for Certain Groups of ABAWDs**

DSS caseworkers indicate that approximately 20 percent of ABAWDs comply and complete participation in a component. Staff remarked that the most promising ABAWD clients are 18- to 19-year-olds who are often motivated to comply with the program requirements. Young married couples without children and older women are two groups of ABAWDs in Greenville who are considered more likely to participate and benefit from the Food Stamp E&T services.

Food stamp staff describe clients who are homeless and those with substance abuse problems as the most

difficult to serve in the E&T Program. Many of these individuals in the county are not medically certified as unable to work and are thus subject to the ABAWD work requirement and time-limit rules. DSS and partnering agency staff mentioned that the predominant barriers for this group of ABAWDs are drug and alcohol abuse, lack of desire or motivation to work, lack of transportation, low literacy, their physical appearance, and low self-esteem.

### ***Funding Issues***

DSS program staff in the county said that they would like increased funding for Food Stamp E&T services and more flexibility in spending for supportive services. In addition, though the staff felt that the vocational training component at Resource Services was the most effective E&T component for adult male ABAWDs, there was limited JTPA funding for this training site and the available funds did not even last through the State fiscal year, causing the program to close its doors for new students for the last few months of the year.

### ***Tracking ABAWDs' Participation in E&T***

Caseworkers noted that tracking ABAWDs' participation in the E&T program and whether or not they have found employment and maintained employment has been challenging. While the staff like the diversity of services available through the partnering organizations, they expressed concern that with multiple-service providers it has been difficult to monitor program participation and client outcomes. Food stamp staff find it challenging to consistently communicate with partnering agencies about the ABAWDs who are referred.

Staff at United Ministries told researchers that their relationship with the DSS and their service to ABAWDs could be improved if clients could be transported over to United Ministries instead of simply referred. They also suggested it would be helpful if a DSS caseworker could be stationed at United Ministries so that eligibility could be conducted on ABAWDs who arrive first at United Ministries for assistance and to facilitate client tracking.

### ***Size of the Food Stamp Caseworkers' Caseload Makes Individual Client Followup Difficult***

The two caseworkers who are responsible for coordinating the referrals to food stamp E&T components and for tracking and following up with individual clients and providers emphasized that it is hard to

carry a full food stamp caseload for eligibility and maintain ongoing contact with the ABAWDs and the E&T providers. These caseworkers suggested that ABAWDs might be better served if some staff were selected to focus on this population and its associated tracking requirements.

### **Addressing Challenges**

DSS has taken some steps to address the challenge created by multiple contracting agencies that are referral sources, but not funded by the Food Stamp Program. There is now a much stronger formal referral system with required paperwork for the DSS and partner agency staff. DSS staff are now requesting that each partnering agency return the referral form for all food stamp E&T clients, whether or not they attend their first E&T session or meeting. As a result of this tracking system, caseworkers say they have increased communication with the partner organizations not only for mandatory tracking functions, but they also understand their clients' needs and barriers to employment in more depth. Staff say that Resource Services has been especially accessible and accommodating in this effort.

The program manager indicated that he would like to have funding to conduct followup to understand the reasons for noncompliance in the program. He suggested that such research could shed light on whether clients are not complying because they do not want to work or if there is something the Food Stamp E&T Program can do to increase compliance. He suggested, if funding would allow, that there be a system for consistent feedback between clients, E&T providers and caseworkers.

## **Discussion**

County administrators and staff in Greenville have been extremely resourceful in creating a diverse range of E&T options tailored to the needs of different groups within the ABAWD population. By creating relationships with community agencies and taking advantage of programs that receive funding from other sources, the Food Stamp Program has been able to offer a wider range of activities than would otherwise be possible given the program's funding.

The transition to using the services of other community agencies was not entirely smooth. At first, United Ministries ended up with nearly all the ABAWDs

referred to their services. This caseload was too large for their staff to handle, and the program almost had to shut its doors to the Food Stamp E&T Program. Since that time, adjustments have been made and the United Ministries receives referrals for those ABAWDs who are primarily job-ready and whom the DSS staff think could benefit from the Employment Readiness track. By the time of the site visit in spring 1999, DSS had identified a group of partnering agencies and had established successful referral and communication strategies. Resources were also being shared so that a group of ABAWDs could be referred to services once used only for FIP clients. As a result of these efforts at the time of the site visit, the department was able to offer a qualifying E&T service to every ABAWD subject to the time limit and was boasting an increase in program participation from 20 to 50 percent.

DSS staff stressed that building relationships with community service organizations is key to the operation of their Food Stamp E&T Program. United Ministries, for example, not only provides direct E&T services, but also provides its trainees with support services that cannot be funded through Federal and State Food Stamp E&T dollars. Once these relationships are established, staff believe that, to successfully serve ABAWDs, a program must pay attention to the following three strategies:

- **Individualized Assessments.** Thorough assessments are needed to determine each client's needs and abilities so that clients can be best matched with a placement.

- **Matching the E&T Services to the Needs of Local Employers.** The partner agency staff recommended that E&T program assess the employment needs of businesses in the community before developing and offering training and other E&T opportunities.
- **Maintaining Ongoing Communication Between the Food Stamp Program and Partner Agencies.** It was repeatedly stressed that ongoing communication between the food stamp agency and partner agencies is critical to the success of the referral process and can assist ABAWDs in maintaining their food stamp benefits when eligible. Communication should be maintained through both formal and informal channels, and be designed to track clients, find out the partner agencies' perceptions of their needs, and make continuous improvements in the referral and tracking systems.

While Greenville County continues to struggle with concerns over ABAWD participation issues, drawing on other community organizations has proved a successful strategy. The county has developed a broad range of components that can meet the varying needs of the ABAWD population and that appear to have a proven track record of success. Two of the partner agencies—Resource Services, Inc. and United Ministries—reported high rates of employment and average salaries above the minimum wage for those ABAWDs who attend their training and job referral programs. Further, these services are used at no direct cost to the Food Stamp E&T Program.