



PARTNERSHIPS FOR OPENING DOORS

A summit on integrating employment and housing strategies to prevent and end homelessness

Effective Practices for Employment and Training

Job-seekers experiencing or at-risk of homelessness have diverse needs and strengths, requiring a continuum of employment models and approaches. Many studies have shown that individuals experiencing homelessness consistently rank paid employment alongside healthcare and housing as a primary need. Increased income is a strong predictor of a person exiting homelessness, maintaining housing, and improved physical and mental health benefits. Understanding the employment needs of individuals and families experiencing or at-risk of homelessness and adopting a continuum of coordinated approaches is critical to designing employment and training programs, matching services to the needs of individuals, and using resources efficiently. Successfully meeting the employment needs of individuals and families requires collaboration with multiple systems.

In preparation for the Partnerships Summit, a series of interviews were conducted with key leaders in the fields of homelessness and workforce development. The following program models and practices were mentioned both across the literature and in the key informant interviews as effective ways in meeting the employment/training needs of people experiencing homelessness and populations with multiple barriers to employment.

Program Models

Adult education bridge programs connect participants to post-secondary education and training programs by equipping them with basic academic and English language skills. Bridge programs are condensed to make learning as efficient as possible and are flexibly scheduled to meet individual needs.

Alternative staffing organizations (ASOs) broker temporary entry-level job placements for individuals with diverse barriers to employment-- including individuals at-risk of or experiencing homelessness, individuals with criminal backgrounds, and individuals with a disabling condition. ASOs aim to develop a quality ready-to-work labor force for employers while helping jobseekers learn workplace skills, build experience and confidence, earn an employment record, and leverage temporary placements to permanent jobs.

Contextualized instruction and curriculum development are practices in the field of adult literacy and adult basic education that involve designing academic skills lessons using illustrations and materials that are relevant in the context of an adult learner's interests, employment goals, and everyday life. Learner confidence and persistence may increase when literacy and numeracy instruction is relevant to learners' practical goals, and when students are given the opportunity to apply what they learn.

Customized employment (CE) is a person-centered process for opening employment opportunities by tailoring job positions to the participant's strengths and abilities that also meet an employer's needs. CE helps participants take the lead in placements and customization options, foster exploration and discovery of employment options. Furthermore, CE provides a range of supportive services such as benefits counseling.

Earn and learn opportunities offer work-based learning opportunities with employers as training paths to employment. While classroom time can be important, individuals can quickly learn skills where hands-on experience in a work environment is integrated with classroom learning. Job-driven training programs aim to include work-based learning opportunities that best suit their participants. These can include paid internships, pre-apprenticeships, Registered Apprenticeships, and on-the-job training.

Supported employment, known as Individualized Placement Support (IPS), is the standard evidence-based model for helping individuals with a mental illness find and keep a regular paid job in the competitive labor market with at least a minimum wage. IPS holds that the best way to support self-sufficiency for people with a mental illness is to support rapid entry to the competitive labor market integrated with support services as soon as the participant feels ready.

Navigators (direct client services or staff support/ombudsman models) this innovation's goal is to grant individuals and families experiencing homelessness to better access benefits and training. The direct client service model utilizes specialized case managers, called Navigators, to provide individualized guidance to individuals experiencing homelessness that bridges the cultural divide among service systems, helps clients articulate their needs, and provides a means to self-sufficiency. In addition, Navigators play an advocacy role for their clients within homeless, workforce, and other systems. The staff support/ombudsman model focuses on developing new and ongoing partnerships to achieve seamless, comprehensive, and integrated access to services, creating systemic change, and expanding the workforce development system's capacity to serve customers with disabilities and employers.

Sector based training and employment strategies engage multiple employers and other industry leaders in the development of industry-specific training programs linked to employment opportunities and workforce needs in a sector. This approach offers participants education and hands-on training to match in-demand job openings in a specific occupation or industry sector.

Social enterprises (SEs) are businesses that intentionally hire individuals who face barriers to employment, while maintaining financial viability. They seek to improve the earnings of people they employ and, as appropriate, graduate from certain government benefits and services. By developing workers' skills and providing them with resume-building experience, SEs prepare workers to move into permanent long-term employment.

Subsidized employment provides an employer with a subsidy from TANF or other public funds to offset some or all of the wages and costs of employing an individual. The participant is paid wages and receives the same benefits as any other employee doing similar work. Generally subsidized employment is a transitional approach that provides immediate earned income and real work experience with public, private, and non-profit employers.

Transitional Jobs (TJ) seek to overcome employment obstacles by using time-limited, wage-paying jobs that combine real work, skill development, and supportive services in order to transition participants successfully into the labor market. TJ provides stability and a stepping-stone to unsubsidized employment for people facing barriers to employment.

Work-First is based on an overall philosophy that any job is a good job and that the best way to succeed in the labor market is by developing work habits and skills on the job rather than in a

classroom. Work First programs seek to move people into unsubsidized jobs as quickly as possible, and generally begin with a job search for most participants, using the labor market itself as the test of employability. For those who are not able to find jobs right away, Work First provides additional activities geared toward addressing those factors which impeded employment. These activities might include education, training, or other options. These activities are generally short term, closely monitored, and either combined with or immediately followed by additional job search.

Program Practices

Co-location of workforce staff at homeless assistance programs and vice versa can be used to ensure that vulnerable families and adults are connected to the full array of assistance they need to achieve self-sufficiency. Developing mechanisms to share client-level data can help both systems evaluate their performance in minimizing homelessness, increasing self-sufficiency, refining interventions, and improving the targeting of scarce resources. Local WIA providers can co-locate employment services within homeless service systems as well as seek opportunities to cross-train workforce and homelessness staff.

Intensive supports with individualized services are often needed, especially early in the transition out of homelessness and initial employment. While individual needs vary greatly across the spectrum of those who experience or are at-risk of homelessness, it is important to be able to provide intensive supports as needed and in a timely manner.

Client-centered and trauma informed care approaches focus on tailoring services and staff behavior to the needs of trauma survivors. Many individuals, especially women, experience homelessness after physical or sexual abuse. The experience of losing one's home or living in a shelter can be traumatizing. Individuals who have experienced trauma may have hidden psychological or physical triggers that may pose challenges to program participation and gaining employment. A trauma informed or focused approach to service delivery can help programs effectively meet the needs of vulnerable individuals.

Engaged and supportive employers are essential to the success of employment programs serving people experiencing homelessness. Strong partnerships among the public workforce system, education providers, and employers in key sectors appear to be critical for improving employment and earnings outcomes for workers. Employment programs serving individuals experiencing homelessness ensure the employer and participants needs are met, often coaching both about how to be successful in their respective roles.

Holistic programs meet the comprehensive needs of participants by providing direct services and an interaction with multiple public systems including income supports and food security, Veteran services, homeless services, and others. Case managers ensure participants' needs are met in a timely and comprehensive manner.

Providing flexible funds for training, licensure, testing, transportation, rent, etc. is a key component of successful models for employment and training of job seekers who experience homelessness. Costs related to entry into employment that are not covered by any benefits program, can add up to more than a family living on a very limited budget can afford. Programs need to be able to access a pool of flexible funds to quickly address these needs.

Integration of employment services with housing and human services is important. Coordination and integration of employment within the homeless assistance program will achieve better results than stand-alone employment and training programs. This occurs both during the planning phase and during service delivery.

Reducing requirements for multiple visits and compression of services sequencing will significantly improve program completion and employment results. People experiencing homelessness have limited transportation resources so multiple visits to complete intake, assessment and enrollment processes are infeasible. Reducing the number of steps and adjusting the documentation requirements also allows homeless individuals to spend more time in job search and training.