
PARTNERSHIPS FOR OPENING DOORS

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

COMMUNITY: PORTLAND, OREGON

DESCRIPTION

Our community has built a strong tapestry of connections and resources dedicated to supporting families and individuals experiencing homelessness with housing, economic opportunity programming, and related services. The work is led through partnerships with Worksystems Inc. (Workforce Investment Board), the City of Portland (Continuum of Care lead), Multnomah County (Community Action Agency), numerous non-profit organizations, Home Forward (public housing authority), and public workforce partners.

Our work is built on the assumption of three core components, which are essential for long-term stability and success for people experiencing homelessness:

- 1) **Housing:** People must be stably housed to reach employment, training and career goals
- 2) **Relationships of Support:** Individualized, relationship-based, culturally-relevant and long-term support from a dedicated Employment Specialist is critical to assisting participants in overcoming challenges in navigating and accessing resources and opportunities
- 3) **Participant-directed planning:** Individuals know best what they want and need, making self-driven planning more effective than traditional workforce programs

Portland's **Aligned Partner Network (APN)** is a collaboration of public and non-profit agencies that intentionally integrate housing, relationship-based case management and participant-directed career plans towards a shared goal of helping participants move towards quality, living-wage employment. The workforce system sets aside training and employment resources, which are available exclusively to the clients of Aligned Partner organizations. Those partner organizations offer client-centered vocational case management and access to housing or rent assistance, which is often funded through a contract with the housing authority or via the Continuum of Care.

The APN model has worked with a variety of target populations – including families with children, chronically homeless individuals with multiple barriers, survivors of domestic violence, people living with HIV/AIDS, people with Limited English Proficiency, and people with criminal backgrounds. The foundation of the APN model is the leveraging of each system or agency's expertise, in strategic connection with the workforce system, to coordinate long-term support for people as they gain stability and develop plans for employment and career advancement.

COLLABORATION

In 2008, an integration of the public workforce system with the Oregon Employment Department resulted in a dramatic increase in workforce registrants (from 2,444 in 2007 to 47,852 in 2008) and immediately created a service environment that de-emphasized individualized support and promoted universal access. The State stopped funding case management with WIA funds, in favor of increasing the range and quantity of services available to job seekers.

While this change expanded services to a greater number of job seekers, the new structure was not as responsive to those in need of support in navigating the workforce system and achieving successful outcomes. This was the impetus for the design of the APN model. The means to move the new model forward appeared shortly thereafter, when the workforce system, the Continuum of Care, and Multnomah County each received an influx of new funds under ARRA in 2009 with the goal of stabilizing families and helping them get back to work.

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Under the APN model, each system or service provider focuses on their area of expertise while working collaboratively to provide wrap-around services for families:

- **Worksystems, Inc.**, the Workforce Investment Board, provides training, employment and career services that are available to the clients of partners, gives partner agencies access to the workforce database so they can track clients' progress, and provides training and on-going support for case managers. Services are delivered via WorkSource Portland Metro, which includes the Employment Department and Community Colleges.
- **Various non-profit organizations** with expertise in working with people experiencing homelessness provide culturally specific services, including relationships of support and vocational case management, housing placement and retention support, behavioral and primary health care, and a variety of other support services. This work is often funded under a contract with City or County government to provide homeless services.
- **Home Forward** (the housing authority) provides access to flexible rent assistance via the Moving to Work program, as well as providing project based Section 8 vouchers and administering a countywide short term rent assistance program.

The APN currently consists of more than 22 agencies. Some of the highly effective collaborations, each serving a unique population, include:

- **Action for Prosperity:** This initiative was the original aligned partnership that emerged out of the ARRA funding in 2009. It targets a wide range of families who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness. Through Multnomah County's system of eight community-based and culturally specific providers, the program uses an "assertive engagement" case management approach to support families as they access training, job search activities, and ultimately employment. Rental assistance is funded by Home Forward, via contracts with each of the eight partner agencies.
- **Economic Opportunity Program (EOP):** Originally a City-funded program that functioned independently of the Workforce system, the EOP focuses on increasing the incomes of very low-income households. Several years ago, the program aligned with Worksystems, and this co-investment has expanded its reach by leveraging the relationship-based case management, housing, and supports at five agencies with training and employment resources in the workforce system. Seven programs in the initiative are experts in serving people experiencing homelessness, including two that offer vocational training in construction and healthcare. The initiative's target populations include youth and adults experiencing homelessness, culturally-specific communities, individuals with Limited English Proficiency and individuals with criminal backgrounds. People can participate in the program for up to three years.
- **Working Choices:** This program is managed by Cascade AIDS Project, which provides employment support for people living with HIV/AIDS who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Staff provide intensive case management, housing support, assistance connecting to medical supports, and career coaching.
- **Employment Access Center:** The Employment Access Center (EAC), operated by Central City Concern, is a particularly unique Aligned Partner, which uses an Individual Placement model of Supported Employment. This nationally recognized evidence based practice combines supported housing case management and Employment Specialists with staffing ratios of roughly 1:30. The EAC modified the model to effectively support individuals exiting homelessness and in recovery from primary addictions and mental health disorders and criminal histories and is recognized as one of the top performing programs of its kind in the country. The EAC's model focuses on helping clients find jobs immediately in order to help them stabilize and experience success. Employment Specialists help clients secure competitive jobs, and then

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provide ongoing support for up to three years to help clients keep or advance in their jobs, utilizing the workforce system as appropriate.

These collaborations under the APN are predicated on shared investment of resources by all of the systems serving homeless people in our community.

In 2012, our Continuum of Care adopted [A Home for Everyone](#), a revised plan to end homelessness which provides renewed synergy for systems alignment and stronger connections to employment for people experiencing homelessness. Access to income and greater economic opportunity is one of six key program areas that will be prioritized in our planning and programming in the years ahead. Leaders from Worksystems, local businesses, public safety, foundations, consumers and community based organizations and other stakeholders hold positions on our governance body, and will help to ensure the development of new opportunities.

INNOVATION

Prior to APN, the rigid structure of the workforce system was not easily accessible for the homeless, who often fell out of the system or were blocked from accessing resources due to the challenges of navigating a system that relies upon self-advocacy and computer skills. The APN model, which recognizes the need for intensive, relationship-based supports, was developed over time through a series of pilot projects funded by a combination of private foundation and flexible government resources that encouraged experimentation.

Two cornerstones of the APN model are the *Employment Specialist/Career Coach* and “*Liaison*” positions. Career Coaches, who work with small caseloads of no more than 1:40, use Career Mapping to help clients develop self-driven plans. Career Mapping has been shown by DOL to increase access to workforce services for populations with multiple barriers.¹ The Liaisons – co-funded by the workforce system and the Aligned Partners - provide training in vocational case management and about the workforce system and provide any technical assistance case managers need to support their clients in accessing training and employment resources.

Central City Concern’s supportive employment model been recognized as one of the top seven ending homeless employment programs in the country by the Butler Family Funded ICA Group 2012 publication titled “Employment Outcomes and Performance Benchmarks for Programs serving Homeless Job Seekers”. Additionally, in FY 2008-09, those securing supported employment services through this program achieved a rate of alcohol and drug treatment completion at 72% suggesting that employment programming may positively impact the rate of treatment completion significantly. Treatment completion for this population typically hovers around 40% both nationally and locally.

FUNDING FOR INITIATIVE/PROJECTS

Last year, APN was funded by the below sources and amounts:

Entity Providing Funds	Source of Funds
Worksystems, Inc.	WIA, Wagner Peyser, Workfoce Innovation Fund and other DOL competitive grants

¹ Promising Practices: Supporting Job Seekers with Multiple Challenges to Employment, October 2009. National Disability Program Navigator (DPN) Program Office, U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration

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City of Portland	General Fund, Continuum of Care, CDBG, HOPWA, HOME
Home Forward	Moving to Work
Multnomah County	General Fund, HUD Family Futures, CSBG
Central City Concern (EAC)	SAMHSA Block Grant, Voc. Rehab, USDA FSET 50/50, VA, private donors, foundations, and more

APN leverages employment and training resources through the public workforce system, which is funded in part by WIA formula funds. Approximately 30% of training funds available through the public workforce system are set-aside to serve highly-barriered populations. WIA formula funds are also used to purchase or develop new services for delivery through the public system that meet the unique needs of this population.

CONNECTION TO EMPLOYERS

The workforce system engages a large network of employers to provide unsubsidized employment, work experiences and On-the-Job Training opportunities. The strongest ties are with employers in targeted, high demand sectors— healthcare, manufacturing, construction and IT.

The EAC program builds diverse employer relationships across the metro area, requiring Employment Specialists to have six face-to-face employer contacts each week and 60% of their time is in the community with clients and meeting prospective employers. As a result, clients of the EAC have secured jobs in more than 15 sectors and over 50 zip codes in the Portland area.

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Community Population	Multnomah County: 780,191 (19.6% of Oregon's total population)
2013 Point in Time Count of Homelessness	4,441 people homeless (HUD's definition: includes on streets, in shelter or in transitional housing). Estimate rises to 15,917 when including those doubled up or temporarily staying with friends. An additional 4,832 received short term rent assistance or are in permanent supportive housing.
2013 Continuum of Care award	\$13,287,142
2013 WIA formula grant allocation	\$7,983,513 (61.8% of these funds allocated to Multnomah County)
Current unemployment rate	6.1% (Portland Metro Statistical Area)

DATA AND RESULTS

Worksystems operates and collects data on a statewide information system linked to the State's Unemployment Insurance wage record information that tracks service and performance information. Many of the APN partners track their program data in the local HMIS system, but also access Worksystems' database. Combined, these initiatives track: basic demographic information, participation in case management and WorkSource activities (including training), benefits, employment and income data, rental assistance and housing stability, treatment outcomes, soft skills development, and financial management skills. At a minimum, data is collected at en-

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try, exit, and over a 12-month follow-up period, though many partners collect data more frequently during program participation. Programs have achieved significant results:

- EAC: Serves between 400-550 annually; 71-77% secure employment; average wage - \$10.43
- EOP: Serves over 500 annually; 97% occupational training completion; 69% employed at exit; average wage - \$13
- AFP: Serves 200 annually; 52-60% employed at exit; average wage - \$11.74; 81% stably housed at follow-up

SUGGESTIONS FOR REPLICATION

The APN model demonstrates the effectiveness of aligning employment, case management and housing resources to help homeless people stabilize and move towards employment. These local programs get results. However, there are significant barriers to replication, due in large part to barriers put up by federal regulations:

- 1) **Housing** is critical to success. Portland addresses this by aligning our limited housing resources with employment programs. However, there is not enough housing to scale this model, and artificial 24-month time limits on transitional housing create pressure to move people into the first available job, rather than allowing them time to access training and prepare for career track employment.
- 2) People with multiple barriers need an **ongoing relationship of support** to help them access stable employment, yet none of the federal systems fund case management with a low enough ratio to provide the level of support needed. Additionally, no system funds retention and advancement work, so people who do secure jobs are quickly exited and left on their own as they face the challenges that inevitably arise for people with limited work experience and limited systems of support. Portland addresses this using a combination of local and private funding to bring caseload sizes down.
- 3) **Participant-driven plans** are effective because they trust people to be experts in their own lives. Too often, employment programs are driven by federal measures focused on process (certification, participation, etc) instead of outcome goals of career track or living wage employment. On top of that, measures are misaligned across federal entities. Replication and scaling will depend on DOL, HHS and HUD working together to set reasonable, outcome-focused measures for the TANF program, for HUD FSS, and for WIA.

The evolution and expansion of the APN model demonstrates its adaptability and resiliency in effectively serving populations experiencing homelessness. In the months and years ahead, we look forward to sharing our learning from the APN model and strengthening our efforts through the expertise and knowledge from other local and national sources.