

# PARTNERSHIPS FOR OPENING DOORS

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

COMMUNITY: SALT LAKE COUNTY

## DESCRIPTION

The Department of Workforce Services (DWS) has allocated full time staff to be stationed at shelters throughout the Salt Lake Valley. We have 16 full time staff stationed out in the community located onsite at various local shelters and permanent supportive housing sites. It is difficult for customers to understand and navigate application pathways and to be aware of all the services and programs that help them get housed and employed. Having staff stationed in the community helps with this barrier. Of the 16 staff, 14 of them are employment counselors who focus on job searching and employment strategies in a one on one environment with each customer.

DWS offers several programs to customers that help them towards their goal of employment. Customers can apply for Food Stamps, Financial Assistance, Medicaid, Child Care, Training funds, as well as get other help in learning how to find, get, and maintain a job. These programs help individuals as they focus on their own path back into the workforce.

A customer who applies for any of the public assistance benefits gets individualized employment plans which target a specific occupation goal based on an assessment, with associated services, tasks, and referrals to services of what will help them to achieve their employment goal. This team of workers reaches out to those who may not qualify or be interested in any of our public assistance programs and are able to still provide employment counseling, assessments, job coaching, and job search assistance to the homeless population regardless if they are attached to a specific program.

Common barriers are identified through assessments given to customers so all staff can focus on how to help customers overcome these constraints. Resources from DWS and partnering agencies can then be better coordinated and provided to customers. These include things like transportation, physical/ mental health, and computer literacy among others. Employment strategies are also identified based on common needs and occupations, along with identifying patterns of personal constraints. Most of the homeless population looks for jobs in similar industries. This enables employment counselors to target specific employers and identify how best to apply and what the employer is looking for so customers are better prepared. Beyond individual counseling, workshops and a Job Club specifically for customers at the various housing and shelter sites in the community are offered. This helps address constraints that this target population faces and how it impacts their career pathway. Employment strategies for customers center around supportive employment opportunities where the employer is either being subsidized to hire the customer or to help give more training and coaching on the job, and with non-supportive employment with a focus on targeting industries and occupations.

The target population are both those who are chronically homeless and in a supportive housing site, and also those individuals who are residing in emergency shelter. Some of

# PARTNERSHIPS FOR OPENING DOORS

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those in shelter who are identified as chronically homeless transition into permanent supportive housing sites, and for the rest of the target population in shelters the Rapid Rehousing program is used to help transition back into the community into more stable housing.

## COLLABORATION

This collaborative effort began when Utah created a 10 year plan to end chronic homelessness. This is the statewide committee that is chaired by the Lieutenant Governor and each major state agency plays a vital role in this committee. Each agency allocates funds to help in this effort. In an effort to better coordinate and align goals of housing and employment Utah's Department of Housing and Community Development joined the Department of Workforce Services. This has made it easier to collaborate and communicate in all efforts geared towards helping those facing homelessness. DWS also partners with local nonprofit shelters, Salt Lake County and City government – Housing Divisions, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, the local offices for the Department of Veterans Affairs, and local nonprofit and governmental health clinics. There is both a statewide and local countywide committee organized by service providers that get together and coordinate services and funding in order to determine how best to serve the homeless populations.

The Salt Lake County Continuum of Care (SLCoC) also promotes a community coordinated response to ending homelessness. SLCoC oversees outreach, shelter, housing and prevention activities. The goal is to quickly end homelessness by helping homeless individuals and families can access housing and can maintain housing by accessing mainstream resources and employment. SLCoC has leveraged ESG, TANF with CoC funding to provide Rapid Re-Housing. SLCoC has focused the majority CoC funding to provide permanent housing. The majority of this funding is tenant-based rental assistance.

Another local collaborative group called the Partner Administration Team (PAT) is made up of members from DWS, Housing and Community Development (DWS), Salt Lake County Housing, The Road Home, and Advantage Services (employer). This committee focuses on how to engage our customers residing in supportive housing sites in activities that will lead to employment. These meetings are ongoing and continue to provide a focus on what kinds of supportive employment opportunities we can engage customers in, what is working, what is not, and includes a reporting of how many residents are employed.

## INNOVATION

The major goal of Utah's 10 year plan to end chronic homelessness was to focus on using the housing first model in providing housing for chronically homeless individuals. Utah was successful in that effort in constructing more than 500 units of housing in the last several years in addition to the use of dozens of scattered site housing in the community.

# PARTNERSHIPS FOR OPENING DOORS

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Having stabilized formerly homeless with housing, it became apparent that there was more that needed to be done both by those who administer the programs and by the formerly homeless. The obvious next step was to provide them with employment opportunities which would further integrate them back into the community as well as provide them increased self-sufficiency.

This new model of addressing housing and employment created more opportunities for collaboration. New housing sites have partners such as the Department of Workforce Services, Vocational Rehabilitation, employers, among others that work hand in hand to provide solutions and keep people housed while working on employment strategies. The University of Utah conducted an analysis of Salt Lake County's efforts and published their results

here: <http://www.socwk.utah.edu/sri/pdf/FinalReportPalmerCourtwithmodel.pdf>

## FUNDING FOR INITIATIVE/PROJECTS

There are multiple funding streams used to help with the efforts of employing the homeless population. Utah has used the Butler Funds, TANF FEP, TANF Rapid Rehousing program, State Discretionary funds, Vocational Rehabilitation, Salt Lake County funding, banking industry companies for donations and re-investment monies, and the Pamela Atkinson Homeless Trust Fund which are donations from the private industry and community administered by a state agency.

As is often the case with federal funding (WIA) the regulations accompanying those funds tend to be generic in nature, limiting liability of the funding source and are targeted toward mainstream populations. Formerly chronically homeless individuals are not the mainstream population having spent years of their lives on the street and most often have accompany challenges in their lives with mental health, substance abuse, criminal histories and isolation. Providing employment opportunities is challenging and needs to occur along a continuum of employment services. The notion of what employment is may need to be taught once again. The typical type of employment (Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.) is not something that formerly chronically homeless can easily adapt to. In a lot of cases it is customized for each individual client. Again, federal regulations often don't allow for that flexibility. Therefore other funding sources have been used.

## CONNECTION TO EMPLOYERS

DWS is reaching out to employers related to the most common occupations and industries that our homeless population has for their employment goal. Staff who are assigned as liaisons to our employer community and develop relationships with employers help target employers with job openings that are willing and interested in recruiting directly from our homeless population. This is typically for customers involved in the Rapid Rehousing program which houses and employs customers quickly and who

# PARTNERSHIPS FOR OPENING DOORS

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

may already have the skills and experience to get back into the workforce sooner without retraining.

DWS also partners with several employers who have supportive employment and have some other form of subsidy that helps customers transition back into the workforce. Some of these companies and organizations are part of the regular and ongoing coordination meetings, and even located on site at the DWS employment centers and housing sites in an effort to better partner and refer customers.

From Utah's experience, the type of employers that work well in employing the homeless are those that offer work that is flexible in the hours of work needed, can be more temporary in nature, allow different people to provide the service over time, have consistency in the type of the work they need and are willing to work with an intermediary agency. This is the type of agency that will actual contract with the employer for the service that needs to be performed and subsequently hire those who are formerly homeless to provide the work. This option removes several barriers for the employer by the intermediary organization assuming liability and offering a mentoring or support network for those entering the workforce.

## COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Community Population	1,079,721
2014 PIT (overall homeless)	9,566
2013 CoC award	\$6,377,242
2013 WIA formula grant allocation	\$12,560,012 (PY 2013/FFY 2014; includes Adult, Dislocated, and Youth)
Current unemployment rate	3.6%

## DATA AND RESULTS

The University of Utah's SRI report:

(<http://www.socwk.utah.edu/sri/pdf/FinalReportPalmerCourtwithmodel.pdf> )

The evaluation of the employment project conducted by the University of Utah looked at a variety of data. Examples of data that was gathered and analyzed included: previous employment history and employment during the pilot project, employment trends over the duration of the pilot project, physical and mental health barriers of clients and their engagement with service providers, and clients receiving public benefits at the beginning of the pilot and after the pilot was completed. The focus of the study was to determine if clients had engaged in employment, employment was retained, whether there was participation in work readiness activities, use of public benefits and to assess client's knowledge of and attitudes toward onsite employment support resources.

# PARTNERSHIPS FOR OPENING DOORS

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## SUGGESTIONS FOR REPLICATION

Two main concepts that have been vital to our success in Utah have been first to put staff out in the community at shelters and supportive housing sites. While working where they are located we are more reactive and understanding of their needs as well as able to better coordinate with partner agencies and nonprofits to work together. Additionally, it is very important to understand how to use supportive employment with organizations that take the time for extra training and coaching on the job to help make our customers successful. This helps with retention and continues giving customers feedback and opportunities to learn and grow.

It was most beneficial to the success of the pilot program to develop and put in place an overall steering committee composed of a variety of organizations that brought to the table an interest and resources to make the project move forward. Concurrently, there were regular meetings of case managers who discussed on an individual basis the employment needs of their clients and identified gaps in service. This information was then provided to the Steering Committee who could provide resources to meet those needs.

## OPTIONAL – SUCCESS STORY

On August 21, 2014 Martha (name changed) reported she was hired for part time (16 hours of work) janitorial/housekeeping at a local IHC hospital. She begins September 2, 2014. Now the journey:

Martha had an extensive period of homelessness and has resided at Palmer Court with her 2 sons since mid-2009. She is on SSI and has significant mental health issues that require regular monthly medication. Upon the arrival of the current DWS employees in November of 2011 Martha was completing a paid internship with Salt Lake City imaging engineering documents. At the beginning of the assignment Tim Early, AmeriCorps member at the time, worked with her to show her how to do the task. After the paid internship DWS service ended she continued as a part time temporary until all the documents were imaged. She has also worked with Valley Services onsite doing janitorial/housekeeping and was promoted to the lead position in July 2014 with persistent advocacy from her Palmer Court case manager, Briana Burnside.

In early 2012 a presentation on the employment efforts in PSH and at Palmer Court was given to The Road Home Board. One board member representing IHC discussed afterwards how she wanted to help support the effort. IHC representatives attended 3 of our onsite celebratory and employment related bar-b-ques, providing health and employment related information from IHC. The onsite DWS staff met with the IHC representatives to discuss ways of working together. At that meeting IHC indicated they would consider hiring candidates from Palmer Court provided they met the minimum requirements and selection would be through the IHC hiring

## PARTNERSHIPS FOR OPENING DOORS

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

process. Our commitment was that we would advocate for possible candidates when we were convinced the applicant/candidate was ready for employment in the regular labor market. We did not expect IHC, or any other organization, to lower employee standards.

Martha continued working, making progress and managing through ups and downs. Without sharing details she and her family continue to experience and meet challenges. In mid-summer of 2014 Martha began applying for positions with IHC. She had a strong letter of recommendation from Salt Lake City, solid work history and experience with Valley Services and the onsite DWS staff had interacted with her enough to know that she was ready to be an excellent employee for an organization. When she applied we were able to provide a recommendation along with her reference from Valley Services.

Martha is very excited about this opportunity and we all share her excitement. While every partner helped Martha on her journey to this point, Martha has persisted and made changes. She has changed her life, and although it took years, Martha will still grow and meet challenges just as we all do. I doubt this communicates fully the day to day growth that occurs with people but I hope the readers can gain some sense of the effort required and the importance of providing the support needed and the success that can occur. Without the support of management from partner organizations we would not see this impact or the joy of Martha as she shared her employment offer!