

PARTNERSHIPS FOR OPENING DOORS

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

Seattle has a long history of championing initiatives that integrate employment strategies in programs providing housing assistance for people experiencing homelessness.

- In 1988, the Workforce Development Council of Seattle – King County (WDC) began leading a consortium of local service providers as administrator for the Homeless Intervention Project (HIP). The initiative is funded by a McKinney grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development provided through the City of Seattle. HIP facilitates homeless adults' transition to reliable housing and provides individualized employment and job training services to help them gain the skills and incomes necessary to become self-sufficient.
- Seattle's Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness, released in 2005, made the coordination of the various systems with which homeless families interface an essential community-wide priority. The plan, created by the Committee to End Homelessness, furthered the development of a network of "one-stop" access points through which people experiencing homelessness receive employment training and placement assistance. In addition, it emphasizes the "vocalizing" of housing programs. Vocalizing ensures that employment opportunities are considered and addressed at every stage at which housing assistance is provided to families experiencing homelessness.
- Since 2004, Building Changes (formerly AIDS Housing of Washington) has administered the Washington Families Fund (WFF), a public-private partnership between funders of community-based housing and support services for homeless families in need. In 2006, Building Changes led a collaborative effort with local government agencies, the Gates Foundation, the WDC, and other stakeholders. This work succeeded in increasing a collective emphasis of employment as a necessary service for people experiencing homelessness and improving the coordination of funding for these services in the community.

The following are model programs and initiatives that have resulted from this early foundational work.

Collaboration

Employment Navigators

In 2010, the WDC, with administrative support from Building Changes, created an *Employment Navigator* model tailored to the needs of individuals and families who were experiencing homelessness or who had recently been homeless. Based on the WDC's original conception of the Employment Navigator in 2000, this pilot project supported residents in WFF housing units in King County, acting as a bridge between the WDC's WorkSource employment centers and the WorkSource system's capacity to connect its customers to needed housing.

At its core, the Employment Navigator serves as a knowledge resource and relationship broker to staff and employers, while also bridging any gaps along the continuum of services provided to individuals experiencing homelessness. Employment Navigators are dedicated staff who: coordinate direct referrals and services with partner housing programs, establish cross-system

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partnerships, build the WorkSource system's ability to serve jobseekers experiencing homelessness, and vocationalize housing programs. This cross-system partnership is essential to better serving the needs of homeless jobseekers.

This employment navigator model was developed based on the earlier success of the WDC's Automotive Career Pathways program, funded through the Aspen Institute, in which Employment Navigators worked to assist community college students and jobseekers complete job training and connect to employment. At one local community college, students who worked with a navigator were far more likely to finish their automotive training courses, get jobs in a related field, and retain their jobs, according to an evaluation conducted by the Aspen Institute.

In the first year of the Employment Navigator pilot, April 2010 through December 2011, 48 individuals experiencing homelessness enrolled. Among them, 19 (40%) secured unsubsidized employment and earned an average hourly wage of \$11.84. The 19 who secured employment had also accessed Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funded services at a one-stop or had enrolled in training.

Cumulative data measuring the Employment Navigator project from inception, April 2010 through June 2013, shows a total of 82 individuals enrolled in the pilot—the original goal was 40. Among them, 35 (43%) entered employment earning an average wage of \$10.56 per hour and 29 (35%) obtained permanent housing. For the pilot, there were no pre-determined performance measures as this was considered a learning grant.

The pilot project informed the development of subsequent Employment Navigator programs, including those currently assisting families experiencing homelessness in five counties in Washington State (including King, Pierce, Yakima, Whatcom, and Skagit Counties). The Pierce County Employment Navigator project, began about a year after King County's, and built upon the promising practices established by King County's Employment Navigators through WorkForce Central (Pierce County's WIB). Numerous state agencies including Department of Commerce (housing and homeless programs agency), Department of Social and Health Services (TANF agency), and Employment Security Department have created a leadership partnership to support staff and programs on the ground working with families facing homelessness.

Currently, King County funds three agencies offering employment navigation services in the WorkSource system, and two of these agencies receive funding as providers in the WDC's HIP as well. The Employment Navigator model is currently being paired with rapid re-housing services for homeless families in King County using three separate employment providers serving six separate rapid re-housing programs. DOL is funding the expansion and replication of the model through its Workforce Innovation Fund grant between 2013 and 2016, estimated to serve 360 families.

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Innovation

Connecting Homeless Jobseekers National Advisory Group

In 2011, the Butler Family Fund awarded a grant to enable the WDC to lead a national initiative to identify and share best practices that have enabled local urban workforce investment boards (WIBs) to overcome the barriers presented by U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) policies that have made it difficult to service individuals and families experiencing homelessness. The focus of the initiative was to encourage and support other WIBs in adopting practical and replicable solutions that have been demonstrated to be successful in increasing the accessibility and effectiveness of the one-stop system for these customers.

The WDC convened the *Connecting Homeless Jobseekers* National Advisory Group in 2011 and 2013, including representatives from seven WIBs and their local counterparts whose focus was the coordination and delivery of services to people experiencing homelessness. Members from Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, Nashville, Phoenix, Portland, and Seattle met and shared promising practices, perceived benefits, drawbacks, and obstacles to implementation. Since then, the National Advisory Group has met quarterly via conference calls to continue to share experiences and evaluate best practices.

Through this initiative, we have identified a number of common challenges in our different urban areas, as well as strategies that can be replicated or adapted in other communities. These strategies include: the co-location of services and utilizing Employment Navigators. The National Advisory Group has identified federal policy change as a priority as well. Recognizing the importance of local innovation in driving federal policy, group members have focused their efforts on policy change at both the federal and local levels.

Out of these discussions came a list of best practices to improve services for jobseekers experiencing homelessness. Those best practices include:

- 1. Develop shared regional vision and goals.** Create multiple cross-system partnerships to leverage capabilities of all member organizations.
- 2. Support. Don't duplicate.** Stay in your own lane, but create cross-system partnerships that complement one another and improve knowledge sharing of member organizations.
- 3. Allow time to create partner systems and shape effect collaborations.** It takes time to build trust and understanding. Create common systems of data, communication, and language to overcome cultural differences.
- 4. Emphasize employment in 10 year plan.** Think practically by integrating employment as system level prevention.
- 5. Focus on crafting employer relationships, awareness, and supports.** Find and educate employers so that they are willing to work with homeless customers and ex-offenders.
- 6. Innovate to improve services and increase access.** Use flexible funding sources, including both private and public. Standardize data sources. Focus on outcomes

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Funding for Initiative/Projects

Employment Navigators

The expansion of the model has been funded to date primarily with private funds through Building Changes and DOL Workforce Innovation Fund grant funds. Providers have been able to access and leverage a range of services funded by different funding streams including BFET, WorkFirst, WIA, HUD/McKinney funds (HIP), and King County Homeless Employment Services. WIA funds remain a small portion of the funding and are difficult to access and sustain.

The Employment Navigator model demonstrates an innovative and effective approach that has outlasted the sole funding source from which it originated. This model needs a mainstream, sustainable model moving forward.

Connection to Employers

The WDC builds a demand-driven workforce system that aligns the skill development of workers with industry demand as the foundation for economic growth and individual prosperity. Through its business services team, talent pipeline research, and cohort models, the WDC cultivates business relationships and identifies industry specific workforce development needs to tailor career pipelines. In 2013, the WDC's Business Services Team organized 87 career events and communicated over 7,500 openings to WorkSource and WIA youth partners.

Within the Employment Navigator programs there has been a focus on connecting families to career pathways using short term sector training. Examples of this include: Certified Nurse Assistant training leading to healthcare occupations; Manufacturing Academy, a ten week long training program designed with input from Aerospace employers leading to jobs in aerospace manufacturing; and BankWorks, a short-term training program in King County developed in coordination with local banks to prepare people for a career in banking. The employment navigators work with housing staff, and workforce providers to prepare and support families as they select and complete training programs and transition into employment.

Community Context

Population (U.S. Census 2013 estimate)	652,405 (Seattle); 2,044,449 (King County)
2014 Point In Time (overall homeless)	9,294 (King County)
2013 CoC award	\$24,149,352 (Seattle/King County)
2013 WIA formula grant allocation	\$11,518,444 (King County)
Unemployment rate (2013 annual average)	5.2% (King County)

Data and Results

Employment Navigators

Outcomes across these projects show job placement rates of between 50% and 60% for individuals experiencing homelessness. Employment services for homeless job seekers generally have the following attributes: increased intensity; involve assertive engagement

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efforts; progress at a more deliberate pace; and involve integration within housing and workforce services.

Employment Navigator Results	King County Employment Navigator Project (April 2010-June 2013)	Pierce County Employment and Housing Navigator Project (Jan. 2011-Dec 2013)
Individuals Enrolled	82	73 (61% of participants were on TANF)
Individuals Who Entered Employment	35 (45%)	37 (50%)
Average Wage of Individuals Who Entered Employment	\$10.56	\$11.00
Individuals Who Obtained Permanent Housing	29 (35%)	Not measured

Suggestions for Replication

Replication would require designated, required housing programs to identify homeless households, while local workforce providers identify staff and resources needed to serve specific referrals. There would also need to be some approach to integrate other programs, such as TANF and Vocational Rehabilitation.

We know that programs most successful at helping individuals who are homeless find good jobs are those that:

- Make services as accessible as possible;
- Are responsive to the multiple needs of people experiencing homelessness; and
- Coordinate employment services closely with housing and other interventions.

These program ingredients are key to any replication model. Beyond these basic components, however, the WDC sees the national advisory group as an opportunity to discuss best practices in greater detail within the context of replication.

The national advisory group is an ideal format for considering the implementing new programs or practices that build upon the work that has already been done.

Conclusion

The Seattle-King County partnership between the Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County, Building Changes, King County Committee to End Homelessness, and the Washington State Employment Security Department is a fantastic example of effective collaboration to serve jobseekers experiencing homelessness. By developing innovative models, such as the Employment Navigator, and convening local, statewide, and national communities of best-practices, Seattle-King County is poised to build upon its successes in supporting

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jobseekers experiencing homelessness to find jobs that lead to self-sufficiency and stable housing.

DRAFT: not for distribution

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Success Stories

C.G.

C.G. and her three year old son had been homeless for a year and a half when she was referred to the YWCA HIP program. She had been living on the street, on a couch with her family, at YWCA's Angelines shelter, and eventually at Hopelink transitional housing before her housing case manager referred her to the Eastside HIP Employment Specialist for assistance. C.G. had come to the United States from Mexico and was undocumented for more than 10 years working one low paying under the table job after another. In February 2013, she qualified for President Obama's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) act, which grants temporary work authorization and a reprieve from deportation to young people who immigrated here illegally as children. Unfortunately, by this time she was already homeless and struggling to provide essential needs for herself and her son.

Because she had worked in the unofficial economy for so long, C.G needed a lot of guidance and support on how to find and secured legitimate employment in the United States. The HIP assessment revealed that she had excellent customer service skills, great communication abilities, and effective problem solving skills. She also had good technology skills and with HIP assistance was able to brush up her knowledge of Microsoft Applications and to learn how to use new technology. HIP assisted her to define her strengths and market herself to make her a competitive candidate. We also helped her with refining her professionalism so that she could pursue employment in a corporate office setting.

C.G. was disheartened and exhausted from her struggles to obtain citizenship and find employment and one of the most impactful ways that HIP helped her was to improve her self-confidence and sense of self-efficacy. She felt increasingly confident and resilient after every meeting with her HIP Employment Specialist and eventually developed a can-do attitude that allowed her to persevere through adversity. With this newfound self-possession C.G. was able to overcome barriers like employment gaps, lack of references, and ignorance of effective job search strategies. HIP helped her learn 21st-Century job techniques, provided her with interviewing clothes (through our Dress for Success program), gave her job leads that were within her reach, and transportation assistance to go to hiring events, job fairs, and employer locations. HIP helped her get her ID, revise her resume, and develop her interview skills.

After weeks of steady appointments and slow progress, dozens of job applications and follow up calls, and many WorkSource workshops to improve her job search abilities, C.G. finally broke through and was invited to interview for a number of companies. She had participated in HIP mock interview sessions and went into each interview with confidence and poise. She succeeded so well that she was quickly offered positions from two companies: Wireless Distribution System (WDS) in Kirkland and Northwest Immigrant Rights Project (NWIRP), a program that she had used in the past. She consulted with her HIP Employment Specialist and decided that she was most passionate about providing customer service for a technology company so she accepted the full time tech support position for WDS paying \$16/hr.

After a swift and hearty congratulations HIP helped C.G. prepare for her new job by researching the bus schedule , arranging child care for her son, and even assisting her to get her driver's

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license reinstated and plan for obtaining a vehicle (since the bus commute to child care and work was challenging). HIP also helped her to adapt to the workplace, manage the stress of a new job, and identify some professional goals including continuing education for technology certifications that would add value to her resume. Once she started earning money, she was provided with budgeting and money management assistance so that she could save her money and be able to pay first and last month's rent on a new apartment. She managed to stay in the transitional housing program for a while longer to save money before HIP referred her to the YWCA's Landlord Liaison Project which helped her search for an affordable apartment. Since her time at Hopelink was up she temporarily moved back in with her family paying them some rent, so that she could continue to work and search for housing.

Despite losing hours at work and experiencing some frustration with the housing search, C.G. preserved and was successfully exited from HIP. When her hours at WDS were reduced HIP helped her get temporary work with Aerotek which lasted until her hours were reinstated. Over the holiday period the YWCA helped her and her son with the Adopt-A-Family program. And most importantly, with help from the YWCA, C.G. was able to obtain permanent housing by renting an apartment.

C.G. expresses her gratitude to the YWCA HIP program: "I really appreciate everything you and the HIP program have done for me! Thank you very much! I cannot express how grateful I really am! Thank you thank you!". When asked what helped her the most C.G. responded: "Interview and work clothes, , training, transportation, child care resources, housing connections, adopt a family on Christmas, constant and supportive communication with my coach Susan, help in practicing with Susan for interviews, pep talks and Career counseling." When asked for any suggestions on improving the program C.G. replied: "I think that I would not change anything about the program. I really like how accessible and how supportive my coach Susan Truong was with me. I felt like my success was actually cared for. She helped me so fully that I cannot thank her enough. I think that this program, really helps especially if you have someone that does this because they went through the struggle and understand on a personal level with the people they work with. Susan and HIP helped me feel great about myself, and provide that confidence I needed to get out of my homeless state and support my son. Thank you so much for providing all of the help that inspired me to become an independent strong single working mother. I feel so blessed."