



## Serving Customers Facing Substance Abuse or Disabilities

**By definition, the Welfare-to-Work (WtW) grant program concentrates on helping persons who face multiple challenges to employment. The previous issue examined approaches for addressing learning disabilities and low basic skills. This issue highlights approaches to three other work barriers: substance abuse, mental illness, and physical disabilities.**

Historically, services for persons with chemical addictions or physical or psychiatric disabilities often focused on clinical treatment or income maintenance. Under TANF, states can now exempt only 20 percent of their caseloads from the lifetime limits on benefits. Thus, increasing numbers of disabled or substance abusing TANF recipients are required to work and will enter WtW programs. To help these customers find and keep jobs, WtW programs must form partnerships with existing disability and drug treatment resources, such as state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies.

### **Substance abuse**

Estimates of substance abuse among welfare recipients range from 16% to more than 33%, concentrated among long-term recipients.<sup>2</sup> The Urban Institute found that among welfare recipients, substance abusers are as likely to work as other recipients but are employed less steadily. As more employers drug test, treatment becomes more important for making substance abusers employable.

#### **Residential Treatment Training Program: New York**

The "traditional" model for treating substance abuse separates clinical treatment from employment services in

both time and geography. The client typically enters an out-of-area residential drug treatment facility for one year and then returns to his or her home community to live in a re-entry facility for 6 to 8 months while receiving skills training, education and employment preparation. This "traditional" treatment model is costly and inefficient for time-limited welfare recipients.

To help recovering substance abusers to become employed sooner in their home communities, the state Office of Alcoholism & Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) and Vocational & Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID) established the **Residential Treatment Training Program**. This program, piloted in Sullivan County, NY, provides job training at the same time and place as drug treatment.

Treatment and vocational counselors screen potential participants by assessing their reading and math skills, work history, and level of active participation in treatment activities. Participants who are strong in these factors are more likely to complete their job training before leaving treatment.

The program collaborates with existing local programs that train for in-demand occupations. In Sullivan County, the local community college and BOCES (a consortium of local public school districts) train participants as nursing assistants or food service or clerical workers. OASAS and VESID worked with both training providers to modify the training curricula to better meet participants' and employers' needs by compressing the time frame and adding more hands-on experience.

The Sullivan County pilot placed 60 of its 83 participants in jobs and reduced treatment time by four months. This 72% placement rate is better than the overall rehabilitation rate, achieved at less than half the state-wide average cost. This program is being expanded to other state-funded treatment facilities.

Contact Doug Bailey at (518) 473-7213.

## Mental Illness

Examples of mental illness (also called “psychiatric disabilities”) as defined by the ADA include major depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety disorders (including post-traumatic stress disorder), schizophrenia, and personality disorders.<sup>7</sup> Estimates of mental illness among welfare recipients vary widely, from 6% to 42%.<sup>8</sup> Mental illness impedes employment not only by interfering with job functioning, but also by triggering job discrimination. Unemployment among persons with psychiatric disabilities has been as high as 85%.<sup>9</sup>

The most common mental illness among welfare recipients appears to be clinical depression. Among programs for “hard-to-serve” customers profiled by the Urban Institute, 42% (twice as many as in the general community) showed a “high level of depressive symptoms” in one program.<sup>10</sup> In a 1998 survey of Michigan TANF recipients who were not exempted from work requirements, 36% met criteria for at least one major psychiatric diagnosis, including 27% with major depression and 15% with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.<sup>11</sup>

### Project Jobs: Rhode Island

Operated by the Northern Rhode Island Community Mental Health Center, **Project Jobs** provides temporary

employees to approximately 30 local employers. The employees fill janitorial, maintenance, shipping/receiving, food service, jewelry manufacturing, assembly, clerical, and other positions lasting from one day to several months.

In addition to mental illness, Project Jobs’ customers face a variety of issues including substance abuse, arrest records, and lack of high school equivalency. The “temp agency” model accommodates the cyclical, episodic nature of mental illness. Customers work on days they feel able to work and are paid at the end of the week. This approach allows them to gradually gain positive work habits, experience, and confidence.

The Project Jobs customers work alongside their work sites’ other temporary and permanent employees and earn comparable wages, always at or above the state minimum wage. Project Jobs competes in the labor market by charging less than for-profit agencies and providing employees’ Workers’ Compensation insurance, transportation, and on-site supervision and support. Project Jobs’ overall goal is to help its customers establish long-term employment goals and steady employment in the mainstream job market. The program has served 250 participants since its founding in 1991 and recently received funding to start a WtW program.

Contact Judy Bolzani at (401) 766-3330.

## The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

As noted in Issue 5, programs working with welfare recipients must provide reasonable accommodations for disabilities. Efforts to employ disabled WtW customers are aided by the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

This law gives persons with disabilities rights to reasonable accommodations in employment, public facilities, and government services. Under the ADA, the term “disability” means a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of a person’s “major life activities,” which include working, learning, thinking, concentrating, interacting with others, caring for oneself, speaking, performing manual

tasks, or sleeping. Thus the ADA covers psychiatric as well as physical and learning disabilities.<sup>3</sup>

The ADA treats substance abuse somewhat differently. Employers cannot deny or terminate employment solely because an individual is or was in treatment, but there are circumstances where they can do so when current abuse violates the employer’s policies.<sup>4</sup> Accommodations are required only for known disabilities. Unlike visible physical disabilities, mental illness and certain health problems that can be hidden raise additional issues such as disclosure and confidentiality.<sup>5</sup>

The IRS offers tax credits and deductions to help businesses comply with the ADA.<sup>6</sup>

## Physical Disabilities

Using data from three national surveys, the Urban Institute studied the incidence of health problems among welfare recipients.<sup>12</sup>

- 10.6% reported difficulty with basic tasks, e.g. dressing, eating, bathing.
- 9.4% reported difficulty with routine tasks, e.g. lifting ten pounds, using stairs.
- 4% had been hospitalized for at least 5 days in the past year (not counting childbirth).
- 7% had stayed in bed for health reasons for at least 30 days in the past year.

Physical disabilities, as defined by the ADA, include a wide range of conditions, from quadriplegia to chronic health problems such as epilepsy or diabetes. Providing WtW services to disabled welfare recipients moving into entry-level jobs involves tailoring a specific package of supportive services from the menu of services you and your partners already offer.

### **KETCH, Inc.: Kansas**

Projects With Industry (PWI) is a grant program of the U.S. Department of Education's Rehabilitation Services Administration that helps persons with disabilities to work in unsubsidized private-sector jobs alongside non-disabled workers for comparable wages and benefits. **KETCH Inc.** (formerly Kansas Elks Training Center for the Handicapped), founded in 1964 and a PWI grantee since 1976, offers a wide range of employment and training services to persons with disabilities and also assists employers with needs such as sensitivity training, ADA compliance, and employment incentives.

Although PWI does not require statistics on welfare receipt, KETCH's Director of Employment Services, David Reyes, estimates that 15% of the approximately 800 customers KETCH serves under PWI each year are on TANF. This proportion will increase since the disability exemption from TANF time limits recently ended in Kansas.

According to Reyes, TANF recipients make up a large share of the customers in KETCH's new Workplace Apprenticeship Training. Participating employers train KETCH customers at the workplace in the same job functions that other workers perform. KETCH provides support services such as job coaching and follow-up, and also pays the trainees' wages and Workers' Compensation insurance. This training is offered at five sites: two

manufacturers, one public library, one retail chain, and a group of businesses operating national customer service "call centers" in Kansas.

Of the 21 KETCH customers who entered Workplace Apprenticeship Training in its first year (October 1997–September 1998), 20 successfully completed the training and 17 were hired as permanent employees at their work sites. The Workplace Apprenticeship Training is expanding to five more sites in the current program year.

Contact David Reyes at (316) 383-8847 or [dreyes@ketch.org](mailto:dreyes@ketch.org), or visit <http://www.KETCH.org>.

### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Loprest, Pamela and Acs, Gregory. "Profile of Disability Among AFDC Families." *Urban Institute Policy and Research Report*, Summer-Fall 1996, [http://www.urban.org/periodcl/26\\_2/prr26\\_2d.htm](http://www.urban.org/periodcl/26_2/prr26_2d.htm).
- <sup>2</sup> "The Hard-to-Place: Understanding the Population and Strategies to Serve Them" by Fredrica Kramer, *WIN Issue Notes*, March 1998, p. 4. (202) 628-5790, <http://www.welfareinfo.org/hardto.htm>.
- <sup>3</sup> Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). *Enforcement Guidance on the Americans with Disabilities Act and Psychiatric Disabilities*, March 25, 1997, #915.002. Includes situational examples of "reasonable accommodations" in the workplace for different mental illnesses. See [http://janweb.icdi.wvu.edu/kinder/pages/ada\\_psych.html](http://janweb.icdi.wvu.edu/kinder/pages/ada_psych.html) or <http://www.eeoc.gov/docs/psych.pdf> or call 1-800-669-3362.
- <sup>4</sup> See <http://janweb.icdi.wvu.edu/kinder/overview.htm> for an overview of the ADA or <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/statute.html> for the law's full text.
- <sup>5</sup> Mancuso, Laura. *People with Psychiatric Disabilities, Employment, and the Americans with Disabilities Act: Turning Policy into Practice*. Center for Mental Health Services, SAMHSA, USDHHS, 1995, p. 5. See <http://www.mentalhealth.org/resource/orderfrm.htm> or call 1-800-789-CMHS (2647), ref. #CS000011. The CMHS Knowledge Exchange Network (KEN) has other publications and also offers toll-free telephone service and an electronic bulletin board.
- <sup>6</sup> "Employment of the Disabled / Work Incentives," Disable Hotline website, <http://www0.delphi.com/DISABLE/employment.html>, or call the IRS at 1-800-829-1040 (Voice) or 1-800-829-4059 (TDD).
- <sup>7</sup> ADA overview (see note 4).
- <sup>8</sup> Kramer, Fredrica. "Serving Welfare Recipients with Disabilities." *Issue Notes*, Welfare Information Network, January 1999, <http://www.welfareinfo.org/disabilitiesissue.htm>.
- <sup>9</sup> Mancuso, page vii.
- <sup>10</sup> *Personal and Family Challenges to the Successful Transition from Welfare to Work*, Krista Olson & LaDonna Pavetti, The Urban Institute, 5-17-96, <http://www.urban.org/welfare/report1.htm>.
- <sup>11</sup> Danziger, Sandra et al. *Barriers to the Employment of Welfare Recipients*, University of Michigan Poverty Research & Training Center, January 1999, p. 15. See <http://www.ssw.umich.edu/poverty/wesappam99.pdf> or call (734) 988-8515.
- <sup>12</sup> Urban Institute *Policy and Research Report*, Summer-Fall 1996, [http://www.urban.org/periodcl/26\\_2/prr26\\_2d.htm](http://www.urban.org/periodcl/26_2/prr26_2d.htm).

## For More Information

Several organizations offer on-line information and technical assistance on substance abuse or disabilities, including:

- Information on state and local substance abuse treatment programs from the federal Center for Substance Abuse Treatment and its Treatment Improvement Exchange. See <http://www.calib.com/csawelfare> or <http://www.health.org>, or call (301) 443-7541 or 654-6740.
- ADA information in English and Spanish from the U.S. Dept. of Justice. See <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/publicat.htm> or call 1-800-514-0301 (voice) or -0383 (TDD).
- Legal and policy information on psychiatric and developmental disabilities (mental illness or mental retardation) from the Bazelon Center on Mental Health Law. See <http://www.bazelon.org/bazelon> or call (202) 467-5730.
- Links to other disability resources, at <http://www.wdsc.org/disability>.

## About *Ideas That Work*

*Ideas that Work* is a series of issue briefs designed to provide practical and innovative technical assistance to the local practitioners who are implementing the U.S. Department of Labor's Welfare-to-Work grants.

The ideas presented in this series are intended to spark innovation and to encourage peer networking. Replicability may depend on individual state and local guidelines. Any activities carried out by a State or local Welfare-to-Work program, using WtW grant funds, must also comply with the Federal WtW law and regulations.

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