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SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

**LAKE JACKSON CAREER CENTER  
LAKE JACKSON, TEXAS**

**One-Stop Profile**

October 1996

Based on a Site Visit Conducted During May 1996

**LAKE JACKSON CAREER CENTER**  
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**One-Stop Profile**

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# **LAKE JACKSON CAREER CENTER**

## **LAKE JACKSON, TEXAS**

### **One-Stop Profile**

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#### **DESCRIPTION OF THE LOCAL CONTEXT**

The Lake Jackson Career Center is one of four existing and two planned One-Stop centers in the 13-county Houston-Galveston “Gulf Coast” area of Texas. These One-Stop centers are being developed as part of the regional Gulf Coast Career Center system by an interagency regional steering committee led by the Houston-Galveston Area Council, which is the administrative entity for one of the JTPA service delivery areas in the Houston-Galveston region.

The Lake Jackson Career Center (“Center”) is located in Lake Jackson, a town of 32,000 people located about an hour’s drive from Houston. The Center serves all of Brazoria County, which has a population of 220,000. Although much of the county area is rural farmland, the county has a diversified economic base, with manufacturing accounting for one-quarter of all non-agricultural employment. Several major petrochemical plants are located in the county, the largest of which is owned by Dow Chemical. Despite being more affluent than many Texas counties—with a median household income about 25% above the state average—Brazoria County has experienced a steady increase in unemployment during the first half of the 1990s, from about 5% in 1990 to over 7% in 1995. Currently, unemployment has stabilized at slightly under 7%.

The Gulf Coast Career Center system was initiated in 1994 when the agencies responsible for the JTPA, ES/UI, and JOBS programs joined in a partnership to plan a regional One-Stop system in response to the state’s One-Stop Implementation Grant RFP. Although it was not included in the earliest stages of the One-Stop planning process, the Lake Jackson Center was ultimately chosen by the regional planning committee as a One-Stop site because the Lake Jackson office of the Texas Employment Commission had recently co-located with the JTPA provider. Planning for One-Stop implementation in Lake Jackson began in July 1995, at about the time One-Stop implementation funding was received by the Gulf Coast regional partnership.

The regional One-Stop planning partnership has enthusiastically embraced the vision of universal customer-driven One-Stop services. The planning committee’s vision for the

Gulf Coast Career Centers is that they will function like *libraries*, with an emphasis on self-service access to information. At the same time, customers should be able to approach staff freely with particular questions and individual needs. Specific regional One-Stop goals include the creation of a region-wide workforce system which (1) provides convenient access to a network of information and services, (2) is evaluated on the basis of labor market outcomes, efficiency of service delivery, and customer satisfaction, and (3) offers universal access to information and services that significantly support and enhance the skills necessary for career and educational advancement.

Several key variables are influencing the context within which the Lake Jackson Career Center is developing. These include: (1) negotiations surrounding the creation of a single Workforce Development Area encompassing the city of Houston, the balance of Harris County (in which Houston is located), and the surrounding 12 counties; (2) rapid changes in the organizational structures for workforce development programs at the state and local levels; (3) substantial “downsizing” among major employers in the Lake Jackson area, relatively high unemployment rates, and an urgent need for retraining among workers dislocated by recent layoffs; and (4) a community culture that has caused staff to emphasize personal relationships in their system-building efforts. These contextual variables are briefly described below:

- *Negotiations are underway between the city of Houston and surrounding counties to create a unified “Gulf Coast Workforce Development Area.”* In the interim, the city of Houston continues to maintain a JTPA delivery system that is separate from that in the surrounding counties. At the time of our visits, members of a workforce development board had not yet certified. It is expected however, that a major new organizational partner—the city of Houston’s JTPA administration, “Houston Works” — will eventually join the regional One-Stop planning partnership.
- *The One-Stop approach in Texas is evolving within a context of rapid organizational change* The merging of over twenty workforce development programs under the auspices of the Texas Workforce Commission mandated by House Bill 1863 (see Texas state profile), has resulted in short-term uncertainty about the state’s blueprint for integrating workforce development services. This uncertainty was expected to continue until the policies of the newly integrated agency were further clarified.
- *Major employers in the Lake Jackson area have been downsizing for a prolonged period and the level of skills needed for current job openings has escalated.* For example, Dow Chemical, which had formerly employed over 10,000 persons at its Lake Jackson plant, now has fewer

than 5,000 employees and is continuing to reduce staffing levels, with another round of lay-offs expected in late 1996. Because of continuing layoffs by major local industries, many dislocated workers have found that their existing level of education and skills is inadequate in the changed labor market. Even many entry-level positions now require post-secondary education and/or skills certification.

- *In a rural setting such as Lake Jackson, there is a strong value placed on informal relationships and communication.* Many respondents, including Center staff and employers, emphasized the importance of personal relationships and contacts. One-Stop development has been facilitated by the existence of long-standing working relationships among Center partners and between Center staff and customers.

### **ORGANIZATION AND GOVERNANCE OF THE LOCAL ONE-STOP INITIATIVE**

Using its One-Stop Implementation grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, Texas awarded a series of One-Stop implementation grants to 12 local areas to “pilot” One-Stop systems. In addition, financial incentives were offered to all areas for the formation of Workforce Development Boards to oversee integrated One-Stop services. In July 1995, the Houston-Galveston Area Council, on behalf of an interagency partnership, received a One-Stop implementation grant from the state to pilot One-Stop centers in the 13-county Gulf Coast region.

#### **Regional Governance**

The regional partners that applied for a state One-Stop implementation grant included the Houston-Galveston Area Council (the administrative entity for the 13-county Gulf Coast JTPA service delivery area), the Balance of Harris County JTPA administrative entity, the Houston Regional Office of the Texas Employment Commission (TEC), and the Houston Regional Office of the Texas Department of Human Services (DHS). The Houston-Galveston Area Council acts as the grant recipient and fiscal agent for the partnership. The city of Houston had applied to the state to maintain a separate Workforce Development Area with its own board, but this request was turned down by the state. As a result, the Gulf Coast regional partnership will face the challenge of integrating the city of Houston’s JTPA entities into this broad regional partnership.

After the receipt of the One-Stop implementation grant in July 1995, the regional One-Stop planning committee was expanded to include the agencies responsible for adult education and literacy services, the Title V older workers program, and vocational rehabilitation services, as well as labor and employer representatives. The expanded

committee prepared a three-year plan for the Gulf Coast Workforce Development Area. Original members of the planning committee have continued to function as a steering committee for Gulf Coast One-Stop implementation.

A regional board, whose members have been appointed by each of the 13 county judges (chief elected county officials), will provide formal governance of the Gulf Coast Workforce Development Area. After the Gulf Coast Workforce Development Board is certified by the state, it will have broad-ranging responsibility for regional workforce development services, including ES, UI, JTPA, school-to-work, welfare-to-work, adult basic education, and proprietary vocational education programs. It was expected that the Board would be approved by the Texas Workforce Commission and certified by the governor by mid- to late 1996. Pending certification, the Gulf Coast Career Center system is overseen by a regional Workforce Advisory Committee and the Houston-Galveston Area Council's board of directors, which is composed of local elected officials from the thirteen counties and major cities in the region. The Area Council board currently has final responsibility for review and oversight of the regional career center system and reports on progress in implementation and performance.

### **Center Governance**

State legislation calling for the creation of regional workforce development boards requires that planning, evaluation, grants administration, and oversight of workforce development services be separated from the *delivery* of services. Agencies operating local One-Stop centers will be selected and funded by, and will receive their policy guidance and oversight from, the regional boards.

Most of the One-Stop advisory and planning functions currently take place at the regional level. At the Lake Jackson Career Center, a site-based management committee—comprised of the center manager (a TEC employee), program supervisors for UI, ES, JTPA, and JOBS, and the local veterans employment services representative (LVER)—is responsible for day-to-day administration, staffing, and scheduling. ES and UI functions had been integrated even prior to One-Stop implementation. ES/UI staff, who also have been trained to screen for JTPA and other program eligibility, are referred to as the “Customer Services” unit of the Center. The “Career Service Unit,” which occupies an adjacent space within the Center, administers JTPA and several other eligibility-based programs. The partners with a full-time on-site presence at the Lake Jackson Center include:

- *Texas Workforce Commission*<sup>1</sup> Programs administered by TWC employees include Employment Services (ES), Unemployment Insurance (UI), and Veterans Employment and Training Services (VETS) and JOBS case management. In addition, TWC has a service delivery contract with the Houston-Galveston Area Council for the delivery of JTPA services to dislocated workers and economically disadvantaged individuals, FSE&T, and Worker Profiling and Reemployment Services (WPRS). As noted above, the Customer Services and Career Services Units maintain separate staff, even though both are TWC employees.
- *Interfaith*. Interfaith, a local service provider co-located at the Center as of April 1996, provides services to JOBS “Work First” participants in a multi-county area in the Gulf Coast region, through a contract with the Texas Department of Human Services<sup>3</sup>.

At the time of the site visit in May 1996, a number of other agencies and programs had arranged with the Center to establish an on-site presence as well. These include:

- *Palacios Independent School District*. School district staff were scheduled to maintain an on-site presence during the summer of 1996 as part of their contract to provide intake and case management for the JTPA Title II-B summer youth employment program. Although much of the actual work is carried out at local schools, the Center offers an office “base” for staff activities and provides filing cabinets and access to telephone message machines.
- *Service, Employment, and Retraining (SER)*. Staff employed by SER, a JTPA Title II subcontractor to the Houston-Galveston Area Council, administer on-the-job training services for JTPA Title II recipients.
- *Career Recovery Resource Inc* is a non-profit Houston-based organization that operates the local *Title V Older Worker Program*. Three participants in the Title V Senior Community Service Program (SCSP) work part-time at the Center on a rotating basis. At least one SCSP trainee is on-site at any time during office hours. In addition to recruiting and performing intake for new SCSP participants, the Title V trainees act as “resource guides” for the Center’s automated job information system and help administer and collate job application forms for local employers.

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<sup>1</sup> TEC has now become part of the new consolidated Texas Workforce Commission.

<sup>2</sup> Since the time of the site visit, administration of Work First, the welfare-to-work program has been consolidated within the Texas Workforce Commission, which has continued to subcontract with Interfaith for the delivery of services to JOBS participants in Lake Jackson.

- *Consumer Credit Counseling Service*(CCCS) is a community-based non-profit organization that offers Center customers free counseling in budget planning, dealing with creditors, avoiding bankruptcy, consolidating debt, and managing finances during periods of unemployment. CCCS services are funded through contributions by creditors.
- *United Way* is an umbrella organization of non-profit service organizations that offers various kinds of on-site counseling and assistance at the Center. United Way services include crisis intervention and other emergency assistance including providing information about food pantries, utility assistance, and transportation to medical providers. The local staff of United Way and CCCS have received cross-training in each other's programs and provide on-site services to Center customers on alternating weeks.

In addition to organizations and programs that maintain staff on-site at the Center, there are additional partners in the local One-Stop effort with whom Center staff maintain frequent contact, and for whom they make referrals. These include the following:

- *Brazosport Community College* located about 3 miles from the Center, maintained on-site staff at the Center on a trial basis during April and May 1996, but was unable to continue this relationship due to staffing and logistical problems. BCC continues, however, to offer job training and certification programs as a funded JTPA service provider, and offers testing and GED classes to the general public. Intake and assessment for these programs are done both at the Center and at the College.
- *Alvin Community College*(ACC), located 30 miles from the Center, provides JTPA-funded training, literacy, and adult basic education programs. Center JTPA staff provide intake and assessment at ACC two times a week during peak enrollment periods.

#### **COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION**

Center staff identified the effective communication of One-Stop goals and vision to staff as a crucial component of local One-Stop implementation. The Lake Jackson Center was not originally considered by the Area Council for One-Stop implementation, but was later included in the grant proposal for One-Stop funding largely because there was already co-location of key programs. Because of Lake Jackson's late selection as a One-Stop center, staff of the Center partner agencies were not as prepared for One-Stop implementation as staff at some other local sites. As a result, early attempts by Center management to move rapidly toward cross-program staff training and integration of services lacked the "buy-in" of staff.

Although the initial Center manager was described as a dynamic proponent of One-Stop concepts, including integration of services across Center partners, she tried to dictate changes through a “top-down” management approach rather than trying to communicate with staff and gain a consensus about the desirability of the planned changes. Local respondents indicated that staff had not had enough time to come “up to speed” on many of the core philosophies of the One-Stop vision. The rapid nature of the attempted One-Stop staffing changes, in combination with other stresses, led to widespread demoralization and dismay among Center staff.

After an initial ambitious effort to train all Center staff on all Center programs and services during the first grant implementation year, the Center manager left her position. An interim manager, a long-time TEC employee brought out of retirement, opted at least temporarily, for a more evolutionary approach. Respondents stressed that, in the future, it would be essential for One-Stop goals and visions to be communicated *with* of the staff, including management, supervisors, and front-line staff. In response to this need, the new Center manager established an on-site management committee which now serves as the principal mechanism for communication among on-site partners. He has also attempted to build consensus about the pace and depth of changes necessitated by legislated program consolidation and the creation of a One-Stop Career Center.

Current efforts to promote communication and information exchange among local partners at the Center are impeded by the absence of a shared information system. For example, the computers used by the Customer Services staff are “dumb terminals” wired directly to TWC databases residing in the state mainframe. “We’re suffering from that,” said one respondent. “Everybody else is PC-based. There’s no way to access other people’s systems.” As a result, Customer Services staff cannot access automated JTPA data and reports, Career Services partners cannot access TWC job listings, and none of the other partners can communicate with the state’s automated welfare information system. Furthermore, according to another respondent, “There’s no link of any kind from Lake Jackson [to]. . . other centers. None of the systems are integrated. Data can be entered, but that’s about it.” Plans are underway to remedy this situation. It is expected that a local area network (LAN) will be available in both Lake Jackson and another Gulf Coast Career Center by January 1997, and that the region will be linked by a wide area network (WAN) at about the same time.

Because Lake Jackson is part of a regional network of One-Stops, local Center staff communicate with both the region and the state on One-Stop issues. From the perspective

of local Center partners, communication with the regional One-Stop steering committee is essential in order for local Center staff to receive “process facilitation” and training for One-Stop related activities. Because the regional steering committee, like the state One-Stop team, is comprised of representatives from all of the core partner agencies located at the Center, regional steering committee members act as the “first line” of communication with Center staff and management in helping to interpret changing policies and regulations in a One-Stop environment.

Center communication with the state “One-Stop team” takes place mainly through on-site visits, referred to as “benchmarkings.” Benchmarkings offer the opportunity for informal discussions between Center staff and state One-Stop team members about the Center’s progress, including specific implementation problems it is facing.

#### **FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS, BUDGETING, AND FISCAL ISSUES**

Of the \$213,000 One-Stop grant received by the Houston-Galveston Area Council to support the implementation of Gulf Coast Career Centers, \$30,000 was allocated to the Lake Jackson Center. Most of the local grant was used for renovation of the physical facility to make it more suitable for One-Stop operations. Before One-Stop implementation, although the Customer Services and Career Services programs were located in the same building, they were physically separated by a wall. The One-Stop implementation funds were used to remove the wall and connect the two spaces. The One-Stop grant also was used to purchase equipment that could be used by all Center customers, including computers for a shared resource room and front entrance area and fax and copy machines available to all Center customers. The grant also enabled the Center to purchase software, video materials, and reference books for the resource room and subscribe to publications for the resource room.

At the present time, although ES and UI programs are in the process of moving toward full integration, Career Services and Customer Services have remained largely separate and distinct, at least partly as a result of the accountability requirements of their separate categorical funding streams. At the time of our evaluation visit, no staff positions were cross-funded between the two programs and the agencies responsible for Career Services and Customer Services maintain separate rental agreements for their adjacent office space.

Although no formal cost-sharing agreements have been developed among the core partners key funding streams (ES, UI, JTPA, JOBS) at either the regional or Center level,

the regional One-Stop steering committee has described cost allocation issues as a “major priority” for the second year of the implementation grant. The committee is also considering a variety of alternatives for integration of program budgets and fee structures, following the practices suggested in the DOL cost allocation TAG.

Until now, emphasis has been placed on developing a “solid marriage” by coordinating services among all of the partner agencies. In the words of one regional respondent: “All partners had a commitment to bring to the table what we each had. Our first priority was to make service delivery more blended.” Instead of formal cost-pooling arrangements for the operation of Center services, there is a great deal of informal sharing of equipment, resource materials, and staff to provide seamless core services to the general public. For example, JTPA funds are currently used to pay the salary for the coordinator for the resource library/resource room.

The One-Stop implementation grant also made it possible, for the first time, to purchase equipment that is officially for use by all Center customers. A fax machine and copier purchased with One-Stop implementation grant funds have been placed in locations accessible from both the Career Services and Customer Services portions of the building, and are clearly marked for use by the general public. Additionally, many of the materials in the Center’s resource center—which is open for use by the general public—were purchased with implementation grant funds.

Additional resources are shared informally. Telephones, copiers, and fax machines on the Customer Services “side” of the building are informally available for use by individual customers: “If a customer is over on this side and wants to use these machines they are free to do so,” said one supervisor, “we don’t make them go to the other side.” In addition, Center staff from multiple partner agencies have contributed materials to the resource center and share in the cost of its operation by assisting Center customers in their use of the center.

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<sup>3</sup> After the site visit was completed, the regional One-Stop steering committee applied to become a demonstration site to test the application of the principles in the DOL cost allocation TAG and has been approved as a pilot site.

## DESIGN OF THE LOCAL ONE-STOP INITIATIVE

### Evolution and General Description of the Local Design

The primary catalysts for changes in the design and delivery of workforce development services in Lake Jackson were the federal One-Stop initiative and the enthusiastic response at the state and regional levels. The decision to co-locate in a Lake Jackson facility a few months prior to the receipt of the One-Stop grant by the Gulf Coast region, was made both to address practical concerns—the ES and UI programs had outgrown its former office space—as well as to further One-Stop principles.

Because co-location of partners pre-dated One-Stop implementation by only a few months, and because Center staff had not been directly involved in the initial stages of the regional One-Stop planning process, staff initially found themselves overwhelmed by what they saw as the Center manager's unrealistic expectations for rapid service integration. Despite this, the Lake Jackson Center has made progress in moving toward many of the federal One-Stop goals. Some of the most important features of the Center's One-Stop design, which are discussed in greater detail in later sections, include:

- Development of a system of *integrated intake*.
- Creation of a *resource room and library* and designation of a full-time staff person as *resource coordinator*.
- Adaptation of the *physical structure* and design of the Center facility so that Career Services and Customer Services areas are connected, and so that individual customers have free access to most of the building, rather than limiting them to a small waiting area when not accompanied by a Center staff member.
- Providing all Center customers with access to fax machines, copy machines, and long distance telephone lines for individual customer job searches.
- Development of an improved system of interagency referrals by *cross-training staff* about the on-site and off-site programs and services available to customers.
- The sharing of Center facilities with community organizations interested in the on-site delivery of complementary services to Center customers.
- Establishment of a series of *mini-seminars* available to the general public on subjects related to job search and employment preparedness.

## **Relevance of the Local Design to the Four Federal Goals**

### **Universal Access**

It is in the areas of universal access and customer choice that the Center has made its greatest strides since the onset of One-Stop implementation. Six priority areas have been identified as key to achieving the goal of universal access:

- The establishment of a self-service area that offers individual job seeking customers access to automated job banks, career exploration systems, and resume writing software.
- The creation of a resource room and library offering all Center customers access to general information on the labor market, occupations, wages, and industries, as well as information on education and training opportunities and current job openings.
- Enhancement of customer awareness of available services through a variety of means, including the creation of a “resource coordinator” position.
- The availability of all “core” DOL programs at the Center and the provision of information on these services through on-site orientations and mass marketing materials, such as brochures and flyers.
- The development of a sequence of modular job search seminars open to the general public on an open-enrollment basis.
- The provision of automated information on training providers and educational institutions via user-friendly career information systems appropriate for entry level as well as more highly skilled workers.

At the time of the evaluation visit, most of these components of universal services were already available to customers, although some were still in early stages of development and implementation. Automated career exploration and labor market information targeted both to new job entrants and experienced workers had recently become available (via the “Texas Cares” and “Rescue” systems). It was expected that resume writing software would shortly be available on the Center’s self-service computers. A computer-assisted orientation to the Center had been prepared and was available for viewing in the lobby. Modular open-enrollment job search “mini-seminars” were offered to the general public on a regular basis.

Improving Center identification and visibility is also recognized as an important key to make Center services accessible to a broader customer base. At the time of the evaluation visit, most residents identified the Center with the “Texas Employment Commission,” or as the “unemployment office,” but new signs were being designed to

strengthen its image as a “Career Center.” Although Center staff believed that longer hours of operation would help make the Center more accessible to potential customers, the Center was open only until 5:00 p.m. largely due to the limited number of available staff.

### **Customer Choice**

Center staff indicate that the changes that have taken place during the first year of One-Stop implementation represent a major improvement in the range of choices available to customers. Prior to the implementation of the One-Stop design, customers for ES and UI were required to sign in, fill out a form, and wait in a “bullpen” waiting area until they were called for a particular service. In contrast, all customers now have access to a wide range of Center facilities and services any time the Center is open, whether or not they have come to apply for a specific categorical workforce development program. According to one staff member, customers no longer feel that they are coming to the “unemployment office”—the new emphasis is on getting customers “quickly acclimated to the idea that they’re in the world of work.”

The new emphasis on self-service represents a major change in the way business is conducted at the Center. Although some people using the Center do not need help in using the self-service options, many of the customers in the Lake Jackson service area have worked in building and construction-related trades and are not proficient in the use of computers. According to local respondents, an important element in improving customer choice at the Center has been the creation of a “resource coordinator” position. The resource coordinator has a broad overview not only of all individualized and group services available at the Center, but also of the self-service options available to customers.

According to staff, the implementation of One-Stop has greatly changed the mix of clients and the variety of services offered at the Center. Staff and individual customers agree that this fact has, in turn, brought about a profound change in the relationship between customers and One-Stop staff. As expressed by one respondent: “Many of the offices before were divided into departments. You could see that some clients were embarrassed at being crowded into one section. Before the emphasis was *waiting*, now they feel comfortable coming over to visit us and we can point them in the direction they want to go. We also give customers a list of places that they can go to get services that may not be offered here—they never go away empty handed.”

### **Integrated Services**

Across programs, the approach to integrated services that is now being pursued at the Center can be described as improving coordination and handoffs among Center staff responsible for different programs. Former ES and UI staff had been cross-trained for some time and form what is now known as the Customer Service Unit. Members of this unit are trained as “generalists” to recognize the need for case management or other specialized services. In addition to administering ES and UI programs, these staff screen for potential JTPA and other “Tier III” service eligibility.

The Career Service Unit is composed of “specialists” who administer JTPA, Food Stamp Employment and Training programs, Project RIO (Reintegration of Offenders), JOBS case management, and Worker Profiling and Reemployment Services (WPRS). Staff in the Career Services Unit share case management responsibility through common case readings, so that the customer is provided cross-program service and duplication of effort is reduced. The Career Services Unit may also provide case management services for customers who are not eligible for individual programs when specific needs are recognized or individualized services are requested.

While staff retain distinct functions, the Lake Jackson staff have worked hard to make the lines between services offered to customers as transparent as possible, and as a result, Center customers are less and less aware of the separate program identities because of improved coordination across programs. In addition, services provided by one or another of the Center partners are available to the general public as part of the core One-Stop offerings. As described earlier, these include a staffed resource room and modular group seminars on a variety of employment preparation and job search topics.

In addition, staff representing the various programs at the Center met after One-Stop implementation to decide what data items were essential for determining minimum eligibility criteria for all programs, and developed a common application form now used during the integrated intake procedure.

### **Performance-Driven/Outcome-Based**

Although the different funding streams administered by the One-Stop partners each have their own program-specific performance measures, both local and regional respondents stressed the need for some locally-determined performance measures to guide Center operations. In late 1995, the regional One-Stop partnership formed a “customer satisfaction work group,” and several partners attended customer satisfaction seminars

sponsored by the Texas Department of Commerce (which administered JTPA programs at that time). While the specific aim of the training was measuring customer satisfaction in JTPA Title III dislocated worker programs, members of this group felt that these processes had wider applicability not only in assessing programs offered at local career centers, but in assessing the facilities and services of the Center as a whole. A two-page prototype survey was developed for use by all customers served at Gulf Coast career centers. It was subsequently modified to fit on a 5 x 7 card.

Lake Jackson Center respondents also believe that they need a new performance management system that can capture system-wide performance to supplement measures of performance of individual programs. For example, among the customers not covered by current performance measures are employed persons who use the Center services to look for a better job or to upgrade their skills, customers who use the resource room or other self-service options without requesting services from any program-specific funding stream, and customers who find jobs through electronic access to automated job banks. Staff are concerned, however, that additional performance measurement efforts would either require additional funds or would take time away from what staff perceive as the more important goal of service provision.

Because current accountability procedures do not permit the Center to account for services provided to or outcomes achieved by a number of its customers, staff have considered asking for the social security number of all Center visitors. This would allow the Center to track whether individuals using Center services had entered employment over time. However, there were no immediate plans to implement this procedure at the time of the site visit.

### **Physical Facilities**

The Lake Jackson Career Center is located near the end of a commercial strip mall near a state highway. For about ten years prior to the opening of the Lake Jackson Career Center, this location was used as the site for JTPA dislocated worker programs. In March, 1995, the Texas Employment Commission decided to move its ES/UI operations to office space adjacent to the existing JTPA program offices. This decision was made because the old TEC facility in a nearby town was no longer large enough to accommodate TEC services and because recent state legislation had encouraged co-location of workforce services. Partly because the key partners were already co-located at Lake Jackson, this site was selected by the regional One-Stop planning group to become a One-Stop career center.

Driving into the shopping mall, potential customers see a sign pointing to the “Texas Employment Commission.” A request has been made to the highway division to have the sign changed to “Gulf Coast Career Center,” but the changes had not been made as of the evaluation site visit. The Center is visible from the shopping area of the mall. Of the approximately 11,000 square feet of space available in the Center facility, about 4500 square feet is used as office space for the 29 Center staff. The remainder houses common areas, such as the resource room/library, four conference rooms large enough to accommodate up to twenty people, a computer lab with 16 personal computers, and break rooms for both customers and staff. There is adequate parking and the building is accessible to persons with disabilities.

As described earlier, One-Stop implementation grant funds were used to remove a wall between what were to be known as the Career Services and Customer Services portions of the facility. Although the current facility is joined, the space assignments still reflect the origins of the Center in two separate but side-by-side Career Services and Customer Services operations. However, the flow of clients within the Center was redesigned so that there would be no “bullpen” customer waiting area which separated customers from staff. Currently, when a customer enters the Center through the front door, he/she enters a small reception area which contains several “Job Express” terminals and a desk staffed by a “Resource Coordinator.”

Customers have access to all areas of the Center. To the left is a resource room/library with publications related to employment and training, a computer with information on career exploration (“Texas CARES”) and several additional computers that can be used to prepare resumes. As mentioned previously, the office space is divided into two major sections, the Customer Service section in which UI, ES, JOBS, and Veterans Employment Services (VETS) are provided. Guest desks are provided in this area for use by various local community organizations. A hallway which has a fax machine and a copier for customer use leads to the Career Services office area on the left. On the right there is a computer lab with 16 terminals, one of four conference rooms, and a customer break room.

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF LOCAL SUPPORT MECHANISMS**

### **Staffing Arrangements**

The ES and UI functions have been consolidated at the Lake Jackson Center and were provided by an integrated ES/UI staff prior to the One-Stop initiative. The VETS program, although also administered by the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), has

been and continues to be staffed separately from ES/UI functions. Under the current “coordination rather than consolidation” approach to integration of services, JTPA services, although they are also provided by TWC staff under contract to the Houston-Galveston Area Council, are delivered through the separate Career Services Unit staff.

Supervisors for all core programs—ES/UI, VETS, JTPA, and JOBS—meet with the Center site manager (a TWC employee) in weekly site-based management meetings. There have been discussions of forming cross-agency functional teams for job development, placement, and for employer services, but at the present time, these functions have not been integrated across the core partners. Services funded by other co-located programs, such as the Senior Community Service Employment Program, United Way, and Consumer Credit, are provided by paid employees, interns, and volunteers associated with each program partner.

At the time of the evaluation visit, other than the consolidation of ES/UI staffing, no staff positions were cross-funded by the major Center program funding streams (ES/UI, JTPA, and JOBS). Of the 29 full-time equivalent staff at the Center, 13 staff are employed in the delivery of JTPA services and 10 staff in the delivery of UI/ES. Other programs with dedicated TWC staff included VETS, Food Stamps Employment and Training, UI Profiling, and a Reintegration of Offenders program (Project RIO). A 1.5-FTE position for Human Services staff is funded by Brazoria County.

Thus, with the exception of the Customer Services programs, in which there is a high degree of functional integration, program-specific staff depend on a shared intake procedure and coordinated cross-program referrals to accomplish integration of services for customers. As a result of these coordination efforts, initial intake staff have knowledge of basic requirements for all the programs offered at the site, and staff from all programs participate in the regularly scheduled orientations for individuals coming to use the Center.

### **Capacity Building**

Staff training has been a two-edged sword at the Lake Jackson Center. On the one hand, the site-based management team indicated that staff training related to One-Stop implementation has been very useful. Training has been provided through a number of sources, including the International Association of Personnel in Employment Security (IAPES), the Houston Club Institute, and TEC-sponsored regional “train the trainers” sessions. Staff particularly praised a series of training modules on team-building, change management, and quality customer services that was prepared by the Harris County

Private Industry Council, one of the agencies participating in the regional One-Stop partnership. In addition, several respondents had recently attended an off-site training on diversity called “Across Borders” and had found that it improved their ability to understand different organizational cultures and communicate across agency lines.

On the other hand, local respondents noted that the scheduling of multiple training initiatives during a short time period has exacerbated the work demands and time pressures on staff. Throughout 1995 and 1996, staff vacancies combined with increased customer flows made it difficult for TEC staff to keep up with their assigned workloads. Moreover, One-Stop training was only one of a series of capacity-building initiatives affecting Center staff. According to one supervisor: “We’ve had all types of training and meetings since February [1996]. These have included team management training, diversity training, and training on the redesign of UI benefits [to implement remote call-in for the initiation of UI claims]. Oftentimes we’ll have two to four staff members out of the office in a given week. Nobody objects to the idea of training, but much of it has little to do with building Career Centers.”

### **Management Information Systems (MIS)**

The Lake Jackson Career Center has developed an integrated intake form, on an interim basis, to support integrated customer reception and referral. However, at the present time, there is no integrated client-level management information system across the different participating programs. The development of an integrated MIS is widely perceived as a state-level function. Local initiatives to integrate eligibility determination and case management functions depend on progress being made at the state level.

Client confidentiality, especially as it relates to the need to protect sensitive information in case records maintained by the Department of Human Services (DHS), is considered another barrier to full integration of case management functions at the local level. These barriers were perceived to exist even though many respondents believed that they could be overcome through the use of security procedures such as passwords. Similar confidentiality issues regarding confidential information about employers in ES/UI databases have been resolved through the use of passwords that restrict staff access to such information on a “need to know” basis.

### **Improvements in Labor Market Information and Related Technology-Based Products**

As in the development of an integrated MIS, most of the initiatives to develop One-Stop technology-based products are viewed as state functions. The primary technology-

based products developed at the state level include Texas CARES, an automated career information delivery system designed for individuals with little work experience; RESCUE, a case management tool designed to help more experienced workers determine additional training needs; Job Express, an electronic labor exchange system; and Socrates, an automated labor market information system. (See the Texas state profile for more information on these products.) Direct customer access to these products was a very recent phenomenon at the Lake Jackson Career Center at the time of the site visit and Center staff were still learning about the levels of staff support needed in order for customers to use these products. Local respondents indicated that Texas CARES was considered the easiest to use. Both RESCUE and Job Express required that staff spend time with customers explaining their use. According to one staff person, "They're supposed to be user-friendly systems, but they still require a lot of staff intervention."

Hard-copy versions of labor market information, prepared at the state or regional level, are also provided to employer customers. For example, the Center distributes monthly updates of labor market information, prepared by the Houston-Galveston TEC regional office, to local employers. Businesses are provided with labor market information on the Brazoria Metropolitan Statistical Area, employer guides and information on topics such as wage and hour laws and other employment law issues, lists of independent contractors, and information about hiring practices and how to prepare employee handbooks.

Electronic kiosks, which have been developed in Texas to provide access to labor market information and job listings public locations with high pedestrian traffic, had not yet been installed in Brazoria County at the time of the site visit. Local respondents look forward to using kiosks as an effective way to "get information out to rural communities," and have identified a local Wal-Mart store as a good location for a kiosk. They are currently waiting for state approval of the funding needed to install a kiosk. Some respondents, however, noted that they had heard that the information available through kiosks is not always regularly updated.

### **Marketing**

State and local One-Stop actors often share responsibility for marketing One-Stop Centers. State-wide marketing efforts for One-Stop, however, were delayed during the massive reorganization of workforce development agencies into the new Texas Workforce Commission during 1996. As a result of delays in the development of a formal statewide marketing plan, Lake Jackson, like other local areas, developed its own local marketing

strategy. Respondents indicated, however, that they had hoped that the state could provide a newsletter or multi-media marketing tools that could support local marketing efforts.

A detailed career center marketing plan has been developed at the regional and local levels and is being implemented in Lake Jackson/Brazoria County. Local respondents recognize the importance of marketing in helping to change the public's perception of the Center from that of unemployment office to integrated career center. As part of the local marketing plan, advertisements for Center services, including "Job Search Seminars" and "Career Assistance," have been run on a weekly basis in a variety of local and regional newspapers. Newsletters and brochures prepared by various Center partners have described the Center's activities with displaced homemakers as well as its Title V Older Workers program. Center services have been listed in publications prepared by the local Chambers of Commerce and other civic organizations.

In addition to formal marketing efforts, local respondents indicate that in a small community such as Lake Jackson in which "everybody knows one another," informal marketing is often one of the most effective ways to conduct outreach. "This is a very tight-knit community," explained one respondent. "Much of the 'marketing' happens when we get people in here who tell their neighbors about our services." Staff are also actively involved in a variety of public presentations and displays publicizing Center services. For example, Center services are publicized in a variety of social calendars, and the Center sponsors job fairs at local malls and at the county fair. Many local staff are also involved in a variety of community activities in schools, churches, and veterans organizations, and are regularly called on to speak at a variety of events, including those sponsored by high schools and United Way. Center staff also address employer groups on questions regarding taxes and unemployment claims.

Discussions about expanding local marketing efforts in the future have addressed the possibility of obtaining free public service announcements from the local cable television channel. Other ideas suggested have included posting announcements in free papers and distributing informational flyers in locations such as stores where large numbers of people congregate.

## **DELIVERY OF ONE-STOP SERVICES TO CUSTOMERS**

### **Services for Individual Customers**

The Center has drawn on the concept of an inverted pyramid of services in which it is anticipated that the largest number of individual customers will use self-service options, with increasingly smaller numbers will use group services, and the smallest number will access intensive individualized services.

The Center offers all customers information about the range of programs and services offered by Center partners and a preliminary or final determination of eligibility for these programs. Upon arrival at the Center, customers are offered the following program-specific service options, based on their expressed interest and eligibility:

- Employment services (ES), available to the general public.
- Unemployment insurance benefits (UI).
- JTPA programs and services for dislocated workers and economically disadvantaged individuals.
- JOBS services for AFDC recipients.
- Food Stamp Employment and Training Services for recipients of Food Stamps.
- Veterans' Employment and Training Services.
- Trade Adjustment Assistance benefits for dislocated workers whose employers were affected by international competition.
- Older Worker Programs available under Title V of the Older Americans Act.

In addition, core Center services—available to the general public at no cost—include:

- Access to on-line job listings through the state's Job Express and America's Job Bank.
- Other automated labor market information.
- Access to the Career Library, which offers a variety of publications on local and national companies, and jobs and salaries, as well as job search manuals and other materials.
- Access to free facsimile machines and telephones for contacting employers.
- Information and referrals to supportive services and other community resources.

- Information on scholarships and career training.

Core services available on a self-service basis will be expanded over time. The Center is planning to offer a variety of computer-assisted learning options as well as access to resume-writing software.

Group workshops and seminars, also available at no cost to the general public include:

- *Total Image Update.* Participants learn how to dress for interviews and careers while remaining true to their personalities and budgets.
- *Money Management.* These seminars, offered by Consumer Credit Counseling, help participants learn how to manage their budgets, especially when their personal financial situations have changed.
- *Stress Management.* This seminar teaches how to cope with the stress of unemployment and the job search process.
- *Exploring Career Options.* This seminar covers areas such as making use of career interest surveys, exploring interest areas, and choosing careers.
- *Job Search.* This seminar covers implementing job search plans and using Center and community resources in the job search process.

### **Services for Employer Customers**

At the time of the site visit, an employer service unit had recently been formed at the Lake Jackson Center, and was in the early phases of planning for the expansion of employer services. Currently, most services to employers continue to be rather traditional—the filling of job orders and assistance with unemployment claims questions. Although there has been discussion of having individuals in the Center act as “employer service representatives” for different companies, this system has not been formally instituted. Rather, employers generally seek out the people with whom they have developed a long-standing working relationship, and find that these people are usually the best equipped to answer their questions.

Center staff indicate that they are looking forward to expanding employer services. One of the biggest challenges is “getting the message out” that a broader array of employer services is available. To date, marketing Center services to employers has occurred largely through informal contacts between Center staff and local employers. Services that are currently available, though under-utilized, include the provision of information to employers on training opportunities at proprietary schools and training assistance paid for through the state’s Skills Development Fund. On an informal employer

survey designed to find out what services employers would like from a career center, the most common responses were “qualified workers” and useful labor market information.

Employer services are better developed at the regional level, where there are employer services specialists working out of the TEC regional office in Houston. Regional employer services representatives make visits to outlying communities and assist center staff in designing customized recruitment and training services for local employers.

## **CUSTOMER RESPONSE**

### **Individuals**

A focus group was conducted with eight individual Center customers, all of whom turned out to be participants in the JTPA dislocated worker program. These customers expressed satisfaction with the quality of the services they were receiving. However, there was no opportunity to discuss how the general public was reacting to the available core Center services.

Center staff indicated that the self-service technology-based products introduced as part of the One-Stop effort are less relevant to job seeker customers in rural areas than they would be in more urbanized areas, because most customers are already aware of the major employers and contact many employers directly to inquire about employment opportunities. This appears to be less true for more highly-skilled workers, who were described as valuing access to electronic job postings, and who respond in great numbers to automated job listings for positions requiring advanced technological skills.

### **Employers**

A focus group was held with five human resource or personnel representatives from area employers. These employers were primarily interested in the job placement function and other services traditionally offered through TEC, and were generally positive about these services. All the employers indicated that the most important thing to them about the Lake Jackson Center was that they could deal with *local* office. According to one representative, “If this office wasn’t here, we’d have to deal with someone in Lubbock or Houston, and they would have little of the local knowledge or the local people needed for the job.” People here understand our industries -- you have to know how to have a rapport with foremen, with supervisors.”

Employer respondents expressed some hesitation about the move toward more reliance on technology-based products for job seekers. “Now it’s up to the individual to find their own job,” said one respondent about on-line job searches, “but a lot of these

workers really need more one-on-one contact. There needs to be someone to intercede on behalf of the employee. TEC used to do that for people. More and more, now they're turning it back to the individual to find their own jobs." At the same time, employers recognized the need for an expansion of "traditional" job matching services, and of the need for a comprehensive system which can not only provide job referrals, but also help job seekers enhance their job search and specific occupational skills.

Local employers emphasized the need for formal training and skills certification to prepare job seekers for employment in the local labor market. They noted that even in construction jobs, certification levels were being pushed upwards, making it more difficult for people with fewer certifiable skills to find employment. Most of the industry representatives said that they now insisted on some form of craft certification. According to one respondent, "It used to be that contractors hired the first 50 people that applied for a job. If somebody looked strong, they hired him. Now we need to put an emphasis on training for jobs. We're worried there won't be anyone around to do the jobs we have locally when our current workers drop out in their late 40s and 50s. Centers like this one can make a big difference in getting people into occupations and training that are needed around here."

#### **ASSESSMENT AND LESSONS LEARNED**

The federal One-Stop initiative has clearly influenced the direction of the Lake Jackson Career Center, although the rapid pace of moving from co-location of services (which existed even before the One-Stop implementation grant) toward integration of services has been a source of tension for Center staff, particularly during the early months of the implementation grant period. The state has provided information and technical assistance to the regional steering committee and directly to Lake Jackson management and staff throughout its development as a One-Stop. As the integration of programs under the Texas Workforce Commission is completed, it is expected that state-level policy guidance will continue to be an important element of One-Stop implementation in Texas.

The most important influence on the Lake Jackson Center has been the thoughtful planning process and clear vision provided by the regional One-Stop steering committee for the Gulf Coast region. Local staff praise the planning efforts at the regional level and view the regional steering committee as being committed financially and emotionally to the One-Stop initiative and sympathetic to local implementation challenges. Although Lake Jackson is part of a region in which a vibrant and dynamic team of One-Stop planners is attempting to develop a network of One-Stop centers, it will take time and a great deal of

effort for the full One-Stop vision to be implemented in this rural/industrial county, 50 miles distant from Houston and isolated from other urban centers

To date, the Lake Jackson Center has made strong progress in creating a system that responds to the employment and training needs of individual job seekers and local staff look forward to offering a menu of enhanced services to employers in the near future. The Center, after only a year of operation, is still in the early stages of developing an identity as an integrated “Career Center.” Part of this may have to do with the fact that planning functions were concentrated at the regional level in Houston. It is only more recently that *Center* staff have participated in a meaningful way in decision making through a site-based management committee. Now that there is more of a sense of local control, ideas about improving Center services are being generated locally. “We now have a lot of ideas about where we want to go,” said a local respondent, “and in about six months we think we will be in a place where we are comfortable with the changes.”

The experiences at the Center highlight several important lessons regarding building One-Stops. In the early phases of implementation, staff had little input into the design of the local system for service delivery. Because planning for the system had occurred at the regional level (in Houston), Center staff were unable to share the vision of One-Stop service during the initial months of the implementation grant period, despite (or perhaps because of) the presence of a dynamic center manager. The situation improved considerably when a local management team was established consisting of supervisory staff from the participating programs. As this management team began to establish its own goals and vision for the Center, they were able to reestablish a sense of local control over the transformation process.

Center staff indicated that they have learned the importance of several factors that can facilitate the transformation of workforce development services to realize the One-Stop vision:

- The ability to set realistic expectations of what can and cannot be accomplished: these include the expectations of *customers, staff, and the Center as a whole.*
- The encouragement of the active involvement by all staff, including management teams at the earliest stages of the One-Stop planning process. Lake Jackson Center staff believe that many of the problems that occurred during early implementation could have been avoided had there been more local input into the design and vision of the Center.

- Placing high priority on communication across partner agencies among Center staff, with particular emphasis on building relations among supervisory staff. With regular forums for discussion, supervisors can relay the problems that they perceive among staff, such as staff overload and stress, and can take steps to modify strategies toward One-Stop implementation as the need arises.

Despite some early challenges, local respondents were visibly proud of what had been accomplished at the new Center, particularly when compared to the former ES/UI and JTPA operations. Customers are no longer separated from the staff, but can come directly to the desk of anyone in the Center. There is no need to wait until you are called—customers can make good use of their time in the resource room, computer lab, or can contact employers immediately by using the phone banks and fax machine available to them. Where once customers experienced a sense of frustration with “the system,” and often felt a sense of embarrassment at having to turn to “the unemployment office” for assistance, they now have a wide variety of resources at hand to speed re-entry into the job market.