



# Urban Partnerships for Welfare Reform: National Academy

*Utilizing Diversion and Emergency  
Assistance Programs*

*Diversionary Work Program*

# Minneapolis



## Key Features

- **Diversion From Traditional Public Assistance (MFIP – Minnesota Family Investment Program)**
- **Four Month Program (months do not ‘count’)**
- **DWP - For Families Who Have Not Received MFIP/DWP in Last 12 Months**
- **Benefits Are Primarily Vendor Paid (rent and utilities)**



# Key Features

- **Employment Plan Must Be Completed Prior To Benefit Issuance**
- **Meet Employment Goals Quickly – short term and intensive**
- **Goal: Cash Assistance Is Not Needed After Month 4**
- **Income Received after DWP is approved is disregarded**



## Key Features

### **Immediate 100% Sanction For Non-compliance**

- **In Hennepin, 48.9% Of Families Are Not On TANF In Month Five (One month after DWP) – Statewide 57.5%**
- **In Hennepin, 50.6% Of Families Are Not On TANF In Month Twelve – Statewide 59.9%**



# Key Features

- Median Hennepin DWP placement starting wage: \$9.50/hour  
Statewide \$9.00/ hour  
Source: MN DHS Program  
Assessment and Integrity Division  
(4<sup>th</sup> quarter 2005 data)



# Successful Strategies

- Close Cooperation Between Employment And Financial Staff
- System-wide Commitment To Meeting Tight Timelines
- Specialization On Employment and Financial Side



# Successful Strategies

- From the beginning: strong connection among partners
- Mutual accountability and “ownership” of processes and outcomes
- Ensured services are equitable and consistent across all six Hennepin DWP locations



# Successful Strategies

- Employment Plan must be completed prior to benefit Issuance
- Engage both parents in a two-parent household (regardless of ES exempt status) when developing the initial Employment Plan
- Support services immediate



# Successful Strategies

- Rapid job search model
- DWP assumes employment readiness vs. recovery from unemployment
- Intensive program design



# Successful Strategies

- Avoid lengthy assessment, training, or counseling
- “Strike while the motivation is *‘hot’*”
- Address issues immediately
- Modeled on expectations of the workplace (attendance=mandatory)



## Successful Strategies:

- **One ES staff serves one family unit**
- **Employment Services staff direct flow of services**
- **ES coordinate information flow among all partners by conveying “real time” information between/among partners**



# Successful Strategies

- Job retention and career advancement integrated throughout DWP services
- State-driven support for non-native English speakers through SRES
- Marketing, networking and job development are key



# Successful Strategies

- Simplify accounting processes
- Remain focused on outcomes
- Strong team definition: result of specializing



# Successful Strategies

- Continual assessment of - and response to - rapidly-shifting, diverse DWP client base
- Define “what works:” practitioners share effective/progressive approaches



# Surprises

- More Successful With Diversion Than Anticipated
- Drastic Effect On TANF Employment Services Caseload And Participation Rate



# Surprises

- Continual fluctuation in demographics of population served
- Positive response from participants to short-term, non-welfare service and strategies



# Surprises

- Expedited access results in expedited outcomes, in a short timeframe
- Synergy between/among systems is possible – given excellent planning and commitment from people delivering services



# Challenges

- Far More Clients Than Expected Applied For DWP
- Communication Between Partners
- Effect On Traditional TANF Caseload And Participation Rates



# Challenges

- Extensive training of staff new to DWP
- Data entry: continual monitoring and updating
- Identifying system problems is complex and demands time – but “worth the effort”



# Challenges

- Continuously updating and augmenting services responding to jobseeker needs
- Short-term planning is “status quo”



## Replication Advice

- Invest Significant Time To Planning
- Establish Easy To Use Communication Tools For All Partners
- Constantly Review Where Client 'Bottlenecks' May Be
- Educate Policy Makers On The Effect On TANF Participation Rates



# Managing During Change

- Keep New Program Specialized
- Develop support from areas not involved in the change
- Recruit Staff Who are dedicated to the successful Implementation of the New Program



# Visions for the Future

- One Possible Vision
  - Implement DWP For All New Clients (Federal Participation)



## Visions for the Future

- High cost/benefit ratio
- Traditional TANF caseload-size reduction has been (and continues to be) substantial
- Pursue avenues to credit DWP success toward the federal participation rate