



## *Peer Technical Assistance (TA) Summary*

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| <b>Requesting Agency:</b>      | Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS)   |
| <b>Point of Contact (POC):</b> | Mary Kay Cook, Section Manager<br>Colorado Works Program   |
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| <b>TA Event:</b>               | 104  |
| <b>TA Requested:</b>           | CDHS requested TA regarding innovative and proven strategies for utilizing subsidized employment, supervised work experience and community service to meet work participation rates and increase self-sufficiency outcomes.  |
| <b>TA Goal:</b>                | To assist counties in developing programs and activities which increase self sufficiency outcomes for Colorado Works participants who may not be as readily placed in unsubsidized employment and to address the problem of diminished unsubsidized employment opportunities particularly in rural counties.   |
| <b>TA Format:</b>              | CDHS Staff and County TANF representatives from throughout the State (over 50) met over three days as a Roundtable to network and exchange information each other and work with three innovative programs from Pennsylvania, Georgia and Arizona and develop action plan strategies for implementing activities in the areas of subsidized employment, supervised work experience and community service.   |
| <b>Sample Evaluations:</b>     | <p>Selected highlights from the evaluations include:</p> <p>“The conversations with other counties as to their actions and views was very helpful for me to gain new ideas and know that I was making the right choices in directing my own actions towards facilitating new locations and enhancing those locations for CWEP and Workfare already in place in my county.”</p> <p>“I really appreciate learning about successful “Best Practices”, rather than theory. All presenters were prepared, knowledgeable, and generous with sharing what is working for them.”</p> <p>“I am very excited about the work I do. This forum has expanded my vision and increased my excitement and knowledge base for what I do with TANF clients in Yuma county. A lot of groundwork is in place that I feel creates a firm foundation for us to build upon and the ideas presented has focused my direction even more.”</p> |

## **Analysis:**

The ability of States and Counties to meet TANF participation goals through the use of subsidized employment, work experience and community service strategies has been a central part of TANF since its inception in 1996. In the first wave of welfare reform, States and Counties utilized innovative strategies which resulted in significant reductions in the TANF caseload. The remaining caseload, however, includes people with more difficult issues to overcome (substance abuse, domestic violence and the like) and whose work skills and life skills are often less advanced than their predecessors.

Recognizing these realities, the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS), on behalf of the fifty (50) Counties in the State which actually administer the TANF program, made a Technical Assistance (TA) request to the Welfare Peer TA Network. Specifically, CDHS requested TA regarding innovative and proven strategies for utilizing subsidized employment, supervised work experience and community service to meet work participation rates and increase self-sufficiency outcomes. The goal of the request was to assist Counties in developing programs and activities which increase self sufficiency outcomes for Colorado Works participants who may not be as readily placed in unsubsidized employment and to address the problem of diminished unsubsidized employment opportunities particularly in rural counties.

Network staff, working closely with CDHS staff, convened a two day roundtable (held over three days) which included representatives from a majority of the 50 Counties in the State. The sixty (60) attendees included County directors, managers, supervisors and line staff, CDHS staff and Federal regional representatives.

The Roundtable included a presentation from the Office of Family Assistance regarding the latest status of TANF reauthorization and, in particular, how the latest bills might impact on the subject matter of the Roundtable. The Network brought in three program initiatives designed to stimulate dialogue and networking: The Transitional Work Corporation (TWC) from Pennsylvania, the Georgia GoodWorks Program and the Arizona JobStart Program. In addition, information was provided about the Maine ASPIRE program. TWC explained how TANF resources could be used to create a public-private partnership around “transitional work” as a vehicle for increasing participation rates while, at the same time, preparing workers for the unsubsidized workforce. Georgia GoodWorks brought an Assistant Labor Commissioner and two staff to demonstrate that creating subsidized employment can be done in graduated stages that include community service and supervised work experience. The Arizona JobStart representative described an innovative “work supplementation” program which diverted TANF funds to a wage pool which was used to reimburse the training costs of employers who provide subsidized employment for TANF participants.

Numerous breakout sessions were used to allow for interaction, networking and strategizing. This culminated in an action planning exercise aimed at developing strategies suitable and capable of local implementation.

Evaluations submitted by attendees indicated that participants valued the opportunity to network with each other and considered the information provided to be valuable and motivational.

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