



THE WELFARE PEER TA NETWORK
Office of Family Assistance

FINAL REPORT of Peer TA Activity # 142

Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Roundtable
Effective Service Delivery for TANF Clients in Rural Areas

Salt Lake City, Utah
May 23 – 24, 2007

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
I. Event Overview.....	3
II. Introduction.....	3 - 4
III. Innovative Ideas and Products.....	4 -7
3.1 Business Access.....	4-5
3.2 GOLD Mentoring Program.....	5
3.3 Good News Garage.....	5
3.4 Occupational Enterprises, Inc.....	5 - 7
IV. Future Goals.....	7 - 8

Effective Service Delivery for TANF Clients in Rural Areas

Serving families that reside in rural areas is challenging to many states whose resources are sometimes taxed serving the needs of their urban populations. By most standards, Utah is not considered a rural state. For much of its history, the state has been predominately urban in its population, as well as industrial and commercial in its economy. The mindset of Utah's residents remains in large measure rural with an emphasis on family life. Local influences play an important part in local government and social life.¹

As a result of changes to the Deficit Reduction Act, many states are in the process of developing qualitative measures to address the needs of rural populations. Typically, job prospects are limited in rural areas, coupled with a lack of reliable transportation. States struggle to develop innovative strategies to engage rural clients in productive activities.

At the request of the Utah Department of Workforce Services, a Welfare Peer Technical Assistance (TA) event was planned to assist the Department in improving systems and resources for providing services to TANF participants residing in rural areas, and providing quality service delivery under the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005.

INTRODUCTION

On May 23 and 24, 2007, the Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network supported a one and a half day event in Salt Lake City, Utah to begin a dialogue focusing on addressing the needs of Utah's rural population and to review best practices from a sampling of states facing the same problems. The Roundtable event included participants from the Utah Department of Health and Welfare's Regional Offices and representatives from programs in Texas, New Mexico, Virginia, and Vermont. Program highlights included interactive dialogue, an in-depth overview of challenges facing rural areas from the Rural Policy Research Institute, presentations from partner States, and a facilitated action planning session for Utah to strategize about next steps for necessary programmatic and policy changes.

Partner states presented a wealth of innovative ideas and products to serve rural families and address barriers to employment in States with large rural areas. Texas' Business Access program provided information on their in-home learning retention project where computers are installed in the homes of clients who have become employed. The program provides education and job training programs via the Internet, which includes G.E.D. courses and job skills development programs. New Mexico showcased a mentoring program for TANF clients that was developed as a partnership with the New Mexico Aging and Long Term Care Department and the Department of Human Services. Vermont offered information on mitigating transportation barriers through the Good News Garage program that solicits donated cars, refurbishes them, and for a nominal fee, provides the cars to TANF clients.

¹ Charles S. Peterson, "The Americanization of Utah's Agriculture." Utah Historical Quarterly (Fall 1974).

Finally, Virginia gave information on an innovative onsite training program where clients receive on-the-job training and perform unpaid work under the supervision of the plan management.

Innovative Ideas and Products

Clients can use a variety of modalities to gain the training and experience required to satisfy the requirements set forth by the Department of Health and Welfare and to eventually become self – sufficient. Other states have used technology, partnership agreements, mentoring, donations and on-the-job training to help clients living in rural environments to accomplish their goals. Four states presented highlights of programs that are working in their states. Highlights include:

Business Access - Texas has developed an in-home learning retention project utilizing computers that have been installed in the homes of clients who have become employed. The program provides education and job training programs via the Internet, including G.E.D. courses and job skills development programs. Clients are able to search for jobs, develop job skills, and even find home based employment from the relative ease of their homes.

The In-Home Learning System increases a participants' ability to accumulate TANF participation hours because of its convenience (available 24/7 in their own home) and because there is no need for childcare and/or transportation.²

Participants are immediately engaged in the program through the Advocacy Quick Start, a series of contacts that begins directly following orientation. If a participant is not active during the first thirty days, they will be replaced at no charge. All activities on the online system are tracked, categorized, and reported. Advocates utilize system tracking to monitor program usage. If a participant is falling behind their program goals, the advocates will contact them and notify their case manager that a contact was made.³ Case managers also receive progress reports and are able to review information on a participant's progress on line also.

There are several activities a participant can access using the In-Home Learning System. Participants are able to accumulate core and non-core activity times. Activities include:

- Vocational Education (core)
- Job Search (core)
- Job Skills (non-core)
- Education Directly Related to Employment (non-core)
- GED preparation (non-core)

²Business Access – In-Home Learning System, TANF, May 2007

³ Business Access-In-Home Learning System, TANF, May 2007

Participants can also acquire and report on employment and/or community service hours using an automated function that prompts the participant weekly and sends the information to the case manager via email.

Participants are able to select their own curriculum through the use of a career aptitude test or take a curriculum that matches their on-the-job training, work, or community service. One of the most promising incentives for using the on-line training tool is ownership of the computer once the participant completes their training or reports work, community service, or on-the-job training.

GOLD Mentoring Program-The New Mexico Aging and Long Term Care Department and the Department of Human Services partnered to create a mentoring program utilizing retirees and TANF clients in the same community. The goal was to fill the gaps in caseworker service delivery and coach clients in relationship building, pre-employment preparation, job search, and navigating the government benefit system.

The “GOLD” in the mentoring program stands for “Golden Opportunities for Lifelong Development”. The program began in February 2002 and is funded by a Human Services Department grant and administered by the New Mexico Aging and Long-Term Care Department. The program works both inside and outside the state’s bureaucracy and brings unique personal attention to the problems facing parents and children in need.

GOLD mentors are typically 50 and older and use their life experience as the primary tool for interacting with program participants. They exhibit patience, creativity, and resourcefulness. They help their mentees access community programs, locate food and clothing when needed, prepare resumes, and share life experiences. GOLD mentors empower program participants to work through whatever problems present themselves, then move on as a stronger individual.

Good News Garage-Vermont founded the Good News Garage Ready to Go programs to address transportation barriers for TANF clients. The Good News Garage is a nonprofit organization that solicits donated cars, refurbishes them, and for a nominal fee, provides the cars to TANF clients. Ready to Go is a 3-year pilot program offering scheduled-reliable transportation serving very low-income individuals with license issues. Since its inception in 2003, Ready to Go has provided rides to 50,000 people.

The Good News Garage received a Federal grant to rehabilitate a building in 2002 and now has a larger site with 8 lifts. Funding for the Garage is obtained through TANF contracts, auction sales and donations. To date, 2,400 cars have been provided to families in need. Garage statistics estimate 61% of TANF recipients were off of public assistance in a year or less and 90% felt more hopefully for the future for themselves and their children.

Occupational Enterprises, Inc. – Virginia supports an onsite training program that established workspaces at two local manufacturing plants where their clients receive on-the-job training and

perform unpaid work under the supervision of the plant management. Clients who are successful workers are given priority for hiring at the plants. Occupational Enterprises, Inc. (OEI) has oversight responsibility for the program. Their vision is to provide comprehensive supportive services to low income Southwest Virginians to help them become self-sufficient. Their mission is to provide wraparound services to augment services provided by the Virginia Initiative for Employment, Not Welfare (VIEW).

OEI conducts a full assessment by a credentialed assessor. The assessment has the capability of identifying learning disabilities. Once a learning disability has been identified, OEI offers SSI advocacy to serve this population.

OEI's copyrighted job readiness curriculum offer a holistic approach to providing services to the hard to serve population. Their approach includes:

- Self-esteem enhancement
- Grooming
- Hygiene
- Wellness
- Parenting
- Communication
- Conflict Resolution
- Work Ethics
- Job Interest
- Skills Inventory
- Home Adjustments
- Resume Building
- Interview Role Play
- Job Search/Job Club
- Makeovers/Dress for Success

Once assessed, clients are referred to one of four unpaid work sites. The sites: The WORKS, Clinch Mountain Hardwood Flooring, PACE, and Rag Pickers, provide on the job experience to clients who are work ready but lack creditable experience. Funds are provided to clients for the duration of their work experience and/or internship with the promise of a job at the end of the successful placement.

In addition, two partnership programs, People, Inc. and Vehicles for Change developed low cost transportation programs designed to assist VIEW participants who have secured employment. People, Inc.'s in collaboration with the Department of Social Services developed the Cars-for-Work Program to provide private vehicles for VIEW participants who have secured employment. Vehicles for Change offers a fifteen-month guaranteed loan designed to help participants establish credit. They also offer AAA membership, car repair services at a labor rate of \$50/hour and the cost of parts once the warranty has expired, and a car orientation class reviewing the basic maintenance procedures of car ownership.

OEI also has Workforce Investment Act (WIA) linkages; OEI's Director serves as the DSS representative on the WIA board; OEI is a member of the Operator Consortium; it partners with the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC) to provide Adult, Dislocated Worker Program and Out-of-School Youth Services; and is the operator of the satellite sites in Lee and Russell Counties, Virginia. The DSS VIEW program is co-located in some WIA sites.

Future Goals

Because of Utah's unique geography, rural and urban environments, and vast distances that often separate potential partners, the challenge is to identify programmatic areas capable of providing qualitative services to all segments of Utah's vast demographics. An additional challenge involves historic idealistic differences between Native American tribes and the remaining population. The conference attempted to address programmatic ideals that would serve the needs and bridge the divide of Utah inhabitants.

The informal dialogue and question and answer sessions allowed both sides to interact with one another in a non-threatening arena. Everyone agreed that leveraging community members and obtaining buy-in from the community would begin the catalyst for change. Best practice ideas were shared and included:

- Networking and sharing information
- Managing and providing services to small groups of customers and maintaining programs
- Thinking outside of the box regarding program development
- Testing for substance abuse and mental health issues up front, and
- Accessing innovative transportation programs designed to address the needs of both rural and urban populations.

Conference participants left the event with a renewed sense of purpose and a commitment to utilize shared ideas and best practices.

This report summarizes and provides an evaluation report for Children and Families (ACF) Office of Family Assistance (OFA) Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network event entitled: Effective Service Delivery for TANF Clients in Rural Areas.

The Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network plans to follow up with Utah at the one year mark to gauge progress and offer additional assistance if required.

For more information, please see:

Appendix A: Agenda

Appendix B: Participant List

Appendix C: Evaluation Summary

[Click here](#) to make a comment regarding this report or to request further information.

[Click here](#) to submit a TA Request based upon what you have read in the Final Report.

Appendix A: Agenda

1:00 – 1:45 PM

Utilizing Technology to Serve Rural Populations: *Texas Distance Learning*
Theresa Wheatley, Utah Department of Workforce Services
Daylan Beamon, Business Access

This session will highlight how states with rural areas are serving clients through technology. Utah will moderate this session, and share knowledge on their technological system, and then Texas will share information on their program. The Business Access Program is an in-home learning retention project where computers are installed in the homes of clients who have become employed. The program provides education and job training programs via the Internet, which includes G.E.D. courses and job skills development programs. From their homes, clients can search for jobs, develop job skills, and even find certain home-based employment.

1:45 – 2:30 PM

Providing Informal Support: *New Mexico GOLD Mentoring Program*
Sondra Match, GOLD Mentoring Program

Utilizing a partnership with the New Mexico Aging and Long Term Care Department and the Department of Human Services, a mentoring program was developed with retirees and TANF clients in the same community. Mentors fill the gaps in caseworker service delivery and coach clients in such ways as relationship building, pre-employment preparation, job search, and navigating through the government benefit system.

2:30 – 2:45 PM

Break

2:45 – 3:30 PM

Mitigating Transportation Barriers: *Vermont's Good News Garage*
Michael Muzzy, Program Manager

This session will highlight how the Good News Garage and "Ready to Go" programs address barriers by providing cars and bus transport for TANF clients. The Good News Garage is a nonprofit organization that was founded in Vermont and has now adapted in other parts of the country. The organization solicits donated cars, refurbishes them, and for a nominal fee, provides the cars to TANF clients.

3:30 – 4:15 PM

Training Programs: *Virginia Training Onsite Program*
Aleta Spicer, OEI

Occupational Enterprises, Inc., (OEI) established workspaces at two local manufacturing plants where their clients receive on-the-job training and perform unpaid work under the supervision of the plan management. Clients who are successful workers are given priority for hiring at the plants.

4:15 – 4:30 PM

Day 1 Wrap-up & Day 2 Preview

Welfare Peer TA Network Staff

Lisa Washington-Thomas, Federal Project Officer, Welfare Peer TA Network

This session will conclude Day 1 and introduce the activities for Day 2. Action planning exercises will be introduced.

DAY TWO

9:00 – 9:30 AM

Day One Overview and Outlook for Day Two

Welfare Peer TA Network Staff

Lisa Washington-Thomas, Federal Project Officer, Welfare Peer TA Network

9:30 – 11:00 PM

State to State Dialogue

This time will allow the Participant States to connect with one another to ask questions and learn about promising practices, which were highlighted in the introductory sessions and panel discussions. This is time for informal dialogue and interactive Q & A. The purpose of this session is to encourage the formation of new partnerships and collaboration among participants.

11:00 – 12:45 PM

Action Planning

Participants will break into working groups by State to address the action items deemed most critical. Teams will be provided action-planning tools to support and facilitate their discussions. These tools will ask participants to capture their current strengths, challenges, opportunities, and resources -- both available and needed – on the given topic.

12:45 PM

Closing Remarks & Evaluation

*Lisa Washington-Thomas, Federal Project Officer, Welfare Peer TA Network
Welfare Peer TA Network Staff*

Appendix B: Participant List



WELFARE PEER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE NETWORK
*Effective Service Delivery for TANF Clients in
Rural Areas*



Salt Lake City, Utah
May 23-24, 2007

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WELFARE PEER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE NETWORK

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WELFARE PEER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE NETWORK
*Effective Service Delivery for TANF Clients in
Rural Areas*



Salt Lake City, Utah
May 23-24, 2007

Welfare Peer TA Network

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Appendix C: Evaluation Summary



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Evaluation Results

Evaluation Statement	Overall Score:
	Scale 1 - (Strongly Disagree) to 5 - (Strongly Agree)
I. Peer TA staff handled the logistics, arrangements, and scheduling of the event in a timely and competent manner.	4.87
II. Peer TA staff prepared me for the meeting by providing clear communication regarding the meeting's agenda and purpose.	4.12
III. The speakers had valuable information to share, and were thorough in the subject areas presented.	4.87
IV. The speakers engaged the audience effectively and facilitated interactive discussions.	4.75
V. The information presented and shared will be useful in effectively serving TANF clients in rural areas.	4.25

COMMENTS

I. What did you find most useful about attending this roundtable (i.e. any immediate or long-term benefits to you/your staff that you anticipate as a result of attending this roundtable)?

1. Hearing ideas from other States are using to help with participation.

2. Lots of good ideas, good examples and good connections. It was especially helpful because the

presenters are working in comparable circumstances to ours. (Things were applicable).

3. Presentation of various programs.
4. Mentoring ideas, Transportation ideas.
5. Being able to share best practices
6. I liked the discussion of best practices. I liked hearing all but picking and choosing those you wanted more information.
7. Networking/Sharing info.
8. Finding out the information from other states. Thinking outside the box of what can be done for FEP customers.

II. About what issues would you like to have had more discussion at the roundtable?

1. Business Access had very good information. I was very interested how this could help with/verification.
2. More discussion of best practices. We were given a lot of time for this but it was so exciting to talk and get ideas.
3. Best practices.
4. More time for planning.
5. It was great.

III. On which aspects of serving rural TANF clients would you like to receive additional technical assistance?

1. Leveraging community members and getting buy in.
2. Managing to provide services to small groups of customers and maintaining programs.
3. What other states are doing in rural areas.
4. Transportation.
5. On-line. Transportation.
6. Mental and substance abuse up front interaction or testing.

IV. Please share any overall comments regarding the program or the speakers, which you feel might be helpful in planning future programs.

- 1. Thought the conference was very helpful. I learned a lot. It would be nice to have more states attend to get more input.**
- 2. Excellent facilitation – at one point we (my group) was bogged down a bit and Kristin very tactfully extracted one faculty member to help get us back on track.**
- 3. Great accommodations. Thank you!**
- 4. Maybe survey possible attendees before picking faculty to attend. This was wonderful!**
- 5. Great opportunity.**
- 6. It was a great conference and very resourceful.**