

Title of Event: "Job Advancement: New Strategies and Facts"
(CLASP Audio Conference Summary)

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Speakers: Jack Tweedie, National Conference of State Legislators
Nan Poppe, Portland Community College

Purpose:

The purpose of this Clasp (Center for Law and Social Policy) audio conference moderated by Julie Strawn was to discuss job advancement with the two speakers. Strategies for different types of job advancement services as well as the approach state legislatures should take on this issue were discussed. The key focus was how to place welfare recipients in higher paying initial jobs that will enable them to use their skills and continued training to advance to an even higher pay.

Highlights:

Legislative Challenges and Opportunities

- Passage of the TANF Final Rules offers legislators a renewed first opportunity to act on passing legislation in the area of post-employment advancement services (with several billion dollars nationwide currently available for welfare spending).
- Legislators should help states shift their focus away from cash assistance and talk to TANF offices about expanding post-employment services.
- Concern about a turn in the economy along with the shrinking of the welfare rolls leads some state legislators to be concerned that Congress may reduce welfare spending in future years.
- States should identify alternate sources of funding if TANF funds are reduced (i.e., Welfare to Work, student financial aid programs, adult education, etc.) as well as alternate programs designed as a safety net in response to a negative change in the economy (Arkansas has such a program).
- With caseloads dropping, many states may lose track of their overall focus of moving people to self-sufficiency and only pass legislation that supports continued caseload reduction (i.e. programs for rural areas, substance abuse, disabilities, or other "hard to serve" client initiatives may receive more funding while areas such as job advancement receive little).
- Legislators will most likely only make adjustments to existing programs that support caseload reduction and not pass many new major programs.
- Legislators need to be "reeducated" about the importance of post-employment advancement services by reviewing findings from studies on welfare "leavers" and hearing about successful strategies states have used to link education/job training to work while tying in employers to assist with post-employment services (many still hold old biases that education strategies do not work- these ideas were popular during the passage of the initial welfare reform legislation and the development of most states Work First strategies).
- Welfare reform is an ongoing process, and legislators should be shown that support for welfare recipients is a progression of services that continues even after they obtain their first job to ensure they maintain employment and advance to higher skill and pay levels.

The Oregon Experience (Steps to Success Program)

- Oregon's Steps to Success program is a nationally recognized model that is a partnership of education, training, employment, health, and social service organizations who collaborate to assist welfare recipients in accessing the services necessary to

become economically self-sufficient-the program is the largest employment agency in Oregon and offers an extensive amount of post-employment services.

- Oregon has been investing heavily in post-employment services- 15-20% of TANF funding is allocated to job advancement.
- Oregon is studying comprehensive models that blend TANF, Welfare to Work, and Work Force Investment Act dollars.
- Workforce Investment Act provides for funds to be allocated to training for welfare recipients who are working- this sets the stage for partnering between community colleges and employers to promote post-employment services.
- Pre-employment services are part of the program in that clients are administered career assessments and complete a six week training program of mostly entry level skills.
- Program has added a "life skills" curriculum through several local community colleges- courses available in areas such as self-esteem, career planning, personal development, and others that focus on job retention.
- Program contracts with businesses to provide work experiences for clients.
- Short term occupational training is offered to allow clients to become accustomed to a work environment.
- Employers are targeted who promote job development-clients are matched to employers who are best suited for their skills, goals, current life situations, etc.
- Program is an alternative to traditional academic programs in that training courses available are short and job focused-this is ideal for clients who have no GED or high school diploma.
- Employers are tied into client training whenever possible.

Job Advancement Strategy Options

1. Employer partnership (for training)- by employer or community college (work-based model)

Positive Aspects:

- Training can be matched to client's schedule
- Training is onsite with the employer
- Training can be tied into the employer's needs

Negative Aspects:

- Many employers do not want to or cannot conduct on a large scale
- Employers have to be sold on the value of post-employment training
- Employer's staff has to be advised of the program and be focused on its goals

2. Flexible community college curriculum offerings (academic-based model)

Positive Aspects:

- Courses scheduled to be accessible to clients (i.e., evenings, weekends, etc.)
- Curriculum is "chunked" together to meet the needs of individual clients

Negative Aspects:

- Customized curriculum becomes problematic to schedule such small classes knowing only a specific type of client would be interested
- Colleges require minimum class attendance to make any class an economical offering

3. Client designed academic program (traditional method used widespread today)

Positive Aspects:

- Clients mix courses as they choose based upon college course offerings- some leading to degrees or certificates
- Clients set up schedules that allow them to work around their other commitments (work, child care, etc.)

Negative Aspects:

- Clients must find a way to pay for courses on their own along with child care, transportation, etc. (the state of Washington offers tuition assistance programs for working parents)
- Clients need strong internal motivation and the support of a career counselor

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