Implementing
Employment Retention
Services in Pennsylvania:
Lessons from Community
Solutions

Final Report

July 19, 2001

Diane Paulsell
Ali Stieglitz

Submitted to:
The Pittsburgh Foundation
One PPG Place, 30th Floor
Pittsburgh, PA  15222-5401

Administration for Children and Families
Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation
370 L’Enfant Promenade, SW
Washington, DC  20447

Submitted by:
Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.
P.O. Box 2393
Princeton, NJ  08543-2393
Telephone: (609) 799-3535
Facsimile: (609) 799-0005

Project Director:
Robert G. Wood

Project Officers:
Gerri Kay, The Pittsburgh Foundation
Nancye Campbell, Administration for Children and Families
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people contributed in significant ways to the preparation of this report. First and foremost, we would like to express our appreciation to the 34 program directors who participated in the study. These directors generously interrupted their schedules to talk with us about their experiences with Community Solutions and Retention and Advancement.

We are especially grateful to the staff of Appalachian Youth Services, Delaware County Community College, the Mayor’s Office of Community Service, and Northwest Institute of Research who participated in site visits. We appreciate their willingness to open their programs to us and their thoughtful participation in on-site interviews. Many Community Solutions participants and employers also made useful contributions during the visits.

We also wish to acknowledge the important role of staff at The Pittsburgh Foundation, which provided a portion of the funding for this study. Our project officer at the Foundation, Gerri Kay, provided valuable support and guidance. With the assistance of Barbara Boylan, she coordinated the efforts of many individuals and agencies to ensure that we received useful feedback on a draft of this report.

This work could not have been accomplished without the contributions of several others. Nancye Campbell, of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, served as project officer for ACF’s grant to The Pittsburgh Foundation, which provided most of the funding for this study. She has provided valuable support, guidance, and feedback throughout the study. At the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (DPW), Sherri Heller, Deputy Secretary of the Office of Income Maintenance, Bob Reynolds, Director of the Bureau of Program Evaluation, Dave Florey, Director of the Bureau of Employment and Training Programs, and Ruth Ann Van Dyke, Director of the Policy and Implementation Division at the Bureau of Employment and Training Programs, provided information about Community Solutions and insightful feedback and guidance on the draft report. Staff from DPW’s county assistance offices in Blair, Delaware, Erie, and Philadelphia Counties also shared their time and expertise with us during site visits.

At Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., several staff members made important contributions. Robert G. Wood, project director, and Alan Hershey, senior adviser to the project, provided invaluable review and guidance on drafts of the report. We are also grateful to Jennifer Chiaramonti and Patricia Ciaccio for their production and editorial contributions.
## CONTENTS

### I Introduction .....................................................................................................1  
   A. The Challenge of Employment Retention.................................1  
   B. Employment Retention and Advancement Initiatives  
      in Pennsylvania............................................................................2  
   C. Studying Employment Retention in Pennsylvania...............5  
   D. Key Study Findings........................................................................7

### II Overview of the Community Solutions Initiative .........................................11  
   A. Pennsylvania’s Blueprint for Community Solutions ......................11  
   B. Expanding the Diversity of DPW Contractors..............................15  
   C. Generating a Caseload: A Challenge for Many Contractors........18  
   D. Community Solutions Participants: The “Hard to Serve”............20

### III Community Solutions Services .....................................................................23  
   A. Staffing.............................................................................................23  
   B. Preemployment Services................................................................26  
   C. Postemployment Services ................................................................34  
   D. Employment Outcomes of Community Solutions Participants ......41

### IV Lessons from the Community Solutions Initiative........................................45  
   A. Promising Strategies ........................................................................46  
   B. New Strategies for Addressing Community Solutions’  
      Challenges..........................................................................................50  
   C. Continuing Challenges....................................................................54  
   D. Next Steps .......................................................................................56

References .....................................................................................................57  
Appendix A ...................................................................................................59  
Appendix B ...................................................................................................63
I

INTRODUCTION

Welfare reform has pressed states to develop new strategies to help recipients make the transition from welfare to sustained employment. With the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996, Congress ended the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program and established Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which imposes work requirements and a five-year lifetime limit on receipt of cash assistance benefits for most recipients. In this context, it is particularly important that welfare recipients develop the skills necessary to find and keep jobs—and to advance to better jobs over time.

This report chronicles the efforts of one state—Pennsylvania—to design and implement services intended to promote employment retention and advancement among TANF recipients and low-income working families. It documents the experiences of the key players in Pennsylvania’s employment retention and advancement effort—state employment and training staff, county assistance offices, contractors, and participants—including challenges they faced, promising strategies they developed for promoting employment retention and advancement, and lessons that can be gleaned from their experiences.

The report focuses primarily on Pennsylvania’s Community Solutions initiative, a statewide effort to provide job placement and employment retention services to TANF recipients that operated from 1998 through early 2001. We also draw on the early experiences of state and contractor staff in designing and implementing Pennsylvania’s Retention, Advancement, and Rapid Re-Employment program, which began in late 2000. The main goal of the report is to convey operational lessons that other states and program operators who pursue similar initiatives can use.

A. THE CHALLENGE OF EMPLOYMENT RETENTION

In recent years, low-skilled workers have been able to find jobs with relative ease, but sustaining employment over time appears to be much more challenging. Research suggests that women making the transition from welfare to employment typically cycle on and off welfare as they find and lose jobs (Hershey and Pavetti 1997). For example, studies conducted on the employment outcomes of welfare recipients before the welfare reforms of 1996 were implemented indicate that 25 to 40 percent of women who left welfare for employment returned within a year (Pavetti 1993; and Harris 1996). Moreover, several studies suggest that a large fraction of recipients who find jobs lose those jobs within a year, whether or not they return to welfare. For example, a national study of AFDC recipients found that as many as 75 percent lost their jobs within a year (Rangarajan et al. 1998). A more recent study of New Jersey TANF recipients found that 45 percent of recipients who found work lost their jobs in the first year, even in the more attractive job market of the late 1990s (Rangarajan and Wood 2000).

For many women making the transition from welfare to employment, the challenges associated with sustaining employment in low-wage jobs are daunting. Many of the jobs
that women leaving welfare find—often those that require only a low level of skills—create challenges and offer minimal rewards. For example, low-wage jobs typically do not offer fringe benefits such as paid leave or affordable health insurance. In addition, they often provide less than a full-time work schedule. The work schedule may be irregular, and it may include some early morning, evening, weekend, or even overnight hours. Such irregular and nonstandard work schedules add to the challenge of arranging child care and transportation to work. Moreover, many low-wage jobs provide few opportunities for advancement to better-paying jobs.

Women leaving welfare for work often face challenges associated with juggling the many responsibilities of raising a family and maintaining a job. Recipients must find reliable child care arrangements for their young children and keep up with older children’s school activities. When children are sick, they must arrange for someone else to care for them or miss work. In addition to childrearing responsibilities, recipients leaving welfare must manage a household budget, arrange transportation to work, cope with their own health problems, and sometimes contend with difficulties with partners or other family members.

While the challenges that welfare recipients trying to sustain employment face are well documented, little is known about the types of programs and services that could help. Several process studies of employment retention and advancement programs have generated operational lessons about program implementation (Wood and Paulsell 2000; Hill et al. 2001; and Fishman et al. 1999). To date, however, there are no proven strategies that have been shown to improve employment retention and promote advancement among welfare recipients. One demonstration designed to test the effectiveness of a case management approach to job retention services—the Postemployment Services Demonstration—did not find evidence that these services led to increased job retention among participants (Rangarajan and Novak 1999).

Nevertheless, the states and the federal government have been working to build a knowledge base about how best to improve the employment retention and advancement outcomes of women making the transition from welfare to employment. Many states have implemented a variety of services and programs intended to promote job retention, including postemployment case management, transportation assistance, payment of work-related fees, and other financial assistance. In addition, the Administration for Children and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has issued grants to nine states that will participate in a multisite Employment Retention and Advancement Evaluation to test alternative approaches to increasing employment retention and promoting job advancement among current or former TANF recipients or other low-income families.

B. EMPLOYMENT RETENTION AND ADVANCEMENT INITIATIVES IN PENNSYLVANIA

In the wake of the new federal requirements that PRWORA established, policymakers, advocates, community organizations, and program operators in Pennsylvania recognized the need to augment the menu of employment services available to welfare recipients throughout the state. Pennsylvania implemented TANF in March 1997 and imposed the five-year time limit on cash assistance benefits that PRWORA required. In accordance with federal law, Pennsylvania also requires most recipients, after two years of TANF receipt, to work or participate in a work-related activity for at least 20 hours per week.
Recipients in Pennsylvania who have been on TANF for less than 24 months are encouraged to enter employment but are not required to do so as a condition of TANF receipt. However, they are required to participate in some form of work-related activity, but they can choose the activity in which they wish to participate. For example, recipients could have chosen to enroll in Community Solutions or another employment and training program or to conduct an independent job search. Thus, for recipients who had been on TANF for less than 24 months, enrollment in Community Solutions and other similar programs was voluntary. Once enrolled, however, recipients were required to participate in the program as specified in their Agreement of Mutual Responsibility (AMR).1

The Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (DPW) implemented a series of new initiatives to help TANF recipients find jobs, and it has placed increasing emphasis on services designed to help recipients and other low-income working families sustain their employment and advance to better jobs. The first employment retention initiative launched in Pennsylvania was GAPS, a community-based program in Allegheny County designed and funded by The Pittsburgh Foundation. DPW increased its focus on employment retention with the implementation of Community Solutions, a statewide initiative to help TANF recipients find jobs and keep them for at least a year. A more recent initiative—the Retention, Advancement, and Rapid Re-Employment Program—is designed to help low-income working families sustain employment and advance to jobs with higher pay or medical benefits. The following sections briefly describe each of these initiatives.

1. GAPS

GAPS was a local initiative funded by The Pittsburgh Foundation, which in the wake of welfare reform sought to address the needs of low-income families with children in Allegheny County who wanted to make the transition from welfare to self-sufficiency.2 In close collaboration with the Allegheny County Assistance Office (ACAO), the Foundation developed the GAPS initiative, an employment retention program for current or former TANF recipients designed to “bridge the gap” between welfare dependence and self-sufficiency. The Foundation contracted with four community-based organizations (CBOs) to provide GAPS services. GAPS was voluntary; participants were recruited by mass mailings from the county welfare department and directly by GAPS service providers.

GAPS began in September 1997 and served about 600 participants in the Pittsburgh area over a three-year period. Many had little recent work history and an extensive history of past welfare receipt. Case management was central to the program model. Through one-on-one contacts with participants, case managers provided supportive counseling, child care and transportation help and referrals, advice on workplace behavior, and referrals to other services in the community. Many participants also

---

1The state requires most recipients to complete an AMR as a condition of receiving TANF. This agreement identifies recipients’ self-sufficiency goals and the activities recipients agree to complete to achieve these goals.

2For more information about the GAPS programs, see “Promoting Employment Retention Among TANF Recipients: Lessons from the GAPS Initiative” (Wood and Paulsell 2000). This report can be found on the Internet at www.mathematica-mpr.com/PDFs/gapsreport2.pdf.
received employment assistance, usually job search advice. GAPS provided others with in-kind help, such as food or clothing, or with emergency financial assistance.

2. Community Solutions

DPW announced its intent to implement the Community Solutions initiative in September 1997, about six months after the state implemented welfare reform. The program was designed to provide a range of pre- and postemployment services to TANF recipients, including case management, job readiness, certain education and training opportunities, job placement, and postemployment followup. In particular, DPW required contractors to provide case management and other support services for at least one year after job placement. DPW funded 70 Community Solutions contractors throughout the state, at a level of $33 million, to serve about 12,500 TANF recipients over a three-year period. Most contractors implemented the program in early 1998, and contracts ended in February 2001. Community Solutions contracts were performance based; contractors could lose their contracts if they did not meet specific performance goals. In addition, Community Solutions operated under a benchmark-based payment system in which contractors received payment based on the number of clients who achieved specific program and employment goals. Chapter II provides more details on the program’s design and its performance incentives.

The program models and array of services that Community Solutions contractors implemented varied widely. Contractors provided services such as job readiness training, basic skills training, vocational training for specific occupations, help with child care and transportation, job search assistance, internships, paid work experience, and postemployment case management and support services for at least 12 months after placement. Some contractors targeted particular segments of the welfare population (such as Spanish-speaking recipients or refugees from Southeast Asia), and others offered services to a broader spectrum of welfare recipients. The types of organizations contracted to provide services also varied substantially. They included CBOs, educational institutions, and for-profit companies.

3. Retention, Advancement, and Rapid Re-Employment

In fall 2000, DPW awarded more than $17 million to 80 contractors to operate Retention and Advancement programs. The programs are designed to help low-income working families, including TANF recipients and families not receiving welfare, sustain their employment over time and increase their earnings. According to DPW officials, some aspects of Retention and Advancement were designed based on lessons learned from the GAPS and Community Solutions initiatives described previously. The programs plan to serve nearly 5,500 participants over four years; most programs began enrolling participants in late 2000 or early 2001.

To be eligible for Retention and Advancement services, applicants must be working in an unsubsidized job. Unlike in Community Solutions, however, eligibility is not limited to TANF recipients. All working families are eligible for the services as long they have incomes at or less than 235 percent of federal poverty guidelines and have a dependent child residing in the household. According to DPW, this provision gives the

---

3 Some of the Retention and Advancement contractors had previously operated Community Solutions programs.
many TANF recipients who left the welfare rolls for employment on their own—without the help of a DPW-contracted program—an opportunity to receive the postemployment follow-up and support services available to recipients who find employment through contracted job placement programs. The program is also intended to serve low-income working families who have never received welfare but who face challenges to sustaining employment similar to those faced by TANF recipients.

C. STUDYING EMPLOYMENT RETENTION IN PENNSYLVANIA

Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (MPR) is conducting a study of employment retention and advancement initiatives in Pennsylvania. The study is funded by The Pittsburgh Foundation and by a grant from the Administration for Children and Families at DHHS, and is being conducted in collaboration with DPW. As part of this effort, MPR has conducted an implementation and outcomes study of the GAPS initiative, a community-based employment retention program funded by The Pittsburgh Foundation. Findings have been released in two reports. In addition, in 1999 MPR released a report on the early implementation experiences of Community Solutions contractors.

This is the final report of the study. It describes Pennsylvania’s efforts to implement employment retention and advancement services for TANF recipients and other low-income families with children, focusing primarily on the Community Solutions initiative. In addition, the report describes how the state has applied lessons learned from its experience with Community Solutions and, to a lesser extent, from GAPS, to its design of Retention and Advancement. The report’s primary purpose is to disseminate operational lessons derived from Pennsylvania’s experiences that other states and program operators implementing similar initiatives can use. The study does not provide detailed information about participants’ employment outcomes, nor does it include an assessment of the programs’ effectiveness in improving such outcomes.

To gather information for this report, MPR conducted a series of telephone and in-person interviews about program implementation with program directors and other staff, program participants, employers, county assistance office staff, and staff from DPW’s Employment and Training Bureau. These interviews were conducted in four phases over a two-year period:

1. Initial Telephone Interviews with Community Solutions Contractors. We conducted an initial set of telephone interviews with 34 Community Solutions directors representing 40 programs (about 60 percent of all programs) in early 1999, approximately eight months to one year after most programs began enrolling clients. Because we could not interview every director, we focused

---


6Some directors managed more than one program. Appendix A provides a list of the Community Solutions contractors included in the director interviews.
on interviewing directors of larger programs. We also attempted to select contractors located throughout the state and contractors implementing a variety of program designs. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes.

2. **Follow-Up Telephone Interviews with Community Solutions Contractors.** In fall 1999, we contacted 12 of the 34 directors interviewed previously for follow-up interviews. The purpose of these interviews was to learn about new developments in the implementation of Community Solutions and to identify promising programs to visit for more in-depth study. We selected these programs for follow-up interviews because they reported substantial job retention activities during our initial round of discussions and were large enough to warrant a site visit.

3. **In-Person Interviews During Community Solutions Site Visits.** In early 2000, we conducted a series of site visits to four Community Solutions programs: Appalachian Youth Services, Delaware County Community College, the Mayor’s Office of Community Service (MOCS), and Northwest Institute of Research (NIR). We selected these four programs because they were implementing a range of approaches to providing retention services and reported some success in helping participants sustain their employment. During these visits, researchers conducted in-depth individual and group interviews with Community Solutions staff, participants, employers, and county assistance office staff. In addition, we conducted in-depth interviews with staff from DPW’s Bureau of Employment and Training Programs in spring 2000.

4. **Interviews with Retention and Advancement Contractors.** In December 2000 and January 2001, we conducted 10 telephone interviews with Retention and Advancement contractors that we had interviewed previously when they held Community Solutions contracts. During these interviews, we learned about the contractors’ plans for implementing Retention and Advancement and the extent to which their experience with Community Solutions influenced their planning efforts.

The rest of this report provides a detailed view of Pennsylvania’s efforts to implement employment Retention and Advancement services for TANF recipients and other low-income working families. Chapter II describes the design of Community Solutions, the types of contractors that operated programs, the referral process, and key challenges participants faced. Chapter III describes Community Solutions staff and services. Chapter IV reviews implementation challenges, promising practices, and lessons from Community Solutions and discusses how Pennsylvania has attempted to address these challenges and apply the lessons learned to its design of Retention and Advancement.

**D. Key Study Findings**

Pennsylvania’s implementation of employment retention programs for TANF recipients and other low-income families can inform policymakers and program operators

---

7Appendix B contains a profile of each of the four Community Solutions programs we visited.
as they design and implement similar initiatives. This section presents two sets of key findings that have emerged from the study. The first set of findings identifies implementation challenges faced by Community Solutions contractors. The second set highlights lessons about service delivery strategies and program design that have emerged from our examination of the state’s employment retention efforts.

- **On average, Community Solutions programs enrolled only half of the participants they planned to serve.** Because Pennsylvania’s TANF caseload dropped rapidly after Community Solutions was implemented, most contractors were not able to enroll the number of participants they were contracted to serve. During the program’s first year, contractors enrolled two-thirds of their projected caseloads. By the second year, contractors enrolled only one-third of their anticipated caseloads. Other factors that led to low enrollment in some programs included eligibility verification procedures that required contractors to refer potential participants back to their county assistance office caseworkers, competition for participants among DPW employment and training contractors, and a mismatch between the targeting plans of some programs and the characteristics of recipients eligible for enrollment.

- **Outcomes for Community Solutions participants fell short of the job placement performance goals set by DPW for Community Solutions.** For example, while the state required most programs to achieve a job placement rate of 65 percent, programs placed slightly less than half of enrolled participants in full-time jobs (at least 30 hours a week). Of those, almost half were placed in jobs that offered medical benefits within six months of hire, while the state’s performance goal was 60 percent of participants placed in jobs.

- **Few Community Solutions participants achieved the state’s employment retention goal of 12 months of continuous employment.** The state set an ambitious goal for employment retention and incorporated this goal into a performance benchmark that contractors had to meet. To receive payment for achieving the employment retention benchmark, contractors had to ensure that participants worked continuously for 12 months for an average of 30 hours per week. Breaks in employment could not exceed seven calendar days. On average, contractors received the employment retention payment for only 10 percent of participants who had been placed in jobs. This low percentage suggests that many participants had difficulty maintaining continuous employment for a year. However, several additional factors contributed to this percentage being so low. For example, contractors sometimes could not assemble sufficient documentation to obtain the retention payment, even though a client had achieved 12 months of continuous employment. In addition, slightly more than half of the 70 Community Solutions contractors terminated their contracts before the end of the three-year contract period. While some participants served by these programs may have met the retention benchmark, these programs did not document or request payment for retention outcomes after their contracts ended. Thus, it is likely that more than 10 percent of participants achieved the retention benchmark.
DPW and the Community Solutions contractors faced several challenges that made the program difficult to implement. Most of these challenges were related to the initiative’s design and the changing TANF landscape in Pennsylvania. Consequently, programs’ options for addressing these challenges within the context of the Community Solutions contract were limited. Nevertheless, DPW and the contractors learned from the challenges that arose in Community Solutions. As they ended the program and began planning and implementing Retention and Advancement, DPW and the contractors attempted to build on past successes and learn from past challenges to design service delivery strategies they believed would be most helpful to program participants. The findings that follow describe key program design and service delivery lessons that emerged.

- **Employment retention initiatives can be enhanced when services are provided in an individualized and flexible manner.** Families making the transition from welfare to employment have a wide range of needs and diverse career interests, skill levels, and personal characteristics. Community Solutions programs that tailored services to address the individual needs and interests of participants—instead of providing a predetermined set of services targeted to participants with specific characteristics—were better able to recruit participants and respond to their needs. Likewise, programs enhanced their capacity to deliver services to working parents by holding case management meetings at locations that were convenient for participants, scheduling meetings during nonstandard hours if necessary, and adjusting the start and end dates of various program components to meet participants’ individual needs.

- **Tailoring services to the individual needs of participants requires intensive case management.** Assessing the evolving needs of employed participants and helping them address work-related and personal problems that arise requires frequent contact between participants and program staff. Often, problems with child care or transportation must be resolved quickly before they jeopardize the participants’ ability to continue working. To address problems with job performance or conflicts with a supervisor, participants may need staff to provide coaching on the job or mediation with the employer. DPW and program staff believe that programs are best able to identify and respond to such problems when staff members communicate with participants regularly. Moreover, these staff members report that frequent contact with participants, preferably at least weekly, is especially important in the early months of employment, when many Community Solutions participants lost or quit jobs.

- **Financial incentives and other rewards can be useful tools for motivating participants to participate in program activities and sustain their employment.** Some Community Solutions contractors used financial or in-kind incentives to encourage participation and reward sustained employment. For example, some provided financial rewards to participants who attended regular postemployment case management meetings. Others offered financial incentives, gift certificates, or other rewards to participants who sustained their employment for specified time periods. While none felt that incentives alone were enough to sustain participants’ motivation, DPW officials and
many contractors indicated that these rewards helped motivate participants to keep working and stay in touch with program staff.

- **Recruiting participants for voluntary employment retention programs requires aggressive recruitment efforts and close coordination between contractors and welfare offices.** As TANF caseloads drop, both the state and contractors must implement aggressive recruitment strategies to make full use of contracted employment retention programs. For example, recruitment methods for Community Solutions included direct referrals from the county assistance offices, recruitment fairs, direct recruitment by contractors, and dissemination of flyers, brochures, and recruitment videos. Moreover, recruitment efforts can be enhanced when the state and contractors coordinate their efforts by holding regular meetings, sharing information on recruitment efforts and progress, and developing joint procedures for making referrals and verifying eligibility.

- **Implementing a benchmark-based payment system based solely on individual participant outcomes is complex and may jeopardize contractors’ financial viability.** Under Community Solutions, DPW and the contractors had to implement a complex set of documentation, verification, and payment procedures that required a significant investment of staff time. Because Community Solutions contractors were paid for achieving performance benchmarks with individual participants, their financial viability depended on their ability to meet enrollment targets. The uncertainty inherent in this payment system, coupled with the low level of referrals to most programs, made planning service delivery and staffing difficult. Performance contracts that provide base funding through cost reimbursement (and thus protect programs’ financial viability), but also include financial incentives for achieving specific performance outcomes, may be a better way to motivate contractors to work toward program goals.

- **When program performance goals require participants to find jobs that are better than the minimum requirements set by TANF, special care should be taken to communicate this message consistently to participants.** DPW established employment-related performance goals for Community Solutions that were higher than TANF work requirements. While Pennsylvania requires TANF recipients who have been on cash assistance for two years to work for 20 hours a week, the performance goals for Community Solutions required work for 30 hours per week in jobs that paid at least $6.50 an hour. Some program directors reported that differences in TANF rules and performance goals for Community Solutions sometimes resulted in an inconsistent message to participants about the types of jobs they should seek. For example, some directors reported that county assistance office caseworkers, when explaining TANF rules, did not clarify that Community Solutions participants were required to meet higher standards. In large part, contractors are responsible for conveying program goals to participants and for motivating them to work toward program goals. However, state staff can reinforce this message from contractors by reviewing performance expectations with participants, incorporating the higher goals into recipients’ service plans, and imposing appropriate sanctions for noncompliance.
OVERVIEW OF THE COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS INITIATIVE

The state of Pennsylvania developed the Community Solutions initiative during the initial stages of its welfare reform effort. At that time, the state anticipated that it would need to expand its capacity to offer employment services to TANF recipients seeking to make the transition from welfare to self-sufficiency. As a first step, DPW implemented the Up Front Job Placement Program and the Rapid Attachment Program, which provided TANF recipients with short-term job readiness training and assistance with their initial job search.\(^1\)

Pennsylvania added Community Solutions to its employment and training programs, in part to increase the number of employment services program slots available in the state. At the time Community Solutions was designed, only 20 percent of TANF recipients were enrolled in a DPW-contracted employment program. As it turned out, however, the state overestimated its need for additional slots. As discussed later in this chapter, Community Solutions did not meet expected enrollment targets because many TANF recipients found jobs on their own.

Community Solutions was also designed to be a more intensive intervention than Up Front or Rapid Attachment. Although both of those programs succeeded in placing large numbers of TANF recipients in jobs, DPW expected some recipients to need additional services and support to overcome barriers that prevented them from finding and keeping jobs. DPW expected Community Solutions to meet this need; the program would serve TANF recipients who had completed an initial job search without finding employment. Community Solutions would fit into the midpoint of the spectrum of DPW-contracted programs. It would be more intensive than short-term placement programs like Rapid Attachment but not as intensive as the Single Point of Contact (SPOC) programs intended for hard-to-serve recipients with multiple barriers to employment.

In this chapter, we provide an overview of the Community Solutions initiative, beginning with a description of the state’s blueprint for the program. We then examine the state’s efforts to expand its pool of contractors for Community Solutions and the types of organizations that eventually won contracts. Next, we describe the recruitment and referral process. We end the chapter with a description of the challenges to sustained employment that Community Solutions participants faced, as described by staff from Community Solutions contractors and county assistance offices.

A. PENNSYLVANIA’S BLUEPRINT FOR COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS

As an initiative designed to serve welfare recipients under the new federal requirements, Community Solutions provided DPW with an opportunity to test several new approaches to providing employment services to TANF recipients. First,

\(^1\)Pennsylvania’s welfare reform law requires most TANF recipients who apply for cash assistance to conduct an initial job search for a minimum of eight weeks. Individuals who were receiving cash assistance benefits when TANF was implemented in March 1997 were required to conduct an eight-week job search after their next redetermination of benefits.
Community Solutions gave DPW a chance to test the use of a benchmark-based payment system in which DPW paid contractors for achieving specific performance benchmarks and allowed programs that did not perform well to shut down. Second, through Community Solutions, DPW tested several specific employment services, including services to help participants find jobs and services to help participants sustain their employment over time. Third, DPW tested the contractors’ ability to meet higher performance expectations than had been set for previous programs. In particular, DPW set a high performance goal for employment retention.

1. Benchmark-Based Payment System

DPW funded Community Solutions through performance-based contracts and implemented a benchmark-based payment system. Instead of offering reimbursement for the actual cost of operating the program, DPW paid the contractors for achieving specific performance benchmarks with individual participants. DPW viewed this as a potentially effective way to ensure that contractors focused on the program’s main objectives and concentrated on achieving the program’s performance goals.

Most contractors received the following payments for achieving each of the benchmarks described below:\(^2\)

- **Participation.** Contractors received $1,000 for each participant who completed a five-day assessment period and reported for the first day of program activity.

- **Placement.** DPW paid contractors $1,000 for each participant who obtained unsubsidized, full-time employment of at least 30 hours per week.

- **Medical Benefits.** Contractors received $400 for each participant who obtained a job that offered medical benefits within six months of beginning employment.

- **Job Retention.** DPW paid contractors $1,600 for each participant who retained full-time employment for 12 months.\(^3\)

This benchmark-based payment system was challenging for DPW and the contractors to implement. To monitor each program’s performance, DPW staff had to

---

\(^2\)A small fraction of contractors that implemented the “employer-linked” program model (described later in this chapter) received lower payments than did those implementing the local collaboration or innovations models. Employer-linked contractors received $800 for participation, $800 for job placement, $400 for placement in a job with medical benefits, and $1,000 after 12 months of job retention. DPW paid contractors implementing the employer-linked model at a lower rate because they received firm job commitments from employers prior to program startup.

\(^3\)Community Solutions participants could change jobs during the one-year retention period. However, for contractors to receive the payment for 12 months of continuous employment, participants’ subsequent jobs had to offer a combination of wages and hours that provided at least as much weekly income as that provided by their initial job, with each spell of unemployment lasting no longer than seven calendar days. If participants became unemployed for longer than seven calendar days, the 12-month employment “clock” restarted when they began working again. The contractor thus had another chance to earn the job retention payment, as long as the participant achieved 12 months of continuous employment within 18 months of first beginning work.
evaluate the achievement of benchmarks for specific participants, reconcile discrepancies in documentation, verify participants’ reported outcomes, and issue payments to programs based on the performance of individual participants. DPW’s employment and training staff reported that, at times, they struggled to keep up with all the details and “crank out the payments” in a timely way.

Likewise, contractors found the reporting and documentation requirements associated with the benchmark-based payment system burdensome. Contractors had to gather documentation to substantiate participants’ outcomes, then request payment for achieving specific performance goals. When discrepancies were discovered between contractors’ reports and data collected in DPW’s management information system, payment was withheld until the discrepancy was investigated and, if warranted, corrected. This process proved time-consuming for both contractors and DPW staff and, at times, significantly delayed payments to contractors.

In the end, DPW staff found that a benchmark-based payment system, as specified by DPW for the Community Solutions initiative, was not worth the additional effort and resources required to implement it.4 (See Chapter IV for more discussion of the challenges associated with the benchmark-based payment system specified by DPW for the Community Solutions initiative.)

2. Program Models

DPW defined three program models for Community Solutions: (1) the local collaboration model, (2) the employer-linked placement model, and (3) the innovations demonstration model. According to DPW staff, these models were chosen to meet three specific goals: (1) to encourage community organizations to collaborate to meet the needs of TANF recipients, (2) to respond to employers’ needs for entry-level workers, and (3) to generate new ideas to help TANF recipients find and keep jobs. The types of services provided differed across models. However, DPW required all contractors to provide the following essential services: an initial assessment of skills and abilities, orientation, job readiness preparation, job search training, case management, assistance accessing special allowances for support services, intensive job placement assistance, and 12 months of postemployment follow-up services.

Variation Across Program Models. Program models differed in the types of partnerships contractors were required to form, the services they could provide, and the duration of various program components (Table II.1). Local collaboration programs had to establish a partnership with at least one other community service provider and identify the specific services each partner would provide to help TANF recipients find and keep jobs. In contrast, employer-linked programs had to form partnerships with employers who agreed to hire at least 80 percent of the participants who completed the program. The employer-linked model also required that program services, such as education or vocational training, be tailored to the needs of specific employers. Unlike programs implementing the other models, employer-linked programs could provide job development services only to participants who were not hired immediately by the designated employers.

4In DPW’s specification, all funding depended on achieving demanding performance benchmarks. As an alternative, DPW could have provided funding based on a cost-reimbursement basis and tied additional financial rewards to achieving specific performance benchmarks.
Contractors that had not formed partnerships with other service providers or employers could implement the innovations model and had broad flexibility in the design and implementation of their Community Solutions programs. These contractors could provide a wide range of services, such as life skills training, internships, and paid work experience. The innovations model, unlike the other models, did not impose limits on the duration of specific services, such as job readiness or vocational training, as long as the program’s preemployment phase did not last longer than 12 months.

**Implementation of Program Models.** Three-fourths of the 70 Community Solutions contractors implemented an innovations program. These contractors designed their programs using a variety of approaches for helping participants find and keep jobs. Some contractors, such as Curtis & Associates, offered job readiness and placement services of relatively brief duration. Participants usually were placed in jobs within 8 to 12 weeks after enrollment. Other contractors, such as Delaware County Technical Schools, offered vocational training and basic education in addition to the required services. A few contractors, such as the Center for Employment Training of Universal Community Homes, offered an extensive education and training component, which lasted from six months to one year.

One-fifth of the contractors implemented a local collaboration program. Most of these contractors teamed with organizations that specialize in serving particular segments of the TANF population or that could provide enhanced support services to Community
Solutions participants. For example, Arbor, Inc., in Philadelphia, and the Greater Erie Community Action Committee formed partnerships with organizations that serve Spanish-speaking populations. Similarly, Educational Data Systems partnered with an organization that specializes in serving refugees. Worksmith Institute collaborated with Allegheny General Hospital’s Family Growth Center, which provided enhanced support services to Community Solutions participants. For example, hospital staff provided individual and family counseling and workshops on life skills topics such as parenting, budgeting, and nutrition.

Only slightly more than five percent of contractors implemented the employer-linked model. Contractors may have found this model unattractive because employer-linked programs received lower payments for achieving performance benchmarks than programs implementing the other models. In addition, DPW and the contractors reported that it was difficult to obtain firm commitments from employers to hire 80 percent of all clients who completed the program. Programs implementing this model prepared participants for jobs in such fields as food service, materials handling, health services, and office support.

3. Performance Goals

DPW set ambitious performance goals for Community Solutions. These goals were intended to promote placement of TANF recipients in jobs with good wages and benefits and to ensure that programs placed equal emphasis on initial job placement and long-term job retention. For all three models, DPW identified specific program requirements and minimum performance goals that contractors were required to meet to maintain their contracts (Table II.2).

DPW staff reported that they selected the performance goals based on several factors. They used their past experience with other programs as a guide for determining the levels of performance contractors would reasonably be expected to achieve with the amount of funding DPW planned to offer. Because DPW considered two objectives—encouraging contractors to help participants find jobs with medical benefits and to help participants maintain their employment—especially high priority, it designed the goals to reward contractors who achieved these objectives. In addition, because DPW contractors had successfully met 90-day job retention goals for other programs, it decided to increase the retention goal to a full year.

B. Expanding the Diversity of DPW Contractors

Before soliciting bids for Community Solutions contracts, DPW held bidders’ conferences throughout the state and took other steps to increase its pool of potential bidders, particularly CBOs that were eager to serve TANF recipients. According to DPW officials, by broadening the pool of bidders beyond those entities that regularly held DPW contracts, the agency aimed to bring in contractors with new ideas and approaches, access previously untapped local resources, and make connections with employers who

---

5DPW monitored contractors that did not meet minimum performance goals more closely during a probationary period. If contractors did not meet the minimum performance goals by the end of the probationary period, DPW could reduce their funding or terminate their contracts.
had not worked previously with other DPW contractors. DPW succeeded in increasing its list of potential bidders from about 600 organizations to more than 3,000, of which 260 bid on Community Solutions contracts.

Of the contractors we interviewed, about 25 percent had contracted with DPW for the first time. According to DPW, its staff had to invest significant time and effort in technical assistance to support these new CBO contractors. Some bid with overly ambitious performance goals and struggled financially when DPW held them to the terms of their bids. As with other types of contractors, DPW officials reported that some CBOs had done exceptionally well, while others failed. However, DPW did succeed in recruiting as contractors some kinds of organizations that the agency had not worked with previously. Officials expect that many of these organizations will continue their contracting relationship with DPW. The rest of this section describes the contractors that provided Community Solutions services and their previous experience providing similar types of services.

1. **Types of Contractors**

Almost 9 out of 10 Community Solutions contractors that we interviewed were nonprofit organizations, such as schools, employment and training agencies, and other CBOs (Table II.3). Schools that provided Community Solutions services include technical schools serving high school students and adults, as well as community colleges. Employment and training agencies range from the Washington Greene County Job Training Agency, a state-funded agency that traditionally has provided services to unemployed residents, to Potential Reentry Opportunities in Business and Education (PROBE), a private organization that provides career counseling and job placement assistance to single mothers and displaced homemakers. Some of the CBOs specialize in providing services to specific populations. For example, the Hispanic American
Organization traditionally has served a primarily Spanish-speaking population. The People’s Emergency Center, a homeless shelter in Philadelphia, targets its services to homeless women and children.

2. Previous Experience of Contractors

Three-quarters of the contractors we interviewed had previous experience providing employment services through DPW contracts, but few of these had experience providing the long-term employment retention services that Community Solutions required. Most of the other DPW contracts these agencies had worked on required only 30 to 90 days of postemployment follow-up services. Only two contractors—Goodwill Industries of Pittsburgh and Three Rivers Employment Services—reported experience providing up to 12 months of postemployment followup. Both programs had long-standing policies of providing extended follow-up services to all participants placed in jobs.

According to DPW, few of those contracting with DPW for the first time (the remaining 25 percent of the contractors we interviewed) had sufficient expertise in providing job placement or retention services to TANF recipients, despite the adequacy of their bid proposals. DPW staff reported providing extensive training to some of the new contractors on the basic elements of providing employment services.

This experience with a substantial fraction of new contractors illustrates the trade-off in balancing DPW’s competing goals for the program. On the one hand, through Community Solutions, DPW wanted to attract contractors—especially CBOs—that had not worked with DPW in the past. One the other hand, to meet the ambitious performance goals established for Community Solutions, DPW needed to find contractors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nonprofit Organizations</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local Collaboration</td>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>Employment and Training Agencies</td>
<td>Community-Based Organizations</td>
<td>For-Profit Companies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employer-Linked</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Innovations</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Telephone interviews with directors of 40 Community Solutions programs.

NOTE: Figures include only the 40 Community Solutions programs whose directors were interviewed.
with sufficient experience in providing job placement and retention services to welfare recipients.

C. Generating a CaseLoad: A Challenge for Many Contractors

When DPW requested bids for Community Solutions contracts in September 1997, the agency expected to have more than enough TANF recipients to refer to the program. However, the number of referrals to Community Solutions programs was much lower than expected, especially in counties in which TANF caseloads dropped precipitously. According to DPW staff, many recipients in these counties found jobs on their own or through short-term job placement programs. Across all programs, contractors enrolled 6,600 Community Solutions participants, or 50 percent of the expected caseload. The rest of this section first describes the recruitment and referral process, including the strategies that contractors and county assistance offices implemented to generate referrals. It then discusses the challenges contractors faced to generating sufficient referrals to their programs.

1. Recruitment and Referral

County assistance offices and contractors used four main methods to recruit Community Solutions participants. First, county assistance office caseworkers often referred TANF recipients directly to one of the Community Solutions programs. Second, in Philadelphia and several other large counties, county assistance offices organized group recruitment fairs where contractors could make presentations about their programs to groups of potential participants. For example, in Philadelphia, the county assistance office invited 1,000 TANF recipients to information sessions at five locations at which Community Solutions contractors made presentations. Third, some contractors attempted to recruit potential participants directly. For example, some approached TANF recipients who used other services offered by their agencies or posted flyers in the neighborhoods they served. Finally, contractors tried to increase referrals by providing information about their programs to county assistance office caseworkers. For example, programs produced brochures and flyers and invited caseworkers to attend open houses at their offices. Appalachian Youth Services in Blair County even produced a recruitment video that could be shown in the county assistance office waiting room. In general, both DPW and county assistance office staff reported that recruitment and referral activities worked best when contractors developed systems for recruitment and referral and strong working relationships with county assistance offices.

Regardless of how potential participants were recruited, county assistance offices had to verify their eligibility before they could enroll in the program. Most often, county assistance office caseworkers referred TANF recipients directly to the programs after meeting individually with them to discuss options for obtaining employment services. During these meetings, county assistance office caseworkers outlined recipients’ obligations to seek employment and participate in employment and training activities.

After discussing their options with the caseworker, TANF recipients could choose to enroll in Community Solutions or another contracted program, or to conduct an independent job search. While the state requires most TANF recipients to participate in work-related activities, Pennsylvania’s welfare reform law does not authorize DPW to mandate that TANF recipients who have been on cash assistance for less than 24 months participate in specific programs or activities. After choosing the work-related
activity in which they wished to participate, recipients signed an Agreement of Mutual Responsibility (AMR). This agreement outlined self-sufficiency goals and the activities recipients had to complete to achieve the goals.

2. Challenges to Generating Referrals

Recruiting a sufficient number of participants was challenging for most programs, because there were not enough potential participants to fill all of the contracted program slots. In preparation for requesting bids for Community Solutions contracts, DPW had the county assistance offices estimate the number of Community Solutions slots their county would need, and DPW updated these projections before selecting contractors. Despite this careful planning effort, however, most counties needed far fewer Community Solutions slots than anticipated, primarily because TANF rolls dropped more rapidly than the state expected. DPW, county assistance offices, and contractors have offered several other explanations, beyond the drop in the TANF caseload, for the generally low level of referrals.

First, from the contractors’ perspective, the eligibility verification process made it difficult to recruit participants. Contractors could recruit potential participants on their own (without waiting for referrals from the county assistance office). After potential participants were recruited, however, contractors had to send them to meet with their county assistance office caseworker to verify their eligibility for the program. During the verification process, they were informed of other options for obtaining employment services. Because TANF recipients in Pennsylvania can choose the employment activity in which they wish to participate, some potential participants decided at that point to choose another activity instead of enrolling in Community Solutions.

Second, in many counties, Community Solutions and other DPW-contracted programs were competing for participants, because there were not enough TANF recipients to fill all of the contracted employment program slots. County assistance office staff reported that some contractors were accustomed to receiving referrals of “mandatory” participants (recipients who were required to participate in specific programs), and thus did not have much experience recruiting participants directly. Because of competition among contractors, however, Community Solutions programs had to market their services to attract participants. According to county assistance offices, some contractors had difficulty making the shift to viewing participants as consumers to whom they needed to “sell” their services. In particular, county assistance office staff reported that some contractors did not attract participants because they did not “give a good pitch” during their group recruitment events. Other contractors did not attend the group recruitment sessions. Likewise, DPW staff reported that the services some contractors offered were not attractive to participants, but these contractors were reluctant to change their programs to better fit participants’ interests. Such programs tended to receive fewer referrals.

Finally, some contractors designed programs tailored to the characteristics of specific types of TANF recipients. In deciding to serve participants with specific characteristics, these contractors unwittingly narrowed their target populations even further. For example, some specialized in serving participants from specific ethnic or linguistic backgrounds. Others focused on preparing participants for specific occupations (such as Certified Nurses Assistant) and could only accommodate participants with specific qualifications.
D. COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS PARTICIPANTS: THE “HARD TO SERVE”

Newly employed welfare recipients can face a variety of challenges as they make the transition from welfare dependence to sustained employment. They may have difficulty finding reliable child care arrangements or transportation to work. They may lack the experience and skills necessary to get along with coworkers and supervisors or the basic education and skills necessary to perform well on the job. Others may struggle with family or parenting problems that interfere with maintaining stable employment.

Understanding the types and the severity of challenges that newly employed welfare recipients are likely to encounter as they begin working is important for designing programs that can support participants in their efforts to sustain their employment. This section describes initial expectations about the challenges to sustained employment that Community Solutions participants would likely confront and the types of challenges participants encountered during their participation in the program (as described by Community Solutions directors and county assistance office staff).

1. Initial Expectations About Participants’ Needs

At the time Community Solutions was designed, DPW expected that it would need to increase the agency’s capacity to provide employment services to TANF recipients. According to DPW, Community Solutions was intended to increase the number of employment services program slots in the middle range of service intensity. In the Request for Proposals issued for Community Solutions, DPW described likely Community Solutions participants as being among the “more readily employable welfare recipients” but cautioned that some participants could have limited education and work history and need intensive help from the program to find and keep jobs. In practice, however, DPW did not need all of the additional capacity created by the Community Solutions program to serve TANF recipients. DPW staff believe that many of the recipients they expected to use Community Solutions services found jobs on their own due to the robust economy or through short-term job placement programs such as Rapid Attachment.

2. Challenges That Community Solutions Participants Faced

According to program and county assistance office staff, those TANF recipients who did not find employment and enrolled in Community Solutions were among the more disadvantaged and harder-to-serve TANF recipients. Contractors reported that, in contrast to initial expectations, most participants entered the program with multiple challenges to sustained employment. In this section, we describe, based on the experiences and perceptions of Community Solutions program directors, the main challenges that Community Solutions participants faced to finding and keeping jobs (Figure II.1):

- **Child Care.** Program directors most frequently identified child care as a challenge to sustained employment for their participants (Figure II.1). During the program’s first year, some participants had difficulty obtaining a child care allowance from DPW when they began attending the program, and some participants experienced delays in receiving initial Transitional Child Care benefits when they began working. According to program directors, however, these problems were largely resolved when Child Care Works, Pennsylvania’s
FIGURE II.1
MOST FREQUENTLY REPORTED CHALLENGES TO FINDING AND KEEPING JOBS AS REPORTED BY PROGRAM DIRECTORS

Source: Telephone interviews with program directors of 40 Community Solutions programs.
Note: Percentages represent the fraction of Community Solutions directors who reported an issue as a main challenge that participants face in finding and keeping jobs. They do not represent the fraction of participants facing each of these challenges.

current child care subsidy program, was implemented in early 1999. A number of program directors described the difficulties that participants faced in arranging child care, especially care during evenings and nights, care for sick children, and care for school-age children after school and during the summer.

- **Transportation.** According to directors, public transportation in many counties did not meet participants’ needs, because bus routes and hours of operation limit employment options. Jobs were plentiful in suburban areas but were inaccessible to participants who did not have access to cars. Several directors also reported that some participants had difficulty obtaining transportation assistance from DPW during the initial period of assessment and program enrollment.

- **Low Levels of Education and Lack of English-Speaking Skills.** Many participants did not have a high school diploma or general equivalency diploma (GED), and this limited their employment prospects. Assessment tests conducted by some Community Solutions contractors indicated low levels of reading skills among a substantial proportion of participants. In

---

6On February 1, 1999, the state launched Child Care Works, the new child care subsidy program, which combines the two former subsidy programs into a single system with uniform rules and procedures. The new program includes provisions intended to ease the transition from TANF to employment by eliminating gaps in coverage and differences in requirements and procedures across the former subsidy programs.
addition, some participants could not speak English or could speak English only poorly.

- **Family and Parenting Problems.** Directors in about half of the programs identified difficulties with partners, family members, or children as challenges to finding and keeping jobs. Some directors specifically identified domestic violence as a serious problem. Other directors reported that some participants experienced negative pressure about work from family members and friends. Finally, problems with children, such as health or school problems, made it difficult for some participants to work.

- **Life and Job Readiness Skills.** Failure to develop life and job readiness skills limited some participants’ employment options and threatened their ability to keep their jobs. Some participants had difficulty maintaining a schedule or arriving at work on time because they did not have the necessary planning and organizational skills. Insufficient personal “coping” skills hampered participants’ ability to manage relationships with coworkers and supervisors. Participants who lacked financial management and budgeting skills developed work-related problems because they failed to set aside sufficient funds for work-related expenses, such as transportation.

- **Behavioral Problems.** Drug and alcohol addiction, criminal records, and legal problems posed serious barriers to finding and sustaining employment for some participants. One director noted that substance abuse was often coupled with depression or other emotional problems. Another explained that drug problems typically were revealed when a participant failed a drug test at a new job. In addition, several directors reported that criminal records severely limited employment options and the wages that employers were willing to pay.

- **Lack of Motivation and Low Self-Esteem.** Some program directors noted that the lack of motivation to work, or lack of a “work ethic,” posed the most significant challenge to employment for some participants. Program staff found it difficult to engage participants who had these poor attitudes in program activities. Moreover, a negative attitude about work and a lack of motivation to succeed at work often resulted in job loss. Other directors identified low self-esteem as a major problem. According to these directors, some participants feared working and believed they would fail. In other cases, partners, family members, or friends pressured participants not to work and told them they would fail even if they did obtain employment.
III

COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS SERVICES

The state of Pennsylvania expected Community Solutions contractors to place participants in full-time jobs that offered medical benefits and to help participants retain those jobs for at least a year. To meet these goals, Community Solutions programs provided a variety of pre- and postemployment services. All contractors provided contractually required services, such as assessment, program orientation, case management, job readiness instruction, job search assistance, and postemployment followup. Beyond these basic services, however, the types and intensity of services offered varied widely. For example, some programs provided optional services such as basic education or vocational training. Some offered support services to help participants arrange child care and transportation, obtain financial assistance, or apply for the federal Earned Income Credit. Others used financial incentives to encourage program participation and reward participants who kept their jobs and stayed in touch with program staff.

To learn from Pennsylvania’s experience implementing the Community Solutions initiative, it is important to understand how the contractors provided services. In this chapter, we first discuss the staffing arrangements for Community Solutions programs. Next, we describe the variety of pre- and postemployment services that Community Solutions contractors provided. We conclude with a discussion of participants’ employment outcomes.

The information presented in this chapter comes from two main sources. The general discussion of programs’ staffing and service delivery is based on telephone interviews with the directors of 40 Community Solutions programs. In addition, to highlight specific examples of programs’ strategies and illustrate individual participants’ experiences as they moved from welfare to work, we rely on information from discussions with program staff, program participants, and employers during site visits to four programs.

A. STAFFING

Staffing patterns for Community Solutions varied according to program size, type and intensity of services provided, and types of other programs the contractors operated. Some contractors hired staff to work exclusively with Community Solutions participants. In smaller programs, for example, case managers tended to provide most services, including job readiness training, job placement, and postemployment followup. Some larger programs had instructors on staff who provided job readiness training, life skills training, basic education, or vocational training. Other programs contracted out for vocational training services.

1Optional services are those that the Community Solutions contract allows but does not require.

2The participants’ names have been changed in these descriptions.
For other contractors, the Community Solutions contract was part of a patchwork of funding that paid the salaries of staff who delivered similar services to participants in various programs. For example, programs operated by community colleges and training agencies tended to place Community Solutions participants into existing classes, instead of hiring instructors to teach separate classes for Community Solutions participants. Similarly, at agencies that operated other employment programs in addition to Community Solutions, job developers and case managers often split their time between participants from several programs.

**Profiles of Selected Community Solutions Contractors**

**Appalachian Youth Services, Blair and Cambria Counties**
- Contracted to enroll 600 participants in rural western Pennsylvania
- 4 weeks of job readiness classes
- Up to 90 days of job search assistance
- Paid work experience placements with local nonprofits
- Weekly face-to-face meetings during first several months of employment
- Financial incentives to encourage participation in postemployment case management meetings

**Delaware County Community College, Delaware County**
- Contracted to enroll 200 participants in suburban Philadelphia
- Up to 8 months of job readiness classes and vocational training
- Access to wide range of community college classes
- Short-term internships with local businesses
- Award ceremonies for participants who sustained their employment for 6 and 12 months

**Mayor’s Office of Community Service (MOCS), Philadelphia County**
- Contracted to enroll 200 participants in the city of Philadelphia
- 11 weeks of job readiness and computer training
- Paid work experience placements in one of 22 MOCS offices
- Job retention specialists to provide postemployment followup

**Northwest Institute of Research (NIR), Erie County**
- Contracted to enroll 100 participants in Erie County
- 4 months of job readiness, computer operations, and data entry training
- Access to a wide range of business school classes
- Access to NIR’s Job Development Resource Center for help with job search and job advancement
- Access to postemployment training opportunities
Initially, staff in only a few of the Community Solutions programs we interviewed offered services during nonstandard working hours. As more participants were placed in jobs, however, more staff began meeting with participants during early morning, evening, or weekend hours.

1. **Staffing for Preemployment Services**

   All of the contractors we interviewed employed at least one case manager to work with Community Solutions participants. Case managers maintained regular contact with participants; helped them obtain payments from the county assistance office for supportive services such as child care, transportation to program activities, and clothing for work; and helped them address personal problems that could make working difficult. In some programs, case managers also served as job developers. However, many contractors employed a staff member who only worked as a job developer and who concentrated on placing participants in jobs and maintaining relationships with employers. Most case managers and job developers had prior experience providing case management, counseling, or employment services to similar populations. Many had worked in other employment or DPW-contracted programs. Program directors said that they sought case managers and job developers who could develop close relationships with participants. In addition, several said they looked for staff with outgoing and upbeat personalities who could motivate and encourage participants.

2. **Staffing for Postemployment Services**

   Many programs assigned the same case managers and job developers who worked with participants during the preemployment phase to maintain contact with them after they found jobs. In these programs, staff tended to put most of their effort into maintaining contact with participants, rather than with employers. Program directors believed that the relationships established between case managers and participants in the preemployment phase would make it easier to maintain contact with them after they found jobs. In addition, because case managers knew the participants, they could anticipate the types of obstacles to sustaining employment that participants were likely to face. Smaller programs with few staff members found this staffing arrangement to be a necessity.

   An alternative approach that some programs implemented was to assign employment retention specialists to provide postemployment follow-up and support services to participants and employers. In these programs, case managers focused on helping participants access needed services and address personal issues, such as child care or family problems. Employment retention specialists monitored participants’ employment status and performance at work during regular follow-up contacts with the participants and visits to their worksites. Retention specialists also tried to follow up with employers to inquire about participants’ work performance and to develop relationships with the employers. When work-related problems arose, retention specialists stepped in to mediate with the employer if possible and help the participant address issues such as conflicts with coworkers or poor job performance. In these programs, practices such as employer mediation and on-the-job coaching were fairly common.

   Some programs favored this staffing arrangement. A few program directors considered the arrangement a logical separation of duties: the case manager focused on participants’ personal issues and helped them access community services, while the
retention specialist focused on employment issues. Moreover, assigning specialized staff to employment retention efforts increased the attention paid to that set of services.

Some programs, however, cited disadvantages to dividing the case management and employment retention functions among several staff. In a few programs, case managers and retention specialists focused too much on their own roles, rather on the clients’ overall situations, and did not work closely enough with their case management or retention specialist counterparts. In addition, participants did not begin to have regular contact with retention specialists until after they were placed in jobs, which sometimes made it challenging for retention specialists to form close relationships with participants.

### B. PREEMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Community Solutions programs varied substantially in the types and intensity of preemployment services they provided. These services ranged from short-term job placement programs to programs that provided more intensive education and vocational training. For example, Community Solutions programs that focused primarily on job readiness and placement emphasized rapid job placement, provided services of relatively short duration, and provided support services that tended to be limited in scope (Table III.1). In contrast, contractors that added education or vocational training to the basic package of services tended to provide preemployment services for a longer period and offer a wider range of support services to participants after they began working.

Many contractors considered preemployment services key in preparing participants to keep their future jobs. Especially in the later stages of program implementation, contractors increased the provision of services that they believed would enhance participants’ prospects of retaining jobs after placement. For example, in job readiness

![Table III.1](image)

**TABLE III.1**

VARIATION IN PATTERNS OF SERVICE DELIVERY ACROSS COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS PROGRAMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Programs</th>
<th>Duration of Preemployment Services</th>
<th>Key Preemployment Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Job Readiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>8 to 12 weeks</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>3 to 6 months</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>3 to 6 months</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>3 to 12 months</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SOURCE:** Telephone interviews with 34 directors representing 40 Community Solutions programs.

*aPercentages include only the 40 Community Solutions programs for which director interviews were conducted.

ESL = English as a Second Language.*
classes, programs adjusted their curricula to emphasize the importance of establishing personal support systems and of having back-up plans for child care and transportation to work. Some also devoted more class time to discussions about appropriate workplace behavior and the conflict resolution skills needed to resolve workplace disputes. Several directors reported that their familiarity with participants’ abilities and limitations, developed during the preemployment phase, enabled them to more effectively help participants with employment retention after they began working. Moreover, their staff could often predict the types of challenges to sustaining employment participants were likely to face.

1. Assessment

Contractors could spend up to five days assessing referred TANF recipients’ skills, abilities, and interests before deciding whether to enroll them in the program (Figure III.1). Most contractors administered the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) to measure basic skills in reading, mathematics, language, and vocabulary. Some used tools to evaluate personality types (such as the Meyers-Briggs and the Personality Mosaic) and career interests (such as the California Occupational Preference Survey). In addition, program staff met with TANF recipients individually to discuss their job histories, barriers to training and employment, career interests, and motivation to participate in the program.

![FIGURE III.1](image-url)

**FIGURE III.1**

**PREEMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROVIDED BY COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS PROGRAMS AS REPORTED BY PROGRAM DIRECTORS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Services</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment/Orientation</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Management</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Readiness Training</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Search</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid Work Experience</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help with Child Care</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help with Transportation</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational Training</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Assistance and Participation Incentives</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Education</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Telephone interviews with program directors of 40 Community Solutions programs.

Note: Figures represent the percentage of programs participating in the director interviews that reported providing each service.
Contractors used the assessment results in four main ways. First, they used them to try to determine whether recipients were interested in program activities and would be likely to cooperate with the program requirements. Second, they used the assessment results to develop individualized plans for short- and long-term career goals. Third, programs that offered basic education and vocational education used the results to place participants in education or training classes appropriate for their skill level. Fourth, some contractors used the assessment results to prescreen recipients for potential employers.

In addition, a few contractors, particularly those with large numbers of referrals, used the assessments to screen out TANF recipients with poor basic skills, career interests inconsistent with the program’s training component, criminal records, or low motivation to participate in the program. For example, some programs that offered a vocational training component had minimum basic reading or math skills requirements that participants had to meet to participate in training. Other programs planned to place participants with employers—such as nursing homes—who did not accept applicants with criminal records. As the number of referrals to programs decreased over time, however, most contractors had to stop rejecting such applicants and accept almost all referred TANF recipients.

2. Program Orientation

During or after the initial assessment period, all contractors offered program orientation to potential participants. The orientation sessions, which ranged from three to five days, typically included an explanation of the program’s objectives and rules, services provided, and participant responsibilities. Many contractors informed TANF recipients of services provided by the county assistance office and by other local agencies. For example, the MOCS in Philadelphia invited outside speakers to inform recipients of postemployment services such as local child care resources and transitional benefits available through the county assistance office. Another contractor reported that, because many participants felt anxious about participating in the program and looking for work, they tried to ease participants’ fears by making the initial orientation process light and fun.

Some contractors began to prepare individuals for employment during the orientation period. A few programs helped recipients create resumes. Delaware County Community College instituted “travel training,” in which recipients were required to travel by public bus from the program site to the college’s main career services office and identify two jobs that interested them. This exercise helped to familiarize recipients with local bus schedules so they could use them to attend job interviews and introduced them to additional job search resources. After TANF recipients completed programs’ assessment and orientation, contractors officially enrolled them in the Community Solutions program.

3. Case Management and Participant Engagement

All programs provided case management services, as their contracts required. Typical preemployment case management activities included monitoring participation, arranging support services, and setting goals with participants. The NIR in Erie convened monthly meetings of all staff who worked with participants, including job development specialists, student administrators, and computer instructors, to review each participant’s status. If the participant was experiencing problems, the staff discussed
ways to address the situation and then decided on a course of action. In some programs, case managers offered counseling and referrals to help participants resolve personal issues, such as parenting problems, family conflicts, or substance abuse. In programs that targeted non-English-speaking populations, case managers often served as interpreters for participants.

Many contractors reported that they struggled to keep some participants motivated and engaged in program activities. Program directors said that some individuals were not interested in the program activities, even though they had chosen to enroll in the program. Other participants faced personal difficulties, such as homelessness or illness, that made participation a struggle. Participants who reached their 24-month time limit for TANF needed to work to continue receiving cash assistance, and some found it a burden to work full-time and attend program activities.

From the contractors’ perspective, the difference between the TANF work requirement (20 hours a week after two years on TANF) and the Community Solutions performance goals (at least 30 hours a week at $6.50 an hour) made it difficult for them to motivate participants who held part-time jobs to continue participating in the program. Contractors reported that, as long as participants met the TANF work requirement (at least 20 hours a week), the state did not consider them out of compliance with their AMR and thus did not sanction them, even if they dropped out of Community Solutions. As a result, some post-24-month participants who found part-time jobs dropped out of the program instead of complying with the Community Solutions requirement that participants work for at least 30 hours a week.

Contractors employed several strategies to increase program participation and completion among enrolled participants. A few contractors screened applicants during the initial assessment process to determine whether they were interested in the program’s activities.3 The programs referred individuals who were not interested back to the county assistance office and asked that they be referred to another program. Other programs modified their hours of operation to make it easier for participants to attend activities. Staff began working during the early morning, evenings, and weekends to accommodate participants’ work schedules. In addition, several programs rewarded regular participation with gift certificates and made concerted efforts to give constant verbal encouragement.

Many directors believed that developing a trusting, personal relationship between staff and participants during the preemployment phase was the key to increasing participation in program activities and promoting employment retention after job placement. Directors believed that, if participants thought program staff were concerned with their well-being, they would feel comfortable approaching staff with problems and be less likely to leave a job without asking for help first. Building these relationships during the preemployment phase was important, because after participants started working and became busier, there were fewer opportunities to do so.

4. Job Readiness Training

All programs provided job readiness training, usually in a classroom setting. Across programs, training lasted from 1 to 12 weeks. Contractors with longer job readiness

---

3As mentioned earlier, however, many programs eventually abandoned this strategy because of the low level of referrals.
classes tended to combine this activity with education, vocational training, or job search activities. Classes usually covered standard topics, such as preparing resumes and practicing interviewing techniques. Many contractors invited employers and other motivational speakers from the community to discuss job readiness topics with participants. Others provided life skills instruction on such topics as time management and effective communication. Several contractors stressed that they conducted job readiness classes in an interactive format that engaged participants. For example, some videotaped mock interviews, and others used games and other interactive approaches to provide instruction.

As programs entered their second year and gained more experience in helping participants keep their jobs, staff began modifying the job readiness training curriculum to include more topics related to employment retention. For example, they increasingly emphasized the importance of finding jobs with benefits and security, of establishing personal support systems, and of having back-up plans for child care and transportation. Training also focused on developing the workplace behavior and conflict resolution skills necessary to sustain employment.

5. Vocational Training

Contractors provided training in a broad range of fields, including computers and word processing, health care, clerical and office skills, customer service, and food service. Courses ranged from 4 to 30 weeks, with the typical length being 8 to 12 weeks. Some contractors, such as the NIR and some community colleges, preferred to have Community Solutions participants attend the same classes as the agency’s other students. The staff felt that, because many of the students were more motivated and had better skills (for example, those students who were paying to attend computer classes at a business school or a community college), this arrangement would motivate the Community Solutions participants to work harder in the classes.

Providing vocational training posed special challenges to contractors working with participants who had low education levels or who were not interested in the training their program offered. Some participants’ low levels of education prevented them from fully participating in vocational training, because they could not read the training materials or did not have the basic math skills necessary to complete the training exercises. In response, some contractors offered remedial basic education services, and some had participants work independently most of the time so they could progress at their own pace. Others offered several training courses on the same topic at different skill or education levels. While some contractors offered one type of training and screened out those not interested in or qualified for that training during the initial assessment process (as discussed above), others were able to place participants in training that matched their skills and interests. For example, since Delaware County Community College’s program was located at an educational institution, staff could offer participants access to a wide range of training courses. Participants received vocational instruction in diverse areas such as office skills, food service, hospitality, and nursing.

Some contractors who provided longer job readiness and vocational training courses thought that, over time, participants lost some motivation to find employment. One director said the agency became a comfortable “home away from home” for participants, and they lacked a sense of urgency to find jobs. To motivate these participants, staff began meeting with them individually and stressing the importance of following their employment plan.
6. Basic Education

More than half the programs included in the director interviews offered a basic education component to their Community Solutions participants. Typically, contractors offered GED preparation or classes in basic reading and mathematics skills. Some also provided English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. A few programs offered evening GED preparation classes for working participants. Most classes lasted from 8 to 12 weeks, depending on the extent to which classes were combined with other activities.

7. Job Search Assistance

Although all the contractors we interviewed developed some job leads for participants, some focused more than others on teaching participants to find jobs on their own. For example, Curtis & Associates in Philadelphia asked all staff and participants to bring in job leads, which were posted daily in program offices. Other contractors required participants to keep logs of job search activities. In contrast, several contractors did not encourage participants to find jobs on their own because they did not want participants to accept jobs with wages and benefits below the program’s performance goals. Instead, these programs developed job leads and set up interviews for participants for jobs that met the program’s requirements.

The NIR in Erie contacted employers to discover how participants performed during job interviews, then used that information to improve its job search class. For example, on one occasion, program staff learned that an employer was about to hire a participant when, in response to the salary offered, the participant said, “That’s all you pay?” The employer was going to tell the participant that he would be eligible for a raise soon, but she was so upset by his remark that she decided not to offer him the position. Program staff used this incident as a lesson in the job search class, emphasizing to participants the importance of being patient and not reacting “off the cuff” to employers during a job interview.

INTERNSHIPS PROVIDED FIRSTHAND EXPERIENCE IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY

Some Community Solutions programs developed innovative strategies to help participants gain work experience at local businesses. Delaware County Community College developed internships to help participants learn about and apply for jobs in the hotel industry and to help hotel staff identify promising job candidates. Hotel staff gave participants a brief tour of the hotel and discussed entry-level positions. Participants met privately with program staff to talk about their career interests and discuss which jobs at the hotel would be most appropriate for them to pursue. Interested participants were then paired with hotel employees and shadowed them for one week. Participants who missed any work during this week were eliminated from the program. Participants who completed the week successfully were considered for a job. Hotel staff thought the contractor’s thorough screening of job candidates and postemployment support provided by the program were essential to its success in placing participants in these jobs.
Typically, programs generated job leads for participants by contacting employers and monitoring job advertisements. In addition, some contractors, such as Delaware County Community College, placed participants in internships that often led to job offers (see text box). Likewise, contractors that provided vocational training usually had strong employer contacts in the career areas in which they trained participants, and they used these contacts to develop job leads for participants as they completed training. Finally, several contractors reported obtaining job leads from agency advisory board members.

8. Help with Child Care

Almost all programs provided some help with child care, most often by working with the county assistance office to ensure participants obtained a child care allowance so they could participate in the program. Many also offered other forms of child care assistance, such as lists of providers, referrals to individual providers, or referrals to child care resource and referral agencies. A few contractors hosted speakers who provided information about child care options. About 25 percent of the directors interviewed reported that their programs helped participants establish child care arrangements. Some even contacted individual providers about vacancies. In addition, some helped participants who used informal relative or neighbor providers to identify back-up arrangements. Almost all contractors counseled participants on how to resolve child care problems that arose during the preemployment phase.

To ease the logistical challenges of making travel arrangements to program activities and child care, five contractors we interviewed provided child care for their participants during hours of program operation. Four provided child care in on-site centers. The fifth, Catholic Charities, in Pittsburgh, provided care through a network of family child care homes. Two of the five contractors reported that participants could continue using their child care facilities after they obtained employment, even after they completed the program.

9. Help with Transportation

Almost all programs provided some assistance with transportation, most often by helping participants obtain a transportation allowance or bus pass from the county assistance office. Some also offered transportation to job interviews or helped participants obtain driver’s licenses. Others provided advice about and help with car purchases. For example, Arbor, Inc., in Dauphin County, a rural area with limited public transportation, arranged for a local car dealer to provide loans for participants who needed a car to get to work. The county assistance office and the contractor each provided a portion of the down payment.

10. Financial Assistance and Participation Incentives

The majority of programs reported helping participants obtain financial assistance, usually by helping them apply to the county assistance office for special allowances. Some also provided direct financial assistance for the purchase of work-related items, such as tools, uniforms, and photo IDs, copies of birth certificates, and criminal background checks required for job applications. A few contractors provided some emergency assistance to help participants cover expenses for such items as heat, rent, and car repairs and inspection. One contractor purchased glasses for a participant who needed them to pass a physical examination for a job. Another paid to have the locks
changed on a participant’s home to protect her from an abusive ex-partner. Some contractors provided participants with in-kind goods, such as clothing, personal-care items, toys, and gift certificates for food or access to the program’s food pantry. In addition, a few programs offered financial incentives, such as gift certificates for perfect attendance, to encourage participants to attend preemployment activities.

11. Paid Work Experience

In Pennsylvania, all TANF recipients who have received cash assistance for 24 months must work at least 20 hours per week to continue to receive cash assistance. To help participants who could not find unsubsidized jobs meet this requirement, the state required Community Solutions programs to arrange paid work experience placements for them with public or nonprofit organizations.4

All the programs we examined offered paid work experience placements to participants who had received cash assistance for more than 24 months. Many placements were made at local nonprofit organizations. Some contractors were already working with local agencies to develop paid work experience placements for other employment programs and were able to make those placements available to Community Solutions participants (see text box below).

KAREN: PAID WORK EXPERIENCE LED TO JOB AT NONPROFIT AGENCY

The story of “Karen” illustrates how paid work experience positions can lead to full-time employment. Karen was referred to Community Solutions after reaching her two-year time limit for receiving TANF without working. The program placed her in a paid work experience position at a nonprofit organization that provides support services to individuals with mental and physical disabilities. This agency was often able to offer entry-level positions to Community Solutions participants when the work experience placements ended. It provides benefits to all workers in direct-care positions (those who work directly with clients) who work at least 20 hours a week.

Karen liked the work. When the placement ended, the agency offered her an entry-level job as a vocational education services assistant. To help clients transition from sheltered employment to community employment, she accompanies crews out into the community to clean office buildings and works along with them.

Karen works six hours a night, five nights a week. She walks a short distance from her home to a meeting point where her supervisor picks up the crew in a van. She has a flexible schedule that allows her to work at times when her boyfriend is at home to care for her school-age son. According to Karen, the best thing about her job is that she and her son receive health insurance coverage.

4The state reimbursed contractors for the cost of paying wages to participants placed in paid work experience. This funding was in addition to the funding contractors received through their performance-based contracts.
The reporting requirements associated with these placements (for example, daily attendance reports) narrowed the range of potential placements, because some agencies found the paperwork burdensome. To address this problem, some programs preferred to place participants in work assignments at their own organizations. For example, the MOCS in Philadelphia placed all of its paid work experience clients in 1 of 22 sites that were part of the mayor’s office. The program tried placing participants with other nonprofit organizations but had difficulty obtaining required daily reports from the placement sites. In addition, staff felt that the mayor’s office placements provided participants with valuable experience. At the beginning of the placement, participants went through a personnel process (completing new employee paperwork and orientation) identical to that of all other mayor’s office employees. Moreover, participants were placed in administrative positions in which they were able to use the skills they were learning in vocational training.

Participants in work experience balanced their time between the worksite and the program. Some participants worked half a day and spent a half a day in program activities until they found unsubsidized employment that met program performance goals. For example, participants placed through the mayor’s office typically worked either a morning or an afternoon shift and attended computer training and other program classes during the other half of the day. Others spent more time working and fewer hours at the program. To accommodate these participants’ work schedules, many contractors offered program services during nontraditional hours.

C. POSTEMPLOYMENT SERVICES

As participants progressed through preemployment activities and were placed in jobs, contractors directed more time and resources to helping participants retain their jobs or find new positions with higher pay and benefits. By the programs’ third year, staff focused almost solely on reaching the Community Solutions employment retention goal, which required participants to sustain continuous employment for at least a year after initial placement (with no longer than a seven-day interruption in employment). To achieve this goal, programs offered participants a variety of services to help them keep their current job, to find a new job if they lost their current one, or to advance to a better job.

1. Case Management

All programs provided case management and follow-up contacts for at least 12 months after initial job placement, as required by their Community Solutions contracts (Figure III.2). Typically, contractors contacted participants weekly during the first month of employment, then gradually reduced the frequency to once a month. Case managers or job developers usually conducted the follow-up activities. In some cases, however,

---

5Programs focused solely on employment retention in the third year because they were no longer enrolling new participants. If the programs had enrolled new participants in the third year, they would not have had time to achieve the one-year employment retention goal.
contractors had retention specialists on staff to work exclusively with employed participants on employment-related issues. Most follow-up was conducted by telephone, although some contractors tried to have face-to-face meetings with their participants at the program office, at their worksite, or at their home. Several contractors also followed up with employers, especially during the initial weeks of employment. A few contractors convened monthly peer support group sessions for employed participants.

To try to prevent future job loss, a few contractors required participants to sign contracts at enrollment stating that they would contact the program before quitting their jobs. These programs had staff on call who were available to respond to participants’ calls during evenings and on weekends. When contacted, these staff members tried to help participants resolve work-related problems. They also encouraged participants who did not want to remain in their jobs to conduct a new job search before quitting and offered the program’s help with this effort. This strategy was intended to prevent participants from having more than a seven-day gap in their employment and thus failing to meet the employment retention performance benchmark.

Many directors reported difficulties in maintaining contact with employed participants. Participants moved, changed jobs, or disconnected their telephones without informing program staff. In addition, according to program staff, some participants were

---

6 Case managers continued to help clients with any personal issues that came up during the postemployment phase. See Section A of this chapter for a fuller discussion of employment retention staffing.
unresponsive to contacts from Community Solutions staff because they did not value the contacts, did not think they had the time for them, or wanted to be completely independent of the welfare system after they started working.

Contractors developed several approaches to increase contact with participants. The NIR established relationships with participants’ family members and friends during the preemployment phase, then enlisted their help to locate participants after job placement. Some directors thought in-person meetings were the most effective way to communicate with and assist employed participants. To make the meetings more convenient for participants, their program staff conducted home visits, met participants for lunch, visited them at work, or met with them after work. One contractor asked participants to attend weekly meetings with program staff for their first six months of employment and offered them financial incentives for participating in the meetings (see text box on next page). Other programs used more indirect methods of contact; they sent participants cards or letters to motivate them to continue working and asked them to call if they needed help.

2. Job Coaching

A few programs offered limited job coaching services to employed participants who were having difficulty with their job performance. Programs were usually able to provide on-site job coaching when the employer had prior experience working with the program and thus felt comfortable with this type of intervention. For example, staff at the MOCS reported that approximately 1 in 10 participants needed and received some job coaching. The retention specialist typically spent a day with the participant on the job, observed her performance, and gave her suggestions about how to correct mistakes or increase productivity. A retention specialist at the MOCS described a participant who worked as a hotel housekeeper and was having difficulty with the requirement that she clean 16 hotel rooms during her shift. The retention specialist spent a day at work with her and gave her suggestions about how to build her speed.

3. Mediation with Employers

Directors of most programs reported mediating with an employer on at least one occasion in an attempt to resolve a participant’s work-related problem. Because job developers often had long-standing relationships with employers, many employers would contact them if problems arose. Although contractors sometimes intervened at the request of participants, more often employers requested the intervention. In addition, job developers sometimes discovered problems while conducting worksite visits or communicating with employers about other participants. In these cases, job developers worked with employers and participants to resolve conflicts or misunderstandings. Many directors believed their relationships with key employers enabled them to successfully mediate on behalf of participants to resolve workplace problems and prevent job loss.
Some contractors systematically followed up with employers during participants’ first weeks of employment. For example, staff from the MOCS reported that their retention specialists tried to develop personal relationships with participants’ employers, so that the employers would contact the program if problems with a participant’s job performance arose. To build this relationship, the program’s retention specialists visited participants at work shortly after job placement to ask how the placement was going. Staff from the mayor’s office reported that most employers welcomed these visits and the support and job coaching services that program staff provided to their employees (see text box on next page).

4. Incentives

About one-quarter of the contractors we contacted reported that their programs offered financial incentives to employed participants to promote employment retention. Some offered cash incentives at various intervals. For example, several contractors gave participants $25 to $50 after 1 month of continuous employment, $25 to $75 after 3 to 6 months, and as much as $150 after 12 months. Two contractors offered a combination of gift certificates, food vouchers, and bus passes at various intervals to induce participants to retain their jobs.

Programs also offered other types of incentives, such as public recognition, to participants who attained employment benchmarks. Delaware County Community College sponsored ceremonies to recognize participants who maintained continuous employment for various intervals. They organized luncheons for participants who worked for 6 months and award dinners for participants who worked for 12 months. During the award dinners, participants were presented with plaques that recognized their 12 months of continuous employment and given $100 savings bonds. Two representatives from the state legislature attended one of the award dinners and recognized participants’ achievements with personal letters. Delaware County Community College also published articles about participant success stories in the agency’s newsletter and local newspapers.
5. Help Obtaining the Earned Income Credit (EIC)

Contractors provided varying levels of assistance for participants in obtaining the EIC. Many discussed the EIC during job readiness classes, showed participants how to complete the necessary forms, and helped participants who obtained employment complete the forms. One contractor, the People’s Emergency Center in Philadelphia, arranged a monthly visit from a representative of the Internal Revenue Service, who conducted a workshop on the EIC and showed participants how to complete paperwork. Another contractor, the Washington Greene County Job Training Agency in southwestern Pennsylvania, made similar arrangements with the local Consumer Credit Bureau. Three contractors encouraged participants to take advantage of the advance payment option in order to use the extra income for work-related expenses. Another contractor discouraged participants from taking advantage of the advance payment option. The director of this program reported that, in her opinion, receiving one large payment annually, rather than a higher level of income throughout the year, was an effective savings mechanism to reserve funds for major expenses, such as security deposits for housing.

Delaware County Community College offered help with applying for the EIC as a strategy for keeping in touch with employed participants. Soon after the new year, staff sent letters to all employed Community Solutions participants offering to prepare their tax returns free of charge. The letter gave a range for the amount of the refund participants could expect to receive if they qualified for the EIC. This refund was attractive to participants; many took advantage of the service and met with program staff to complete their tax returns. As a result, participants benefited from the EIC, and staff were able to talk with participants about how their jobs were going and offer other services.

6. Help Obtaining Transitional Benefits

Directors at most programs reported helping participants who had obtained employment acquire transitional benefits and special allowances from the county assistance office. Contractors usually helped participants complete paperwork,
coordinated with the county assistance office, and helped participants resolve any problems that arose. Contractors typically helped participants obtain child care subsidies, clothing allowances, and other special allowances to purchase tools and uniforms. In some cases, contractors also helped participants who did not have adequate transportation obtain special allowances to purchase cars.\(^7\)

7. Other Support Services

Some programs also directly offered transportation, child care assistance, and other support services to participants. For example, several contractors provided bus passes for the initial weeks of employment, helped participants form carpools, helped participants pay for car inspections, provided emergency cab service to places of employment, and identified mechanics willing to provide low-cost repairs. In addition, the majority of contractors offered help in resolving problems with child care subsidy payments and difficulties with child care providers. A few programs helped employed participants find child care arrangements, and others reported helping employed participants with housing problems.

8. Help with Reemployment

When employed participants lost their jobs, contractors usually helped them update their resumes and conduct new job searches. In addition, many program staff gave participants emotional support and encouragement to persevere in their searches (see text box). Several contractors emphasized the importance of determining the reason for job loss so they could prevent the problem from recurring. Two contractors we interviewed did not provide job search services to participants if they were fired from their jobs for good cause.

For the contractor to receive credit for the employment retention performance benchmark, participants had to work continuously for 12 months, with unemployment spells of no more than seven consecutive days. All contractors reported difficulty with meeting the Community Solutions employment retention requirements; finding new jobs for participants within seven days was especially difficult. To help participants find new jobs within seven days of job loss, program staff had to find out about the job loss, identify available positions appropriate for participants, help participants send out resumes and cover letters, and help them prepare for job interviews. After participants submitted job applications, employers often took longer than a week to set up an interview with the candidate, conduct the interview, and make the decision to hire. Since the process of finding a permanent job for participants usually took longer than seven days, some contractors established relationships with temporary employment agencies that would immediately hire participants. Others tried to dissuade participants from quitting their jobs until they found new ones and offered job search assistance to employed participants.

\(^{7}\)DPW will provide up to $750 towards the purchase of a car to get to work.
CARLOS: JOB SEARCH SKILLS AND STAFF SUPPORT ENABLED REEMPLOYMENT

One Community Solutions participant characterized his experience in the program as follows: “When I graduated from [the Community Solutions program], I went to a company . . . and the [company’s] contract wasn’t renewed. I was really broken up . . . but all the tools that [the Community Solutions program] had given me I learned . . . and I utilized those tools and sent out 15, 20, 30 resumes . . . and [the program manager] gave me a reference . . . those are some of the things that helped me. Then I got a job . . . and I worked for 30 days and got laid off again. It’s the second layoff in six months and I’m going ‘What’s going on with me?’ but somehow or another I just learned stick-to-it-iveness, just keep pushing . . . keep a positive attitude. And then when I came back to [the Community Solutions program] they said, ‘Carlos, you’ll be all right, don’t worry about it’ and I would say to myself, ‘What are you talking about? I have two children, what am I going to do?’ [and they said] just keep doing what you’re doing and lo and behold [another company] hired me.”

9. Help with Career Advancement

Overall, most contractors provided minimal career advancement services. The provision of these services was not a stated goal of the Community Solutions program, and there were no financial incentives for contractors to provide this type of help. Some contractors offered limited education and training courses to employed participants, but the programs did not promote the services. Participants had to take the initiative to request this kind of assistance. Likewise, several contractors reported helping employed participants who requested the services update their resumes, identify job leads, and conduct new job searches for better positions. These services, however, were not offered systematically to all employed participants. Moreover, program staff reported that few participants expressed interest in advancement services. Many were too busy juggling the responsibilities of raising a family, managing a household, and sustaining employment to seek out or participate in career advancement opportunities. Some were still learning how to perform their first job and were not ready to start looking for a better position.

About one-quarter of contractors continued offering training and education courses, at least in the short term, to employed participants who needed to upgrade their skills or were working only part-time. However, program staff reported that few participants took advantage of these services. One offered GED classes, ESL classes, and vocational training, as well as the use of agency computers to upgrade computer skills. Another contractor paid for work-related training courses that participants wanted to take, such as computer courses, so they could advance in their jobs. In coordination with an employer, one contractor developed an individualized computer course so a participant could develop skills for a new, advanced position (see text box). A contractor who exclusively enrolled Southeast Asian refugees offered workplace literacy classes on-site at companies.

Almost all Community Solutions participants were women, but a few men were also enrolled in the program.
Finally, some contractors reported that they provided advice about how to advance to better positions. For example, a few contractors included tips on advancement and career development during their job readiness classes. One contractor matched employed participants with volunteer mentors, who gave advice about advancement and career development; another provided evening workshops for employed participants that addressed the same topics.

**D. EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES OF COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS PARTICIPANTS**

While Community Solutions contractors made progress toward reaching the performance goals established by DPW, fewer participants than expected met performance benchmarks, according to contractors’ reports. As described in Chapter II, because the TANF caseload in Pennsylvania dropped rapidly after Community Solutions was implemented, most contractors were not able to enroll the number of participants they were contracted to serve. During the program’s first year, contractors enrolled two-thirds of their projected caseloads. As the state’s TANF caseload continued to drop during the second program year, however, contractors enrolled only about one-third of their anticipated caseloads (Table III.2).

The proportion of participants that contractors reported as having achieved the program’s employment benchmarks was also lower than expected. Contractors reported that only 44 percent of enrolled participants were placed in full-time jobs (at least 30 hours a week), only half of those who found jobs had access to medical benefits within six months of hire, and only 1 in 10 met the employment retention goal.

Several factors, largely outside of the contractors’ control, contributed to the lower-than-anticipated performance of Community Solutions contractors. First, as we discuss in more depth in Chapter IV, when programs were not able to reach enrollment targets, they could not generate sufficient income to operate their programs and maintain the staffing levels necessary to provide planned services.
Second, DPW and the contractors told us that programs were not able to obtain sufficient documentation from employers to substantiate some participants’ outcomes. (The figures in Table III.2 reflect the participant outcomes for which contractors provided documentation required for receiving payment.) Thus, although more participants may have achieved the employment goals, contractors could not assemble the documentation necessary to obtain payments for these outcomes. For example, to count 12 months of continuous employment averaging at least 30 hours per week, participants had to keep track of all of their pay stubs. Alternatively, the program could ask employers for a letter detailing participants’ period of employment and work hours. Some employers, however, would not provide such letters, usually because it would mean releasing confidential employee information.

---

**TABLE III.2**

COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS OUTCOMES FOR WHICH CONTRACTORS RECEIVED PAYMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Goal</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Totals and Average Percentages Across Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment in program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projected enrollment</td>
<td>6,220</td>
<td>6,220</td>
<td>12,440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number enrolled</td>
<td>4,104</td>
<td>2,156</td>
<td>6,260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage enrolled</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placement in full-time employment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number placed</td>
<td>1,762</td>
<td>1,012</td>
<td>2,774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage placed*</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placement in jobs with medical benefits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number placed in jobs with benefits</td>
<td>819</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>1,249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of enrolled participants placed in jobs with benefits*</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of employed participants placed in jobs with benefits</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-year employment retention</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number who retained employment</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of enrolled participants who retained employment*</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of employed participants who retained employment</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SOURCE:** Pennsylvania DPW.

*Percentage of participants enrolled in the program who were placed in full-time jobs (at least 30 hours a week).

bPercentage of participants enrolled in the program placed in jobs that offered medical benefits within 6 months of hire.

cPercentage of participants enrolled in the program who maintained their employment for 12 months.
Third, slightly more than half of the 70 Community Solutions contractors terminated their contracts before the end of the three-year contract period, either at the contractors’ request or because DPW terminated the contract due to poor performance. Twenty-four contracts were terminated during the program’s second year, and 15 contracts were terminated during the third year. Consequently, although some participants in these programs may have met the one-year employment retention goal, programs that terminated their contracts did not document and receive payment for these outcomes.
IV

LESSONS FROM THE COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS INITIATIVE

Based on the experiences of the state and the contractors in implementing the Community Solutions initiative, important lessons have emerged about operating employment retention programs. The contractors, county assistance offices, and DPW developed promising strategies for delivering services, but they also encountered difficulties implementing some aspects of the program. As the Community Solutions initiative wound down, DPW began planning a new employment retention initiative, called Retention, Advancement, and Rapid Re-Employment. In its design of Retention and Advancement, the state sought to build on some of the lessons it learned from the implementation of Community Solutions. Likewise, Retention and Advancement contractors who previously held Community Solutions contracts tried to incorporate what they learned from Community Solutions into their plans for implementing Retention and Advancement.

The experiences of the state and the contractors in implementing Community Solutions can inform other policymakers and program operators beyond the state of Pennsylvania as they design and implement employment retention initiatives. In this chapter, we present the key implementation lessons that have emerged from Community Solutions and ways in which the state and the contractors have attempted to apply some of these lessons to the Retention and Advancement initiative. To derive these lessons, we draw primarily on interviews with DPW officials and Retention and Advancement contractors that previously held Community Solutions contracts.

RETENTION, ADVANCEMENT, AND RAPID RE-EMPLOYMENT

Retention and Advancement, implemented by DPW in late 2000, is designed to help low-income working families sustain their employment over time and increase their earnings. To be eligible for Retention and Advancement services, applicants must be working in an unsubsidized job at the time of application. Eligibility, however, is not limited to current or former TANF recipients. All working families are eligible to receive services as long as they have incomes at or less than 235 percent of federal poverty guidelines, have a dependent child residing in the household, and are not enrolled in any other DPW-funded program.

Retention and Advancement has three performance goals. First, participants must remain continually employed for at least six months. Second, participants must increase their earnings by 25 percent or obtain a job that provides medical benefits within six months of hire. Finally, participants who lose their jobs while enrolled in the program must find another job within two weeks. To help participants achieve these goals, contractors can provide a broad range of services, including case management, education and training, life skills training (such as parenting education and financial planning), mentoring, job coaching, and educational activities for participants’ children. Contractors can also provide a wide range of financial incentives to encourage participation.
A. Promising Strategies

The state and the Community Solutions contractors developed several promising strategies for delivering employment retention services. Because we did not collect detailed information on participants’ employment outcomes or compare participants’ outcomes to those of a control group, however, we cannot assess the extent to which these strategies had an impact on participants’ economic progress. We can, however, learn about strategies that may be particularly promising from the extent to which programs achieve the performance goals. In addition, based on our interviews with contractor staff, participants, employers, county assistance office staff, and state officials, we can identify key operational strategies that appear to enhance service delivery and program operations. The rest of this section describes strategies developed in the Community Solutions initiative and incorporated into the design of Retention and Advancement to customize services, provide intensive case management, and promote participation by offering incentives.

- Providing flexible, individualized services enhances recruiting and service delivery.

According to DPW officials, the most successful Community Solutions programs accepted participants with a broad range of characteristics and provided flexible and individualized services to meet their needs. These programs did not limit eligibility to participants with specific characteristics, such as ethnic or linguistic background, interest in specific careers, or basic reading and math skills. Instead, they accepted applicants who were interested in the program, identified the barriers that each participant had, then planned for services to address those barriers. For example, if participants were concerned about their children’s after-school activities, programs helped them enroll their children in after-school programs. If participants had housing problems, staff helped them find housing. Likewise, staff from successful programs met with participants at times and locations that were convenient for them, rather than during standard office hours. In general, DPW staff felt that successful programs had a mentality of “doing whatever it takes” to address participants’ barriers to sustained employment.

In contrast, some Community Solutions contractors designed their programs to serve participants with specific characteristics. For example, employer-linked contractors often needed participants who had the qualifications required by the employers that had agreed to accept placements. Several employers, especially nursing homes and other health service providers, would not accept applicants with a record of criminal convictions. Some programs offered vocational training courses that required participants to have basic reading and math skills. Others specialized in serving special populations of TANF recipients, such as Spanish speakers or Southeast Asian refugees.

According to DPW, many programs designed to serve specific populations were too tailored to those types of participants. Because the TANF rolls dropped so sharply, programs that specialized could not recruit enough participants with the characteristics they sought. Instead, to enroll enough participants, programs had to accept almost all TANF recipients referred to them. Many TANF recipients referred to Community Solutions had more complex needs than these specialized programs had anticipated. Because these programs had not planned to enroll hard-to-serve recipients with multiple needs, they struggled to meet participants’ needs and achieve the performance goals.
As a result of these experiences with Community Solutions, DPW required all Retention and Advancement contactors to provide individualized services. The Request for Proposals (RFP) for Retention and Advancement states that contractors must customize services to meet participants’ needs and must schedule activities at times and locations that accommodate participants’ work schedules. The RFP discourages programs from establishing a regular schedule of classes and case management hours. Furthermore, the RFP requires all program activities to be open entry/open exit. In other words, contractors must arrange services so that participants can begin and conclude program activities as needed, rather than according to a predetermined schedule.

To meet the varied needs of participants, DPW also encourages Retention and Advancement contractors to offer a broad range of services, including parenting classes, workplace literacy, skills training, and job coaching. The programs we contacted were planning to provide a wide variety of services to address barriers they anticipated participants would have. For example, some programs planned to offer assistance in obtaining a driver’s license, and some planned to link participants who needed it with consumer credit counseling services.

Most of the contractors we interviewed also planned to offer education or training courses. Several planned to offer GED preparation and Adult Basic Education classes. Many offered computer training, ranging from one-day workshops on specific software packages to more extensive word processing training courses. One Retention and Advancement contractor, Worksmith, Inc., in Pittsburgh, planned to provide four-month skills training courses for jobs that are not traditionally held by women, such as construction and other unionized jobs that involve physical labor. These jobs typically offer relatively high pay and benefits.

In Retention and Advancement, contractors can also offer services to participants’ children and other family members to resolve family issues that create obstacles to sustained employment (see text box). Contractors welcomed the opportunity to work with participants’ family members and felt that providing services to participants’ children would motivate parents to maintain their participation in the program. One contractor planned to organize a youth club and tutoring sessions for participants’ children. Another planned to take children on monthly field trips to the Philadelphia Zoo and area museums.

### Promoting Retention Through Family-Centered Service Planning

Retention and Advancement staff at Jewish Employment and Vocational Services (JEVS) in Philadelphia believe that complex family issues often pose significant challenges to sustaining employment for newly employed welfare recipients. Addressing these issues is necessary to help participants keep jobs and advance in their careers.

To address family-related challenges, JEVS plans to engage in “family-centered service planning.” Staff will work with participants to identify issues faced by family members that make working difficult, then offer services to address those difficulties. JEVS also will offer to help all participants arrange child care or enroll their children in after-school programs. Finally, staff will work with participants to set family goals they can work toward, particularly goals for children. According to agency staff, working toward specific family goals motivates participants to sustain their employment and advance to better jobs.
• Tailoring and individualizing services requires intensive case management.

According to DPW, Community Solutions contractors had more success helping participants sustain their employment when case managers maintained frequent contact with them. DPW staff felt that staying in touch with participants was most critical during the early months of employment, because many participants lost or quit their jobs during those initial months. However, DPW staff reported that a number of contractors, especially new ones with little prior experience operating employment programs for welfare recipients, did not contact participants often enough to monitor their employment status and help with problems that arose. This happened in part because staff at some of the new contractors were inexperienced; they needed extensive training and support from DPW on how to provide case management and employment services. Other programs did not have enough staff to make regular contact with employed participants. When programs did not receive the level of referrals they expected, they could not generate income for the program and thus could not afford to maintain planned staffing levels. According to DPW staff, when programs did not have enough staff to provide intensive case management, counseling, and follow-up to employed participants, they tended to have higher dropout rates and lower program performance.

Based on their experience with Community Solutions, DPW decided to make case management requirements for Retention and Advancement more explicit. The RFP states that programs must maintain weekly contact with participants, including two face-to-face meetings, for the first 30 days after enrollment and biweekly contact for the rest of the participants’ time in the program (5 to 11 months). In addition, the RFP specifically requires programs to maintain sufficient staffing levels to ensure that staff can maintain close contact with participants. Because Retention and Advancement, unlike Community Solutions, is funded through cost-reimbursement contracts, programs are assured of adequate funding and thus can hire sufficient staff without fear of losing money on the program.

All of the Retention and Advancement contractors we spoke to thought that the case management requirements were reasonable. In fact, most said they planned to contact participants even more frequently than required, usually weekly. Several said they planned to visit participants at work and at home. One contractor, JEVS, also stressed the importance of ensuring that participants not feel abandoned when program contacts taper off at the end of the program. To address this issue, the agency has started a book club to foster support networks among participants.

• Financial incentives can be useful tools for motivating participants to participate in the program and sustain their employment.

Some Community Solutions contractors used financial incentives—such as small cash payments, gift certificates, or movie tickets—to encourage program participation and reward participants for sustaining their employment. According to DPW, these incentives helped motivate some participants and keep them involved in the program. DPW officials also noted that incentives provided through the GAPS program, a
Incentives May Encourage Participants to Work on Employment Goals

Incentives may encourage participants to work on employment goals. Staff at Worksmith’s Retention and Advancement program believe that financial incentives motivated participants to persevere in their employment. Worksmith, Inc., located in Pittsburgh, provides participant incentives according to a point system. Participants accumulate points by completing (or having their children complete) specific program activities and by reaching specific employment goals. Participants redeem the points for prizes. Some prizes are necessities such as children’s clothing, diapers, and baby food. Others are luxury items, including a weekend getaway, a cellular phone, a beeper, a DVD player, a playstation, a color television, amusement park passes, and dinner for two.

Similarly, Educational Data Systems, Inc. has designated $800 per participant to provide financial incentives. The agency sets aside $200 for emergency assistance. The remaining $600 is given to participants in the form of gift certificates to reward attainment of specific participation and employment goals. Participants receive a $200 gift certificate after three months of employment retention, $200 after six months of employment retention, and $200 for advancing to a better job. If a participant does not use the $200 in emergency funds, it is awarded as a gift certificate when the participant successfully completes the program.

Educational Data Systems has set up a computer-based awards center in a central location at the program office. Participants can use the center to order gifts from selected Web sites. Staff believe that this highly visible method for rewarding participants may motivate others to continue working toward program goals.

1One of the agencies providing GAPS services provided its participants with smoke detectors, bicycle helmets for children, and other home safety devices. For more information on the GAPS services, see page 66 of “Helping TANF Recipients Stay Employed: Early Evidence from the GAPS Initiative” (Wood and Paulsell 1999).
recognize major achievements. For example, one program planned to give participants a computer for successful program completion. Another will reward participants with televisions and DVD players.

B. NEW STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS’ CHALLENGES

DPW and the Community Solutions contractors faced several challenges that made the program difficult to implement. Most of these challenges were related to the initiative’s design; consequently, programs’ options for addressing them within the context of the Community Solutions contract were limited. Nevertheless, DPW and the contractors learned from the problems that arose in Community Solutions. Moreover, DPW applied what it learned to the design of Retention and Advancement in an effort to avoid some of the problems contractors faced in Community Solutions. The rest of this section describes each of these challenges—generating referrals, implementing performance-based contracting, meeting employment retention performance goals, and coordinating with the county assistance office—and the steps DPW took to address them in the design of Retention and Advancement.

• Because DPW expanded eligibility for Retention and Advancement to include low-income non-TANF families and took other measures to ensure sufficient referrals, contractors have a large pool of potential participants from which to recruit.

Across all Community Solutions programs, contractors enrolled half of the number of participants they were contracted to serve.2 As described in Chapter II, reasons for low enrollment included a larger-than-anticipated drop in the TANF caseload, eligibility verification requirements, competition for participants among Community Solutions and other DPW contractors, and limits set by some contractors on the types of participants they would accept.3 DPW tried to increase referrals to Community Solutions contractors by encouraging programs to offer services that were attractive to recipients and to accept participants regardless of their characteristics, and by encouraging county assistance offices to refer as many recipients as possible to the Community Solutions contractors.

DPW recognizes that making full use of its contracted employment services programs supports its primary mission of ensuring that TANF recipients are prepared to become self-sufficient when their TANF clock runs out. Thus, based on its experience with Community Solutions, DPW has taken several steps to ensure that there are enough referrals to Retention and Advancement programs. First, DPW has directed county assistance offices to provide contractors with contact information for all TANF recipients whose cash cases close because they find employment, as long as recipients are not already involved in job retention activities provided through another DPW-contracted program.

Second, DPW prohibits Retention and Advancement contractors from only accepting applicants with specific characteristics (such as those that meet minimum education requirements, who do not have a record of criminal convictions, or who belong to

---

2See Chapter III, Section D, for more detailed enrollment figures.

3See Chapter II, Section D, for a more detailed discussion about challenges to generating referrals.
specific ethnic or linguistic groups). Instead, contractors must accept all eligible applicants who agree to cooperate with program requirements.

Third, DPW permits contractors to recruit participants from a large pool of both former TANF recipients and low-income families who have never received welfare, making Retention and Advancement caseload sizes less sensitive to the declining TANF caseload. According to DPW, this provision gives the many TANF recipients who left the welfare rolls for employment on their own—without the help of a DPW-contracted program—an opportunity to receive the postemployment support services available to those who found employment through a contracted job placement program. Few employment programs serve the non-TANF population, so Retention and Advancement contractors will not face as much competition for participants. Several contractors we interviewed said they expected recruiting non-TANF participants to be challenging, because potential participants are busy with work and family responsibilities, may be reluctant to enroll in a DPW program, and may be reluctant to change jobs. Nevertheless, these changes in eligibility provide a large pool of potential participants from which contractors can recruit.

- **Because of difficulties implementing a benchmark-based payment system for Community Solutions, DPW has shifted to a cost-reimbursement payment system for Retention and Advancement.**

As described in Chapter II, implementing a benchmark-based payment system was challenging for DPW and many of the Community Solutions contractors. A payment system based solely on individual participant outcomes requires a complex set of rules and procedures. DPW had to verify not only the employment status of individual participants, but also the number of hours that employed participants worked per week, prior to paying contractors. Similarly, the employment retention benchmark required verification that participants had not had unemployment spells lasting longer than seven calendar days during a 12-month period. Contractors had to obtain the documentation necessary to report and substantiate participant outcomes, then request payment for achieving performance goals. DPW had to compare the contractors’ reports with participant data collected in its management information system, investigate discrepancies, and, if necessary, correct computer data. Payments were not made until discrepancies were resolved, which significantly delayed some payments to contractors. In contrast, Retention and Advancement contractors must also document participants’ employment outcomes to substantiate achievement of the performance goals required by the contract, but payment does not depend on assembling this documentation.

In addition, because Community Solutions contractors were paid for achieving performance benchmarks with individual participants, their financial viability depended on their ability to meet enrollment targets. Programs needed enough referrals to generate the income necessary to provide services. The uncertainty inherent in a benchmark-based payment system in which the level of referrals cannot be guaranteed made planning

---

4Low-income families who have never received TANF cash assistance are eligible to enroll in Retention and Advancement as long as they have incomes below 235 percent of the federal poverty guidelines, are working in unsubsidized employment, have a dependent minor child, and are not participating in a DPW-funded employment and training program at the time of application. DPW is able to use TANF funds to provide Retention and Advancement services to non-TANF clients by categorizing the services as “non-assistance,” as defined by federal TANF regulations.
service delivery and staff levels difficult. When contractors began the program with the staff necessary for serving the expected number of participants, but did not receive the expected number of referrals, they sometimes failed to recover their costs. Even when referrals were lower than anticipated, contractors needed to employ a minimum number of staff to operate the program. When the level of referrals remained below a minimum threshold, even conservatively staffed programs sometimes incurred costs that could not be recovered.

To avoid these difficulties, DPW decided to implement a cost-reimbursement payment system for Retention and Advancement. In this type of contract, contractors receive funds according to a preestablished budget to operate their program, and funding does not depend on the number of referrals a program receives. Based on their experience with Community Solutions, DPW staff think that cost-reimbursement is a better payment system for CBOs that may not have extensive experience managing programs and operating in a benchmark-based environment. Moreover, if new contractors can obtain the funds they need to fully implement their programs, they stand a much better chance of achieving the performance goals, and thus the participants are more likely to receive higher-quality services. Nevertheless, according to DPW staff, both programs were performance based. In other words, for both programs, DPW had the same authority to put contractors on probation or cancel contracts when programs did not perform at required levels.

In addition, DPW staff reported that a few of the new contractors did not fully understand the consequences of signing a contract that included specific performance goals. Some set very ambitious goals and were apparently surprised that DPW held them accountable for achieving them. Based on this experience, DPW was more explicit about contracting obligations for Retention and Advancement. DPW also designed a fill-in-the-blank response and budget form for Retention and Advancement to make the application process and expectations clearer for new applicants. DPW also included appendixes in the Retention and Advancement RFP that described the program guidelines and other important information applicants would need if they won contracts.

5DPW attempted to mitigate some of the uncertainty in the level of referrals by guaranteeing to pay contractors 70 percent of the funds set aside for the participation benchmark (the payment for each client who enrolls in the program), as long as contractors met the program’s performance goals. For most contractors, the participation payment was as high as $1,000 per participant, or one-quarter of the maximum $4,000 per participant that contractors could earn if they achieved all of the performance benchmarks. A program contracted to serve 100 participants could have expected to receive as much as $400,000. DPW guaranteed such a contractor as much as $70,000 (100 participants x $1,000 per enrollment x 70 percent) if enrollments were lower than expected and if the contractor met all of the program’s performance goals with the participants it enrolled.

6As an alternative to moving to a cost-reimbursement payment system for Retention and Advancement, DPW could have continued to use benchmark-based payments, but could have specified the payment system in a way that safeguarded contractors’ financial viability. Instead of tying all payments to achieving performance benchmarks, a performance-based contract could provide base funding through cost-reimbursement (thus protecting programs’ financial viability) but also include benchmark-based financial incentives for achieving specific performance benchmarks. For example, DPW could have provided half (or more) of the funds for Retention and Advancement through cost-reimbursement and half according to a benchmark-based system of rewards for achieving specific goals.
Based on experience with Community Solutions, DPW set a more realistic employment retention goal for Retention and Advancement.

To meet the performance benchmark for employment retention, Community Solutions participants had to maintain continuous, full-time employment (at least 30 hours a week) for 12 months, with spells of unemployment lasting no longer than seven calendar days. If participants became unemployed for longer than seven days, the 12-month employment "clock" restarted when they began working again. The contractor thus had another chance to earn the employment retention payment, as long as the participant achieved 12 months of continuous employment within 18 months of beginning work. If the participant changed jobs during the employment retention period, the new job had to provide a combination of wages and hours that generated an income equivalent to or greater than that of the initial job.

Many of the Community Solutions contractors we interviewed found this standard almost impossible to meet. Despite some contractors’ diligent efforts to maintain close contact with participants and provide support throughout the 12-month retention period, few participants sustained continuous, full-time employment without more than a seven-day gap. Several contractors said that even highly successful participants did not always meet that standard. For example, participants who advanced to better jobs during the retention period often had more than a seven-day gap between jobs. Some contractors suggested that, if performance-based contracting is used, there should be a distinction between gaps in employment due to losing a job versus advancing to a better job.

Several examples illustrate the kinds of difficulties programs faced in attempting to achieve the initiative’s retention goals. Staff at Appalachian Youth Services in western Pennsylvania described the situation of several participants who found jobs at a local shoe factory. Although the factory offered entry-level jobs with medical benefits, it closed for two weeks each summer. During that time, employees had to take unpaid vacation. Because there was no opportunity for participants to work overtime during the rest of the year (to reach 30 hours per week, on average, for the year), it was impossible for them to meet the retention benchmark, even though they had held their jobs for a year. County assistance office staff in another county described a participant who worked for 11 months and then quit her job to take a better one. She did not begin the new job within seven days, however, because she wanted to take a vacation during the holidays. Consequently, the contractor could not receive the retention payment for this participant.

For Retention and Advancement, DPW established a six-month employment retention goal. To receive credit for achieving this goal, participants must be continuously employed for six months, with spells of unemployment lasting no longer than 14 days. DPW staff said that, based on their experience with Community Solutions, a one-year retention period was too long. The resources required to track participants and follow up with them for an entire year were not worth the reward.

Likewise, DPW increased the number of days that participants could be unemployed and still receive retention credit—from 7 days in Community Solutions to 14 days in Retention and Advancement. All of the Retention and Advancement contractors we interviewed said that 14 days was a much more reasonable period of time in which to expect unemployed participants to find another job. Most contractors, however,

---

7See Section III.D for more information about contractors’ performance on the employment retention benchmark.
suggested that 30 days would be more realistic time frame to help participants find and begin new jobs.

- **In Retention and Advancement, DPW is emphasizing the importance of coordination between county assistance offices and contractors by making it a contractual requirement.**

  County assistance offices and contractors can most effectively engage participants in the task of finding and sustaining employment when they work cooperatively. In many counties, coordination between county assistance offices and Community Solutions contractors has gone smoothly. According to DPW staff, contractors that worked to maintain a productive and cooperative relationship with the county assistance office tended to receive more referrals and to have their performance data reconciled more readily. In many counties, county assistance office staff and contractors found monthly meetings helpful for reconciling their records, discussing the availability of potential referrals to the program, and resolving any issues that had come up during the month.

  In other counties, tensions arose between the county assistance office and Community Solutions contractors, especially when contractors did not receive enough referrals. Some contractors who specialized in serving participants with specific characteristics became frustrated when they did not receive referrals that met the minimum qualifications needed to match participants with the services they offered. County assistance office staff, however, were somewhat limited in their ability to steer TANF recipients with specific characteristics to particular programs, for two reasons. First, in Pennsylvania, recipients on TANF for less than 24 months can choose the employment activities in which they participate. Second, county assistance office caseworkers did not conduct assessments to provide them with an in-depth knowledge of each recipient’s skills and circumstances.

  To encourage better collaboration, DPW made coordination with the county assistance office a specific requirement for Retention and Advancement contractors. DPW further specified that coordination must include meetings with the county assistance office at least monthly. Moreover, contractors and the county assistance office must develop formal agreements about recruitment, referrals, eligibility certification, issuance of special allowances, exchanging information about participants, and steps for resolving programmatic and administrative problems.

**C. CONTINUING CHALLENGES**

Despite DPW’s efforts to incorporate promising practices and correct problems identified in Community Solutions, some challenges remain that may be difficult to remedy through program requirements and guidelines. Two key remaining challenges identified by DPW and the contractors are (1) communicating a consistent message to participants about program requirements, and (2) the slow imposition of sanctions to enforce these requirements. While the state has taken steps to address both of these issues, contractors for future DPW-funded programs may face similar difficulties.
• Communicating a consistent program message to participants is challenging when program requirements differ from TANF rules.

In both Community Solutions and Retention and Advancement, DPW established employment-related performance goals that were higher than the TANF requirements. Some program directors reported that differences in TANF rules and performance goals for Community Solutions sometimes resulted in an inconsistent message to participants about the types of jobs they should seek. For example, some directors reported that county assistance office caseworkers, when explaining TANF rules, informed participants that they could accept part-time jobs (20 hours per week) that paid minimum wage. This information was accurate and consistent with the county assistance office caseworkers’ mandate to explain TANF rules to recipients. However, it conflicted with the Community Solutions performance goals, which required participants to find full-time jobs (at least 30 hours per week) that paid at least $6.50 per hour and offered medical benefits. Retention and Advancement contractors could face similar difficulties with inconsistent messages when participants are on TANF cash assistance.

In large part, the contractors are responsible for conveying program goals to participants. They must communicate program goals and requirements to potential participants at enrollment. In addition, contractors are responsible for motivating participants to sustain their participation in the program and work toward achieving the program goals. Moreover, they are responsible for communicating to participants the advantages of finding jobs that provide higher wages, more hours, and more benefits than jobs that meet the minimum TANF work requirements.

However, county assistance office staff members also have some responsibility for communicating program goals. According to DPW, caseworkers in some county assistance offices did a good job of helping recipients understand that, once they enrolled in Community Solutions, they had to comply with the program requirements. Other caseworkers, however, were not aware of the difference between TANF rules and Community Solutions performance standards. Although DPW educated the county assistance offices about the program’s requirements, keeping up with all of the rules and requirements for all contracted programs was beyond the scope of caseworkers’ duties. DPW’s Employment and Training Bureau invited county assistance office staff to all trainings held for Community Solutions contractors, but, because the caseworkers are not under the supervision of the Employment and Training Bureau, they could not mandate that all caseworkers attend.

• More vigorous imposition of sanctions could promote greater emphasis on achieving program goals that are higher than minimum TANF requirements.

During the early years of TANF implementation, the imposition of sanctions in Pennsylvania was rare. Initially, the grounds and process for applying sanctions were not clear. Pennsylvania’s welfare reform law allows DPW to sanction recipients for noncompliance only when their failure to meet program requirements is “willful.” It took the state time to clarify what constituted grounds for “willfulness” and how sanctions should be implemented. DPW staff report that sanctions are slowly being imposed as a consequence for noncompliance. However, the documentation required to support a sanction is onerous—documentation must clearly and thoroughly demonstrate the client’s “willful” failure to meet program requirements.
Consequently, DPW and county assistance office staff told us that many caseworkers have been slow to impose sanctions and, in some cases, have not been able to substantiate the “willful” noncompliance of TANF recipients. According to DPW staff, county assistance office caseworkers could have included compliance with the program requirements for Community Solutions as a requirement in participants’ AMR once they enrolled in the program. Failure to comply with the program requirements, and thus the AMR, would then be a valid reason for sanctioning the recipient. However, DPW and county assistance office staff told us that the documentation required for demonstrating “willful” noncompliance was a disincentive for caseworkers to sanction participants.

Thus, in general, AMR requirements were not adjusted to reflect the goals of Community Solutions. Both contractor and county assistance office staff reported that many Community Solutions participants believed there was little chance of getting sanctioned for noncompliance with Community Solutions’ requirements. According to DPW, the slow imposition of sanctions has made enforcing compliance with requirements for all contracted programs (not just Community Solutions) more challenging. This issue may surface again in Retention and Advancement, since participants on TANF will be required to work more than 20 hours a week and seek jobs with higher wages and benefits.

D. NEXT STEPS

Despite challenges and changing circumstances, the state and the contractors are working hard to provide services that can address the challenges to sustained employment faced by TANF recipients and other low-income families. As they ended Community Solutions and began implementing Retention and Advancement, DPW and the contractors attempted to build on past successes and learn from mistakes to design service delivery strategies they believed would be most helpful to program participants.

Moreover, DPW staff reported that they continue to adjust the services and programs they offer to the changing makeup of the TANF caseload and what they learn each year about service delivery. For example, because the SPOC program is now enrolling participants who are more challenging to serve, DPW has reduced the program’s participant-staff ratio and offers more funding per enrollment than in the past. Likewise, based on the success of a pilot initiative, the state recently issued an RFP for a new initiative called Community Connections that will engage community- and faith-based organizations to promote early participation in education, training, and employment opportunities among TANF recipients.

As DPW, the county assistance offices, and program operators implement Retention and Advancement and other new initiatives to help TANF recipients and other low-income families find and sustain employment, they will undoubtedly continue refining strategies for delivering services. These evolving strategies will provide the state with new lessons that can be incorporated into future programs and initiatives as the TANF landscape continues to change.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contractor</th>
<th>County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Local Collaboration Program</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arbor, Inc.</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berean Institute</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Booker T. Washington Center</td>
<td>Erie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Data Systems</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Erie Community Action Committee</td>
<td>Erie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic American Organization</td>
<td>Lehigh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Area Multi-Service Center</td>
<td>Allegheny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worksmith Institute</td>
<td>Allegheny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employer-Linked Program</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arbor, Inc.</td>
<td>Dauphin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coatesville YWCA</td>
<td>Chester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Erie Community Action Committee</td>
<td>Erie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commission on Economic Opportunity</td>
<td>Luzerne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Innovations Program</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appalachian Youth Service</td>
<td>Blair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appalachian Youth Service</td>
<td>Cambria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BASE</td>
<td>Lancaster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic Charities</td>
<td>Allegheny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commission on Economic Opportunity</td>
<td>Luzerne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connelly Technical Institute</td>
<td>Allegheny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curtis &amp; Associates</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware County Community College</td>
<td>Delaware</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware County Technical Schools</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Opportunity and Training Center</td>
<td>Lackawanna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erie Area Job Training Partnership</td>
<td>Erie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forbes Road East Area Vocational-Technical School</td>
<td>Allegheny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodwill of Pittsburgh</td>
<td>Allegheny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic American Organization</td>
<td>Lehigh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic American Organization</td>
<td>North Hampton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact Services Corporation</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish Employment and Vocational Services</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximus, Inc.</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayor’s Office</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwest Institute of Research</td>
<td>Erie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People’s Emergency Center</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROBE</td>
<td>Lebanon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program for Female Offenders</td>
<td>Allegheny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Rivers Employment Services</td>
<td>Allegheny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threshold Rehabilitation Services</td>
<td>Berks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universal Community Homes/CET</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington/Green County Job Training Agency</td>
<td>Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington/Green County Job Training Agency</td>
<td>Washington</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SOURCE:** Interviews with program directors of 40 Community Solutions programs.
APPENDIX B
MPR researchers conducted site visits to four Community Solutions programs. This appendix contains brief profiles of each of the programs we visited. Each profile provides background information about the agency, the agency’s rationale for bidding on Community Solutions, program staffing, recruitment and referral, and the program’s main service delivery strategies.

A. APPALACHIAN YOUTH SERVICES

Appalachian Youth Services (AYS), located in rural, western Pennsylvania, is a nonprofit organization founded more than 20 years ago to serve dependent and delinquent youth. Since 1986, the agency has operated a number of DPW-funded employment and training programs for adult welfare recipients. Most recently, the agency has held DPW contracts to provide services through the Rapid Attachment, Community Solutions, and Retention & Advancement programs.

When DPW announced its intention to solicit bids for Community Solutions contracts, AYS was phasing out Project Connect, another DPW-funded employment program. Staff felt that they could use a similar model to continue serving welfare recipients through Community Solutions. To plan services for Community Solutions participants, staff contacted over 1,000 area employers to find out what types of entry level jobs were available, likely wage rates, and whether the employer offered medical benefits. In most cases, access to medical benefits depended on whether the employer offered full- or part-time employment to entry level workers.

1. Staffing

Initially, AYS operated its Community Solutions program out of three offices—one in the Northern part of Cambria County, one in Johnstown (Cambria County), and one in Altoona (Blair County). An instructor/counselor and a classroom aide staffed each office. A job developer worked with participants in all three offices, and the Director of Employment and Training coordinated the activities of all staff. Offices were open during standard business hours, but as the program progressed, staff met with participants during early morning and evening appointments to accommodate the scheduling needs of working participants.

2. Recruitment and Referral

AYS contracted with DPW to serve 600 Community Solutions participants—300 in Blair County and 300 in Cambria County. However, welfare rolls in Blair and Cambria counties dropped dramatically during the program’s operation. AYS received far fewer referrals from the CAOs than anticipated. The agency closed its Community Solutions offices in Cambria County during the program’s second year due to lack of referrals, but was able to maintain its program in Blair County. By the end of the program, AYS had enrolled approximately 40 percent of the Community Solutions participants it planned to serve.

Staff in Blair county worked closely with the CAO to generate referrals. AYS made a recruitment video at the local public access studio which the CAO played in its waiting room. In addition, staff held several open houses for the CAO’s employment and training staff to educate them about the benefits of the AYS Community Solutions program. Because welfare recipients continued leaving the rolls and because jobs were plentiful,
however, there were not many new families enrolling in TANF, and eventually, there were not many recipients for the CAO to refer to Community Solutions.

3. Services Provided

AYS held a four-day orientation session for all new participants. During this time, staff used the Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE) to assess participants’ reading and math skills and the Meyers-Briggs assessment to help participants understand their personalities and the different personality types they might encounter at work. Staff also used the orientation phase to assess participants’ barriers to employment, develop plans to overcome the barriers identified, and help participants write their resumes. In addition, staff talked with participants about how to manage their time and balance work and family responsibilities once they began working.

After the four-day orientation, participants attended job readiness classes and conducted job search activities for at least 30 hours per week. Most of the job readiness instruction took place during the first two weeks. Participants gradually spent less time in the classroom and more time conducting job searches. During job readiness classes, the instructor helped participants prepare resumes, practice filling out job applications, and practice interviewing techniques. AYS also held mock interview sessions during job readiness classes and discussed other topics such as dressing for the workplace, behavior on the job, time management, budgeting, and related topics.

Those who did not find jobs in the first month continued in job search activities for up to three additional months. AYS staff provided participants with job leads, but encouraged them to conduct their own job searches. For participants who did not have cars and could not reasonably expect to get cars, the staff helped participants search on the internet for employers within a one mile radius of their homes (within walking distance), and then helped participants contact these employers about job openings.

In March 1999, AYS added a paid work experience component, in which participants—especially those who had reached their two-year time limit for receiving TANF cash assistance without working—completed a 12-week paid work experience placement with a non-profit organization. Because AYS has a long history of providing paid work experience through JTPA contracts, the agency had a solid network of nonprofits willing to take their participants.

During the program’s pre-employment phase, AYS held weekly case management sessions with participants and helped them apply for transportation and other special allowances. Staff also helped participants find stable child care arrangements. Because of concerns about reliability, staff strongly encouraged participants to use licensed child care centers rather than informal child care providers such as relatives or neighbors.

When participants found jobs, staff helped them prepare to begin working. For example, staff went over social security and tax tables with participants to help them determine how much money to expect in their paychecks. In addition, staff helped participants plan how they would get through the transitional period from their last cash grant to the first paycheck, taking into account likely adjustments in food stamps and subsidized housing, as well as transportation costs for getting to work. One instructor even helped participants think through time management issues like getting children ready in the morning and strategies for efficient cleaning and cooking.
AYS strongly encouraged participants to apply for the Earned Income Credit (EIC) advanced payment option. Many participants felt that receiving advanced payment was like getting “something for nothing,” so staff stressed that it is the Earned Income Credit. In other words, one must work to receive the credit; it is not “free money.” AYS also offered assistance to employers who had never set up the EIC advanced payment before and did not know how to go about it.

B. DELAWARE COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Delaware County Community College (DCCC) provides a range of educational programs and services to residents of southeastern Pennsylvania. The college, which grants associate degrees in arts, science, and applied science, has a main campus in Marple Township and four off-campus centers. DCCC’s programs for low-income county residents primarily are offered at the Collingdale and Chester off-campus centers, located on the outskirts of Philadelphia. Since the early 1980s, these centers have operated a career development program for single parents and displaced homemakers, and in 1997 they began providing employment services to welfare recipients through the Rapid Attachment program.

DCCC decided to apply for Community Solutions funding so they could expand the college’s service provision to welfare recipients. Many welfare recipients in Delaware County live near the Collingdale and Chester centers, and staff thought the new funding would enable the college to continue serving these area residents after Rapid Attachment ended. They also hoped DCCC could offer welfare recipients more extensive job training, placement, and retention services through Community Solutions than they had through previous grants.

1. Staffing

The Community Solutions program had six staff members at the Collingdale center (a director, a supervisor, two case managers, a job coach, and a secretary) and two at the Chester center (a supervisor and a job coach). Most staff worked part-time for the Community Solutions program and full-time for DCCC. Their salaries were paid from several DCCC grants. This staffing arrangement enabled the college to provide participants with more extensive services and staff expertise than if the program operated independently at the college with staff dedicated solely to Community Solutions. At the beginning of the program, DCCC offered services during traditional business hours, but as participants found employment, staff began offering services during evenings and weekends.

2. Recruitment and Referral

DCCC planned to enroll 200 Community Solutions participants. By the time the program ended, the college had enrolled approximately 160 participants, or 80 percent of its anticipated caseload. Although the number of referrals to the Community Solutions program initially met DCCC’s expectations, referrals declined during the second program year. In an effort to increase referrals, staff cultivated relationships with CAO caseworkers and provided them with additional information about the program’s services. In addition, DCCC staff posted recruitment flyers on the campus and at community locations such as libraries and laundries. Despite these efforts, however, referrals to the
program remained low in the second year, primarily because the number of welfare recipients in the county had declined dramatically.

3. Services Provided

During an initial five-day orientation period, staff assessed participants’ reading, writing, and math abilities; personality types; and career interests. The results of these assessments were used to develop individualized employment goals and plans for each participant. These plans outlined specific, realistic steps needed to reach the goals and target dates for completing each step.

DCCC’s Community Solutions program offered participants up to eight months of job readiness training and vocational education. After the five-day orientation, participants received eight weeks of life skills training and then began a job search. They could also enroll in classes at the college to prepare for work in particular fields, such as food service, hospitality/customer service, clerical office work, or nursing. Participants could supplement their vocational education by beginning a one-to-four-week internship at a local business, such as a hotel or nursing facility. During weekly job club meetings, community employers, successful participants, and program staff led sessions on job search strategies and provided information about current job openings.

Staff also devoted considerable time to counseling participants and developing personal relationships with them. Case managers thought Community Solutions participants were more challenging to assist than those in the college’s other programs; many were long-term welfare recipients, had little work history, and struggled with complex personal issues. The case managers tried to provide emotional support and increase participants’ confidence in their ability to obtain employment.

Once participants began working, DCCC staff contacted them frequently. The job coach tried to call employed participants weekly. If he could not reach them by phone, he sent a stamped, self-addressed letter for them to fill out and return. To encourage participants to keep in touch with the program, the job coach also sent them letters offering assistance to obtain the Earned Income Credit (EIC), filing tax returns, and upgrading resumes.

Staff took an active role in mediating with employers when participants had problems at work that could jeopardize their employment. Supervisors and case managers stayed in frequent contact with employers that DCCC had a history of working with, and on occasion, visited job sites to help participants resolve work-related problems. Staff, however, did not contact an employer if a participant did not want them to do so.

As more participants found employment, DCCC added financial incentives to promote job retention. For example, the program offered participants $75 after 90 days of employment. DCCC also sponsored luncheons for participants who completed six months of employment. They held award dinners and provided $100 savings bonds to participants who worked continuously for 12 months. Some former, employed participants attended these events, serving as role models for more recent program graduates.

Staff estimated that almost half of participants who found employment lost their jobs. When this happened, the job coach met with them to evaluate the situation. He worked with participants to identify reasons for the job loss and help them learn from the
experience. DCCC occasionally used a temporary service to hire on short notice
participants who had lost their jobs. Some of these temporary positions became
permanent.

C. MAYOR’S OFFICE OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

The Mayor’s Office of Community Services (MOCS) is a city agency and branch of
the mayor’s office that provides services and programs to Philadelphia residents. It
operates in 22 sites throughout the city. MOCS programs include such initiatives as
crisis intervention, creating city murals, adult literacy, and programs for seniors and youth.
The North Broad Street office (out of which MOCS operated Community Solutions)
opened in 1997 to operate a DPW-funded Rapid Attachment program. This was the first
employment program operated by MOCS and their first DPW contract.

According to agency officials, MOCS bid on Community Solutions because the
agency saw it as a logical extension of the work they were already doing with TANF
recipients under Rapid Attachment. In addition, because Community Solutions was
designed to be a longer term intervention than Rapid Attachment, staff thought it offered
the agency an opportunity to spend more time working with each participant and provide
them with substantial training.

1. Staffing

MOCS’ Community Solutions program had eight staff members. A program
manager oversaw program operations. A job readiness instructor taught a 12-week job
readiness course. A computer instructor taught an 11-week computer training course.
Two case managers helped participants access support services and provided referrals. A
job developer contacted employers, identified job openings, and placed participants in
jobs. Two job retention specialists maintained contact with participants and their
employers after job placement and mediated any disagreements that came up between
them. The case managers, the instructors, and one of the retention specialists split their
time between Community Solutions and other programs. Other staff worked full-time on
the program.

2. Recruitment and Referral

MOCS contracted with DPW to enroll 200 Community Solutions participants. By
the end of the contract period, the agency had enrolled 202, meeting its enrollment goal.
Staff attributed MOCS’ recruitment success to two main factors. First, as a city agency,
MOCS had credibility with potential participants. Second, the computer training offered
by MOCS was more appealing to TANF recipients than the services and training courses
available from other local Community Solutions contractors.

3. Services Provided

MOCS provided all potential participants with a one-week orientation. Staff met
with applicants during daily four-hour sessions to provide information about the program,
administer the Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE), and interview applicants
individually to assess their career goals. At the end of the orientation period, MOCS
rejected some applications because their TABE scores were too low or because their
career interests were not a good fit with the training offered by the program.
MOCS also brought in a variety of outside speakers to provide information to applicants during the orientation period. For example, a local child care expert talked with applicants about child care options, CAO staff discussed transitional benefits available after exit from TANF, and a representative from the Equal Opportunity Commission discussed sexual harassment and racial discrimination on the job.

After the orientation period, participants began attending daily training classes for 30 hours per week. They had a half-day of job readiness training and a half day of computer training. Job readiness training included such topics as good work habits, getting along with supervisors and coworkers, resume writing, interviewing skills, and dressing for success. The computer course included training in typing skills, use of various computer software packages, and use of email and the internet. The curriculum focused primarily on teaching the skills needed to pass a standard Word and Excel certification exam.

During the training phase, MOCS case managers met with participants on a weekly basis. They helped participants obtain child care and transportation assistance from the CAO, counseled participants about how to choose their child care arrangements, and made referrals for other services that participants needed. MOCS also had a child care coordinator on staff who could refer participants to specific child care providers. In addition, if a participant missed class, the instructor alerted the case manager, who followed up with the participant. Once participants found jobs, the case managers met with them only if they needed a referral or help with a personal issue.

MOCS offered paid work experience placements to participants who had reached the two-year time limit for receiving TANF cash assistance without working. Participants could remain in these placements for a maximum of six months. MOCS usually placed Community Solutions participants in one of its 22 offices located throughout Philadelphia. Typically, participants carried out clerical duties that were related to the training they received from Community Solutions. Participants usually attended Community Solutions training classes for a half-day and worked in their work experience job during the other half of the day.

After about 10 weeks of training, participants began working with the job developer. Initially, they worked on their resumes and discussed career interests. Once participants had resumes, the job developer helped them identify job openings, fax and mail resumes, and follow up on job leads. She sometimes accompanied participants on job interviews. MOCS discouraged participants from looking for jobs on their own, because they often did not find jobs that met Community Solutions’ requirements for hours, wages, and benefits. In addition, when participants found jobs on their own, the retention specialists found it more difficult to form relationships with their employers.

After participants were placed in jobs, retention specialists maintained regular contact with them and their employers. Retention specialists contacted employed participants at least monthly by phone or during work site visits. In most cases, the retention specialist also contacted the employer periodically to monitor participants’ job performance. If any problems came up between the participant and employer, the retention specialist would try to intervene to resolve the problem. Retention specialists sometimes provided job coaching services to help participants increase productivity or correct other problems with job performance. When retention specialists became aware of personal problems that could affect participants’ ability to sustain employment, they alerted case management staff.
D. NORTHWEST INSTITUTE OF RESEARCH

The Northwest Institute of Research (NIR) is a non-profit organization that has assisted unemployed individuals in Erie County for over 20 years. Certified as a business school in 1984, NIR offers classes in computer operations, data processing, and accounting. NIR’s Job Development and Resource Center complements this training by providing job placement, retention, and advancement services to agency participants. Traditionally, NIR has served dislocated workers under federal Department of Labor and Pennsylvania Department of Labor contracts. In 1989 the agency began serving welfare recipients under a DPW contract.

NIR decided to bid on Community Solutions because the program fit within the its mission of training unemployed adults. Staff decided to integrate the Community Solutions program into the business school, so that program participants could attend the same classes and be assisted by the same staff as the other students. This arrangement was intended to offer Community Solutions participants an extensive array of classes, assistance from a variety of staff, and an opportunity to learn from other students at the agency.

1. Staffing

Six staff members worked on the Community Solutions program: a director, a job development specialist, a job development secretary, an admissions specialist/student administrator, a student services/admissions worker, and a secretary. The staff worked full-time for NIR and part-time for the Community Solutions program. In addition to these full-time NIR employees, seven part-time computing and accounting instructors and two part-time accounting staff assisted Community Solutions participants.

2. Recruitment and Referral

Because the welfare rolls in Erie were declining and several area contractors were competing to recruit the same TANF recipients, NIR did not receive the number of referrals it expected. NIR contracted to enroll 100 Community Solutions participants, and had enrolled 77 by the end of the contract period. The program worked closely with the CAO to generate referrals to the program. For example, NIR staff met regularly with the CAO to discuss the status of potential referrals. In addition, each Wednesday the job development specialist gave a 10-minute presentation on NIR’s Community Solutions program to TANF recipients at the CAO. After the presentation he met with interested recipients individually. CAO staff thought NIR’s computer training, which was highlighted in the presentations, interested many TANF recipients. However, since the number of eligible recipients in the county remained low, NIR’s outreach efforts had limited success.

3. Services Provided

NIR conducted a three-day orientation for new participants to introduce them to the program, assess their skills, and identify their barriers to sustained employment. Staff administered the Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE) to assess participants’ vocabulary, reading, and math levels and interviewed participants individually to learn about their work history, career interests, and challenges to working. Based on all of this information, staff developed individualized plans for meeting each participant’s needs during the program.
Following the assessment period, participants began training classes that met for 20 hours per week for four months. These classes included training on computer operations, data entry, job search, and job readiness. Participants were assigned to specific sets of classes based on their skill levels. Computer instruction lasted for four months and focused on data processing, keyboarding, and computer software packages. To complement this computer training, participants received job readiness and life skills instruction for one hour each day during their first month in the program. They attended job search classes for one hour each day during the last two months of computer training. During these classes, participants developed lists of employers they wanted to work for, learned job search strategies, and contacted employers.

Community Solutions participants required more case management and individual support than NIR’s other students. In addition to problems with child care and transportation, Community Solutions participants’ barriers to sustained employment frequently included personal issues (such as poor health or lack of a support system), low motivation to work, and poor communication skills. To address these challenges, staff offered ongoing, intensive case management and personal support. All Community Solutions staff directly involved with participants met monthly to review each participant’s file, discuss her progress in the program, and decide on a future course of action. In addition, since the job search class instructor also served as the program’s case manager, he spoke with participants regularly during or after class and often helped them arrange supportive services with the CAO.

NIR supported participants in their efforts to sustain employment by offering ongoing personal support and financial incentives. For example, the job development specialist sent letters to participants congratulating them on finding new jobs. He encouraged them to stay in touch with the agency and update their resumes. He also developed relationships with participants’ family and friends during the pre-employment phase of the program so they could help him locate participants after they started working. When participants consented, the job development specialist contacted employers to assess participants’ job performance and help resolve any work-related problems. In addition to offering personal support, the agency also used financial incentives to encourage job retention. NIR awarded gift certificates to the first 50 percent of participants who worked continuously for 30 days ($50), 120 days ($100), and 365 days ($150).

When participants lost jobs, staff invited them to return to the agency and update their resumes, write cover letters, and fax job-related materials to employers. Staff also worked with employers to schedule interviews for participants. In addition, participants could read books and watch videos on job search strategies in the agency’s Job Development and Resource Center. Despite these resources, staff thought that when participants lost jobs, they tended to remain unemployed for several months because they were devastated by the job loss. With encouragement from NIR staff, however, some participants eventually returned to the agency and began new job searches.