

THE TANF PROGRAM: A SUCCESSFUL WELFARE-TO-WORK PROGRAM IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the collaborative partnership between the University of the District of Columbia and the local government's human services agency. The government entered into a partnership with the university to provide job skills training to District residents receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits. Through the collaboration, the government has been able to prepare individuals for employment and become self-sufficient.

The University has engaged faculty in interdisciplinary collaboration and professional development. This partnership provides a snapshot of the value of the university in serving both the residents of the District of Columbia and local government policymakers.

Keywords: Job skills, Professional development, (TANF) Program.

INTRODUCTION

Most government programs cannot meet all the needs of all its population. In response, policymakers engage in collaboration to circumvent bureaucratic boundaries and red tape. Today's human service delivery system includes a number of human service agencies that operate independently of each other. Often, each agency works in silos and is unaware of whom the other is serving. At times, more than one agency may be competing for the same resources and duplicating services. This creates system of fragmented services. The end result is an unmet need, that of a low-income family.

This fragmentation presents insurmountable barriers for participants with multiple needs (Edelman & Radlin, 1991). Increasingly government agencies are collaborating with colleges and universities to administer public services and goods. In particular, human service agencies collaborate with universities to promote self-sufficiency and offer a unified service delivery system. Local governments collaborate with local colleges and universities to develop programs to serve their target populations.

The University of the District of Columbia is a public, historically black college and university (HBCU) and land grant institution in the District of Columbia. The University's mission is to offer an affordable education and workplace learning opportunities. The University partners

with the local human services agency to provide job skills training to individuals receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits.

This collaborative partnership is consistent with the university's mission and vision. The university seeks to establish pathways for matriculation from workforce development. The vision also seeks to align educational offerings to student interests and District of Columbia priorities.

This article will examine how one government jurisdiction collaborated with a local university to provide services to residents. The research will draw upon the literature that focuses on the infrastructure and systems to support collaboration between local governments and university from the academic perspective.

Background

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 changed the nation's welfare system. The federal legislation (Public Law 104-193) was introduced by Representative Eugene Clay Shaw, Jr. (R-FL.22). President Bill Clinton signed the Act into law on August 22, 1996. The Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act replaced the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits program. The new legislation became effective on July 1, 1997. The legislation replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), the federal entitlement program for low-income families, with state administered block grants.

The federal entitlement program had been in effect since 1935. In 1997, the TANF Program replaced the program of 1988. The TANF program was reauthorized in the Budget Deficit Reduction Act of 2005. The Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training program (JOBS) was a welfare-to-work program created by the Family Support Act of 1988. The Family Support Act replaced the Work Incentive program (WIN) created by the Social Security Act Amendments of 1967 (Hagen and Lurie, 1993 and Reid and Smith, 1972). The Family Support Act put the program under titles IV-A and IV-F of the Social Security Act.

The Temporary Cash Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is a benefit program that provides cash assistance to needy families with dependent children when available resources do not fully address the family's need. Program participants are prepared for independence through job skills training, work activities and employment.

The legislation pushed states to experiment by designing their own social welfare programs. Though the legislation imposed new requirements on the state use of federal welfare funds, each state was encouraged to independently configure their program (Moffitt and Ver Ploeg, 1999).

In order to qualify for the TANF program in the District of Columbia, an individual must be a resident of the District of Columbia, pregnant or responsible for a child under 19 years of age. Other qualifications may include being a U.S. national, citizen, legal alien, or permanent resident with a low or very low income and be either under-employed (working for very low wages), unemployed or about to become unemployed (D.C. Department of Human Services (DHS), Economic Security Administration (ESA), 2014). Approximately 17,000 District of Columbia residents receive TANF benefits (DC Action for Children, 2016).

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Institutions of higher education have vested interests in building strong relationships with surrounding communities of their campuses. They do not have the option of relocating and are of necessity place-based anchors. While businesses and residents often flee urban areas, universities remain (Birch, Perry and Taylor, 2013). Leaders have called for "engaged colleges and universities." Such an institution systematically structures, rewards and encourages partnerships and collaborations. An engaged institution collaborates with communities, not only in the traditional sense of educating students and producing relevant research, but also by focusing on community partnerships and collaborations (Mattessich, 1992). The University's current partnership with the government of the District of Columbia demonstrates its commitment, as an anchor institution, to serving the residents of the District of Columbia. Furthermore, it is the beginning to developing future collaborative agreements to address the needs of targeted populations.

A Collaboration Formed

In the District of Columbia, the Government of the District of Columbia human service agency administers the TANF benefits program. In 1996, the Department of Human Services entered into an agreement with the University of the District of Columbia (UDC) School of Business and Public Administration (SBPA). The School of Business and Public Administration's Institute of Human Service Delivery administers the job skills training program for TANF customers. The

purpose of the program is to engage and train District residents who were receiving benefits in order to become self-sufficient and employable.

The agreement outlines three key goals. The first is to create a job skills training program for 700 low-income residents receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)-*formerly known as the Aid to Families of Dependent Children* (AFDC). Second, to provide technical assistance to the Department of Human Services (DHS), Economic Security Administration (ESA) staff. Finally, to sponsor an Annual Capacity Building and Technical Assistance symposium for DHS grantees and community-based partners.

The collaboration reflects a growing trend of government and municipalities partnering across campuses to create sustainable urban partnerships.

In the mid to late 1980s, the Department of Human Services (DHS) was the largest District agency. It operated the city's largest budget and employee population. The agency had oversight over the city's entire health and human services delivery system. At the time, this included childcare, adult education, health care, welfare reform, elder care and other public services.

The demand for expanded capacity and greater efficiency led to the restructuring of the agency. The human services agency now primarily focuses on the human service delivery system for residents.

Since 1996, the Institute of Human Service Delivery has been working to improve the well being of low-income individuals and families in the District of Columbia. The center is a component of the University of the District of Columbia (UDC) School of Business and Public Administration (SBPA). The center is located within the university's School of Business and Public Administration. The Institute's programs serve District residents who receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits under the state TANF block grant.

The Institute, along with six other community-based providers, serves as TANF Employment Program (TEP) providers. The Institute offers two programs for residents receiving TANF benefits. The first program is the Paving Access Trails to Higher Security (PATHS). This program provides life skills training, job search and readiness training, vocational assessments, transportation assistance and job skills training. The job skills training includes certified nursing assistant (CNA), home health aide (HHA), hospitality, computer skills training, entrepreneurship and child development associate (CDA).

The second program, Program on Work, Employment and Responsibility (POWER), is for individuals receiving TANF benefits as well. The POWER Program offers specialized services and resources to DC residents with disabilities who are receiving TANF benefits.

Individuals who are in the POWER program are exempt from work participation requirements (but must comply with their self-sufficiency plan). Customers in the POWER program are exemption from the 60-month TANF time limit. The amount of a customer's cash assistance to the benefit amount received before any reductions (in the event, the customer, has exceeded the 60-month TANF time limit).The POWER program team engages customers through health and wellness promotion activities. The team also assists customers with obtaining Social Security Income. The University of the District of Columbia (UDC) team helps offer these services. The Institute also provides professional development training for local government staff and representatives of community-based grantee organizations. The Institute's programs promote workforce development, life skills training and health education at the community level.

Collaboration Begins at Home

Both the District of Columbia and University have mutually benefitted from the partnership. Together, both entities were able to create effective solutions to community needs, expand implement best practices and increase the understanding of human service delivery systems in urban settings. The University offers an environment whereby, both faculty and students, to foster an ethic of service and civic participation. Faculty and students gain experiential learning and professional development training.

This partnership is an opportunity for the University to examine its ability to identify and support new partnerships. The funding for university partnerships is important because of: 1) It can provide initial funding for programs and potentially attract funding from other sources in the future and 2) enable universities to develop and sustain an effective infrastructure and/or conducive environment to engage with communities (Ashenden et al., 2011).

The resources required to create the 'infrastructure' to support the program may be overlooked. The Institute is a single partnership. A significant proportion of these costs are for academic and administrative support staff time, although there may also be marketing and promotion costs as well as general office-related overheads. Faculty and staff are paid additional pay during the summer to perform work with the program. The Institute provides two computer labs, contracts with vendors to provide direct services and pays educational and examination fees. Additional costs include marketing and promotional materials for training, workshops and conferences, uniforms and other related costs for the program participants

If a University seeks status as an engaged institution-an institution that through its place-based relations strengthens its role as an urban anchor institution-then this must be registered in the institution's fiscal and structural investment in the process (Birch, Perry, Taylor, 2013).

The physical geographical location of the University has promoted intra university collaboration also has a geographical dimension. The majority of the services for program participants are offered at the University's main campus. The Institute provides the majority of its core services onsite at the university. This includes case management, job search and readiness training, intake and assessment, transportation assistance, child care referrals, health care coordination, mental health screenings and job skills trainings.

Ancillary supports services, such as vocational assessments, health and wellness support groups, life skills training, job search and readiness are offered at the main campus as well. Coordination of these services are centralized and managed through the SBPA Institute. A few of the job skill training classes are offered one of the University's other campus locations. One of the most unique features of this initiative has been its ability to utilize intra university collaboration. The across-university collaboration has been effective in improving the sustainability of the program because the majority of the services are offered at one location. Key questions for the program point to whether intra university collaboration will continue to yield benefits to the university-government partnership, enhance the support mechanisms for the program and influence the likely sustainability of support mechanisms and partnerships.

Universities are increasingly supportive of focusing on collaboration between researchers who offer different and complementary perspectives, knowledge, experience and skills that can result in innovative approaches to problem solving (Office of Responsible Conduct of Research, 2005). The program currently participates in intra university collaborations with the Departments of Social Work, Counselling and Psychology and Nursing.

Social Work

Since the beginning of welfare reform, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) has supported PRWORA. The organization's core values include social justice and belief in the dignity and worth of each person. The organization's members maintain that the TANF program must accommodate the needs of all families, particularly those with disabilities.

According to the National Association of Social Workers, there is a distinct lack of awareness regarding the high percentage of families on TANF that are coping with disabling conditions. The most common disabilities for TANF beneficiaries include physical or mental health problems, drug and alcohol addictions, developmental disabilities and responsibility for the care of a disabled family member. Many are coping with one or more chronic conditions.

The General Accounting Office (GAO) found that at least 44 percent of TANF customers have physical or mental impairments or are caring for a child with impairments, compared with 15 percent of the non-TANF population (2002). Figures around 50 percent, both higher and lower, have been confirmed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Inspector General, as well as The Urban Institute, the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) and others.

The Institute's program enlists the assistance of the University's licensed social workers and clinicians to conduct mental health and vocational assessments. The clinicians conduct screening and assessment procedures. These tools help identify the family's barriers and steps needed to assist them with obtaining greater independence.

The Institute employs Case Managers to advocate and guide the program participants. With the advent of the 1996 welfare reforms, the roles and responsibilities of the job changed dramatically. Case Managers hired prior to 1996 to work on the front lines in human services

were trained to assess participant eligibility by processing them to determine their income and expenses, according to Cynthia Woodside, senior government relations associate at the NASW.

According to Woodside, "They were no longer just checking to determine whether someone was eligible for the program, but were really charged with screening for barriers, helping people find jobs and being a job coach once they found one." She adds, "The workforce was not sufficiently trained to take on these responsibilities, and they recognized this fact." Many of the Institute's Case Managers were not prepared for the challenges of serving the TANF population.

The University's faculty in the Department of Social Work provided training for frontline staff on how to identify the basic signs and symptoms of the more common mental health disorders and substance abuse problems. If problems were identified, then one of the University's clinician's would provide a more in-depth assessment. Ensuring a qualified, stable and professional TANF workforce is a critical component of the program. Following enactment of the PRWORA, employees whose primary task had been to determine client eligibility was suddenly called upon to conduct customer assessments, engage customers in job search and job readiness training and placement activities, make referrals to related programs and special services and track customer activities. Many states have not invested sufficiently in the training needed to prepare their Case Managers for these additional tasks, nor have they hired more highly skilled staff.

Social workers are trained professionals who have bachelors, masters, or doctoral degrees in social work from an accredited social work program. In contrast, the majority of Case Managers today have little to no professional social work training. Case Managers often possess

college degrees, but typically in fields unrelated to social service delivery. Some states only require Case Managers to have a high school diploma. Case Managers with the Institute possess a Masters degree along with at least one year of professional case management experience. They receive continuous training. This includes, but not limited to, mandated reporter writing, case management documentation, SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery (SOAR), screen co-occurring disorders, non-crisis prevention intervention and domestic violence.

The ultimate success of welfare reauthorization depends, in large part, on the skills and abilities of the TANF workforce to implement the policies; it is critical that resources be directed to address current shortcomings.

Counseling and Psychology

The transition from welfare to work poses challenges. Individuals may face mental health issues and/or contextual variables (i.e., lack of a well-paying job). The Institute engages both Department of Counseling and Psychology faculty and students as consultants and interns. Faculty provide vocational guidance and psychological testing. The faculty maintains strong relationships with local mental health agencies and organizations in an effort to serve the needs of the Institute's participants.

Collaboration is drawn from many fields., including social work, public administration and sociology and others (Lasker and Weiss, 2003). Licensed clinicians and graduate students conduct vocational assessments and provide vocational guidance to participants seeking to transition from welfare to work.

Nursing

University nurse faculty conduct training workshops for the Institute's Case Managers. This includes reviewing medical records, developing comprehensive and coordinated physical and health care plans and record keeping. Specifically, the nurses demonstrate how to develop medical summary sheets for customer records. Case Managers are also trained on how to document and report health barriers in the centralized reporting system. Nurse faculty also receives continuous education units (CEUs) for training and uses them as a part of their professional portfolios.

Collaborative Education begins Early

The Institute offers internship to a broad mix of students enrolled in the Counseling and Psychology, Public Administration, Social Work and Computer Information Systems. The program includes students from other universities in the metropolitan area as well. Students must begin working together before they actually start working. Students participate in a year-long internships and collaborate with Case Managers in the development of each participant's development plan. Students gain from the experiences and learn to distinguish and differentiate certain conditions (i.e., depression, anxiety) from poorly defined vocational interests and lack of job-related self-efficacy (Edwards, et. al, 1999).

Students are taught consultation, program development and program evaluation skills through work with social service agencies. The provision of such experiences will likely advance the training agenda of the field (Edwards et. al, 1999).

Many professionals operate in silos. It is incumbent upon universities and training programs to expand interdisciplinary educational opportunities and programs to help foster

Collaboration among students before they enter the workforce (Robert Wood Foundation, 2010). Interdisciplinary collaboration can provide people with many learning experiences, but only if they are properly managed (Chu, 2013).

Lessons Learned

Through the collaboration, the University has trained more than 10,000 District residents receiving TANF benefits and prepared them to work in hospitality and health careers. The University has opened and shared its core facilities with government officials. Through the Institute, the University has provided onsite leadership, sponsored and conference for more than

15 community-based organizations on an annual basis and continuously developed professional development workshops training for the human services front line staff.

Furthermore, the University has hired five of its interns who remain as current employees, formed community partnerships and increased its grant funding from the government. This has increased the visibility of the program and confidence of the District government in the University's ability to provide and sustain city programs.

There are scholars who are cautious about interdisciplinary collaborations in the academic setting. For some, concerns included credit for publishing (Chu, 2013). Others

maintain that the focus on interdisciplinary research distracts one from their primary field of study.

As the District government policymakers juggle competing priorities and dwindling budgets, they must evaluate the value of university partnerships. Universities can share training and technological resources with government to reduce their agency cost. Both entities share

common interests and objectives in serving the District of Columbia. Moving forward, both entities must evaluate innovative approaches to service delivery, including best practices to promote government and university collaboration.

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