

INSIGHTS AND SUGGESTIONS FROM COMMERCE WORKFIRST FORUMS

August 2010

Program Design		
	WorkFirst of Today	WorkFirst of Tomorrow
Cultural Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are systematic differences between some of the partners. Some have the main mission of putting people to work, some don't (eg. the colleges). All of the partners at the table need to be focused on the same mission. Our jobs have become more about process than case management. [This was echoed by quite a few] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We need to treat our parents more like employees. What we do should be outcome driven, not process driven.
Generational Welfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">
Family-Based versus Adult-centered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create opportunities to work more with OSPI to develop a family approach rather than just the adults in the household. Create more connection opportunities with the public school system. The Comprehensive Evaluation should assess a parent in their whole environment including their family.
Child Only Cases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What many of the grandparents really want are the benefits -- but they'll take the money too. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I think we should write IRP's for teenagers.
Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It's important to be able to establish a rapport and trust with customers so they aren't worried about participation hours or sanctions – those things just get in the way. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need more mental health and chemical dependency services, not just formal, intensive treatment but also access to support groups, group therapy, etc. so we're not just serving the extreme cases. Mental health partners aren't used enough. Part of recovery is getting work or getting back to work. We need a different type of orientation for "returners". Our clients need more orientation in setting goals – need to help the individual be in control – more therapeutic. Have something to look forward to that says "I matter". Huge percentage of parents are still stuck in survival mode and don't feel they can really impact their own future – we don't do enough mental health assistance and are trained in that, but we are still doing it. We have people with mental health issues that don't meet the criteria, but need something. Maybe we could provide support groups that also meet participation requirements. There should be more retention and stabilization services once they leave TANF I'd rather see support services go down so we have more transitional/stabilization activities at the end or once they've gotten a job..
Employment Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ES needs to provided Job Club/Mock interviewing that's critical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Re: Job Search. Fear of going back to a cookie cutter approval model

Department	<p>elements in their Job Seekers workshops, but time limitations for these activities is definitely a challenge.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On the job training is extremely underused. ESD has to request funding through the Olympia office for each opportunity. • Keytrain is a great tool. Clients get excited to use it. Since it is self-paced, they can see their success as they go. • Job Search. A lot are just going through the motion. Many need more training before they go into Job Search. • ES line staff don't seem to be following the same guidelines when it comes to taking parents, even though we get everything "stacked". 	which didn't work well.
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents definitely need assistance with job search, job coaching, and retention services. Case management models definitely work with this population in obtaining and retaining employment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with employers to provide entry-level job opportunities with the potential to progress to livable wage jobs. • Provide micro-enterprise opportunities. • Need job developers and specific marketing strategies.
Job Ready	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The job hunter modules at Work Source work well. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide services differently between "job ready" and "career ready/minded".
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's hard to get parents to turn in their attendance hours (and it's an administrative nightmare). They don't want to be identified with WorkFirst. • Issue between core and no-core activities as it relates to GED, especially if they have to ride a bus. Transportation is a struggle. • Smaller counties struggle to fill the education component and there are no open ended options. • The colleges require 52 weeks of participation per year. Instructors and local partners have to spend a considerable amount of time designing classes for Winter/Spring/Summer breaks. During breaks, they get referred to the CSO and Supported Works which swamps capacity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer online classes to parents with flexible tuition payment options rather than on a quarterly cut-off basis. • Offer education opportunities providing short-term skill development as an open entry/open exit opportunity. • There are some colleges we can't automatically go to, but instead have to do paperwork over and over for the same type of request. In the end, it has always been approved, but do we really need to do all that extra paperwork?
60-Month Time limit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't wait until the 60th month to start "safety net" efforts with families. • Some parents have the expectation the program will always be there for them even though they've heard about the "rule". We might consider some sort of grandfather clause. However, we should really concentrate on those actively working towards getting a job and self-sufficiency. • A large amount of people are in and out of the program in 6 months. When someone has been in longer than that, something else is going on. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This should be enough time for a parent to get employed. If not, maybe it isn't the right program for them. • Enforce the 60 month time limit for families without exemption status. • 60 months is five years. Even if someone goes, stops, and goes again. Even then, that's enough time. For CJ – even with barriers – that's enough time. • The 60 month time limit is good as long as we have a process to identify those who aren't employable. • If we implement the 60 month "rule", we need to begin an exit pathway at 48 months.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Folks know about the benefits they get here in Washington and even move here from other states because of it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start talking with clients early about moving on. And then, help to get them to move on. In the last year, we should put more intensive social help into the household. 24 months or less is most successful. After that, it gets more difficult. The five-year timeframe is reasonable and may even be incredibly generous.
Local Planning Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partners are meeting regularly and are willing to work together to address issues. LPAs have been positive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Re: the 60 month limit. We not only need to inform clients, but we need to embrace these people within the community so they can survive. This might be something the LPAs could address. Want to see LPAs have the ability to do as much as possible locally. LPAs might think more broadly when it comes to children and include youth programs, write abstinence grants, etc.
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">
Community Jobs/Supportive Works Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We love CJ! I feel privileged. It's a life changing program – it can be! It's a great program. CJ provides the case management focus that TANF parents need. FLSA maximum hours limitation is difficult for some parents who want to be able to volunteer additional hours at their worksite. CJ offers on-the-job experience for TANF grant recipients rather than just receiving financial support. Advantages include: volunteering at a job after a training program helps parent obtain experience in the field and building work ethic skills. System roadblocks include: Ability to jointly serve families, reducing gaps between activities/program, team-based case management includes all partners communicating, program time limits – staff have to find workarounds to allow parents to complete education programs. Activities are required because they are “federally countable” but not always providing relevant skills or education. Support services such as childcare and transportation are essential. The 30-hour option for CJ clients has worked well. CJ used to be a 9-month program. It worked better then. SW is valuable and serves a purpose, but it is also a distraction from CJ. SW is a huge challenge “stacking”. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possibly have unpaid work activities that lead to wage paying activities. Revisit the Community Jobs requirements regarding employment barriers. It would be helpful if we could spend more time on CJ and Career Jump. Career Jump is a great option. Re: CJ -- Paradigm of 6 month program has been there forever. Perhaps we should make it a 5 month program. The sanction process could be handled differently. I think all the work is being done by the workers, not the clients. Re: SW. It would be good to get credit to get them working. It isn't intensive, but we meet with the clients at least once a week and are still doing a lot of the same things for them. Sanction policy changes have added balance to the program by saving staff time and requiring personal responsibility.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's a big problem and an issue to find enough stackable activities. • Subsidized employment (CJ) gives people the opportunity to be successful. • It's hard to get people to do unpaid work (CJ vrs. SW). • Allowing participants to learn on-the-job skills and build confidence in a professional work environment is invaluable. • The system doesn't always work well for CJ if you get a parent in-between quarters and there are no open enrollment options. It creates a problem for all involved in trying to add an hour or two here and there. • JT is one of the most challenging. When a parent is going for their GED, they end up doing a computer class just as a filler. • Important to do support services training across the board. 	
<p>"Participation" Specific</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal participation requirements and focusing on "participation hours" has definitely hindered services and is preventing us from serving clients to the best our ability. [This was heard several times]. • Participation hours serve a purpose as parents learn about what employers expect. • Participation should be used as a tool, not an outcome. Our outcome should be the number of participants who have moved to self-sufficiency. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider changing the requirement to monitor participation hours. • Need to ask parents "what do you want" when creating participation options. • Consider changing the requirement to stack education activities that people don't need just to have them participating. • Participation needs to be meaningful and useful. It would be better to be able to differentiate what they need rather than just doing something just to meet the criteria. • Count hours in the classroom as participation.
	<p>Policy</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The new Comprehensive Evaluation is too rigid and does not allow for partner contribution when identifying program pathways. • Current program has unrealistic participation expectations especially as it relates to transportation options and activity scheduling. • The Comprehensive Evaluations force us to gather information. • The volume of caseloads combines with tallying logs, passing audits, tracking and finding clients when they have gone MIA and getting them to turn in timesheets, etc. consumes us. • Each partner has a different measurement of participation, which makes reporting at the local level time consuming and complex. We're not on the same page. The State's participation report differs from the Federal report. • Lack of flexibility with the WorkFirst program. Local partners want to see folks move to self sufficiency, but aren't able to put them into 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need flexible time limits on activities. Some parents need more than 6 months of on the job experience to be viable candidates for employment in their field and college certificate programs may require more than 12 months to complete. • Shorten the Comprehensive Evaluation. Many of the questions are repetitive.

	<p>certain programs. They aren't always able to develop the skills they want to focus on. For example, the Vancouver WorkSource office meets with 300-350 participants each week. They want to be able to look at the whole picture for a family and send them where they believe they would benefit (Asset classes, financial sessions, school participations), but they are limited.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	
	Budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WIA funding continues to be reduced. • Before the Deficit Reduction Act, we had 30 days when we did a lot of life skills training – when this went away, it affected our outcomes. We need to revisit how we did life skills training before the Deficit Reduction Act. We need to compare and see if the system we have now is really working. • Budget cuts are unfortunately happening to those who are being good and participating. I'd rather see cuts made that affect our non-willing participants. • Budgeting classes might become even more important. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus cuts on state funded programs rather than programs that help the state access federally funded programs. Continue to fund those programs that have federal match requirements. • Consider reducing TANF grants. • Perhaps support services should be limited. For instance, someone who works two days a week should not get the same amount for gas as someone who works full-time. • Possibly reduce some of the support services dollars in the CJ program because they have a higher amount coming in. • Support services could be tightened up just a little -- Maybe even make it available just for real emergencies.
	Other	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pathways to Engagement was a successful program locally connecting parents with activities that support participation • Life skills classes are important. They are both extremely beneficial and critical to a parent's success in retaining employment. • In some areas, community colleges are offering Life Skills classes. In others, they lost funding for it. • The eJAS system requires me to learn about my partners. • MCAR doesn't roll everything together with some stopping and starting again. • The "state report" doesn't reflect everything that's important. An education refresher on FLSA might be nice. • Have to cope with SDR right now, so case management is a bit of a luxury. • The majority of people I see really want to get off TANF. There's a small amount that are afraid, etc. Why do we spend so much time concentrating on that small fraction. We just need to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need a program to help with empowerment and problem solving – perhaps something like the WorkFirst Innovation Fund which has been discussed before.

	<p>acknowledge that not everyone will succeed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The HUB program has really worked well because the client has the ability to sell themselves. The response from customers has been good.• The “Move the Mountain” agency really does a good job of working with small groups of families (national organization?).	
		•