
Promising Practice Fact Sheet – Workforce Development

HARBORQUEST – Chicago, Illinois

Program

Description: Subsidized jobs program for adults with barriers to employment, including criminal backgrounds; graduated stress, peer support, and on-the-job coaching, case management by MSW staff. Strong partnership with private employers.

Target Population: TANF participants and those who are low-income or have barriers to employment, such as criminal backgrounds, etc

Goal: To provide reliable, reasonably priced staffing services that improve the quality of their workforces.

Cost: Annual cost - \$4 million

Evidence: Unaware of any formal evaluation conducted on this program. Evidence documented is based on outcomes tracked by the Harborquest program. Source: William Schwartz, COO, and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Administration for Children and Families report on “Innovative Employment Approaches and Programs for Low-Income Families”

Caseload Data: Annual enrollment of about 2,000 clients.

Assessment: Screened and assessed by MSW social workers

Description of Services:

- Harborquest serves as a staffing service for local employers. Pending successful completion of a trial period (up to 90 days) a participant is hired as a permanent employee. During this time, the participant remains on the Harborquest payroll and the employer is charged a modest hourly fee for the actual time worked.
- Key services include case management by individuals with Masters of Social Work (MSW), classroom training, on-the-job subsidized work experience, graduated stress, peer support, and on-the-job coaching.
- TANF clients (25% of total client population) participate for up to 6 months while other clients may participate up to one year (75% of total client population).
- Trial placement service shifts the focus away from an applicant’s background, work record, or interview skills, and lets the employer observe the applicant’s work habits and ability to do a specific job within the employer’s own work environment.
- MSWs carry a 50 client caseload.

Eligibility:

- While Harborquest does not have any eligibility requirements, most of their clients are low-income.
- Many are on TANF and have criminal backgrounds, low literacy levels, and/or other barriers to employment.

Findings:

- In 2005, Harborquest placed about 1,000 people in temporary jobs with approximately 60 different employers.
- Approximately 63% placement rate into unsubsidized employment for TANF participants (typically in the 80% range) in 2009.
- For clients participating up to one year:
 - 90% placement rate into unsubsidized employment

- 70% retention rate after 6 months of unsubsidized employment
- Incentives to employers include:
 - Recruitment, specialized screening and job orientation
 - Ensures right number of workers arrive on time for each shift
 - Handles the payroll and workers' compensation
 - Account executives quickly and expertly resolve any issues
 - Transportation when necessary
 - On-site coaching

Implications for policymakers and program developers to consider:

- As a social entrepreneurship venture, Harborquest covers more than 80% of its operating expenses with income earned through the hourly fees during the 90 day trial period. Additional funding comes from WorkFirst funds, corporate and private philanthropic foundations, government agencies and private donors.
- Strong partnership with private sector employers provides on-the-job training in a position that often times leads to unsubsidized employment.
- Incentives important to private sector employers create a realistic interface with the needs of the business community dependent upon being competitive.