

WorkFirst Lean

A Mid-Point Reflection

www.workfirst.wa.gov/wflean/default.htm

JULY 2014

Greetings from Community Services Division Director Babs Roberts, Project Sponsor



Many of you have heard of or participated in the large WorkFirst (WF) Lean Project we've been engaged in. As we round the half-way mark and head toward the end of this adventure, I wanted to take a moment to share some of my reflections on the journey so far.

First, how did we get here? As you probably know, last year we found ourselves at a crossroads—facing the need to engage families in meaningful ways that make the best possible use of their time-limited TANF assistance

(engagement that matters) while also balancing our responsibility to meet our federal participation rate obligations (participation that counts). How could we best identify the right balance in these crossroads, the right actions to take, and the right changes to make?

DSHS chose to embark on a collaborative effort to bring together staff from across the WorkFirst spectrum to identify actions we could take that would help us meet these goals. The methodology we chose is Lean, primarily value stream mapping and root cause analysis. We asked staff from CSD (WorkFirst Program Specialists, financial service specialists, regional and headquarters program managers) to come together with partners from Employment Security, the community college system, Commerce providers, and the Department of Early Learning to examine key areas where there appeared to be pinch points. Between December 2013 and July 2014 we will have conducted six Lean events to evaluate our current state and identify enhancements in critical areas of service delivery within the program.

Wow, was this ever the right thing to do! In the first three events, I supported movement forward on over 60 innovative ideas for change. This work is part of [Results Washington](http://www.results.wa.gov) to help the most vulnerable people become independent and self-sufficient. It is item 3.2a under Goal 4, Healthy and Safe Communities – Supported People. It is also part of the [DSHS](http://www.dshs.wa.gov) and [ESA Strategic Plan](http://www.esa.wa.gov) (see strategic objectives 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4).

In this newsletter you will see some examples of the ideas that are moving forward and I encourage you to visit our webpage at www.workfirst.wa.gov/wflean/default.htm to learn more about the great work that has taken place in the past six months. I am always inspired by the positive energy, expertise and most importantly, the passion and commitment to our clients that I see when our WorkFirst partnership comes together to tackle an issue—and I am sure you will be too.

WASHINGTON
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What is Lean Anyway?

Lean helps organizations to streamline how the work gets done and eliminate waste. Through the use of Lean tools, your program can:

- Eliminate or dramatically reduce backlogs.
- Reduce lead times.
- Decrease the complexity of processes.
- Improve the quality and consistency of work.
- Free up more staff time for "mission critical" work.
- Improve staff morale and process transparency.

To learn more about Lean and Continuous Improvement please go to this website: <http://www.results.wa.gov/resources/learn-about-lean>

"This event was one of the more worthwhile and productive, outcome-oriented activities and workgroups I've participated in."

– Millicent Blocquer, Employment Security Department Administrator, participant from WorkFirst 1 (WF 1)



Transforming lives

WorkFirst #1: Reducing Job Search Churn

Reflection

"It is the time of year when we are reminded to give thanks.

This week we were thankful for the opportunity to gather together.

A collaborative.

What we heard resonate thru out this workshop truly was the joy of coming together.

We are excited to work towards achieving a practicable and attainable plan.

We have the support of our leaders.

We have the support of one another.

Together we will persevere to achieve a new improved future Lean State plan.

This week we have been reminded that it is not them and us, DSHS/ESD.

We are one social service program.

This week we have been reminded that it is not them and us, worker/client.

We are a community of one.

Our combined successes are the successes of one.

We have a common vision.

Together we improve lives.

We are the people of Washington.

We invite each of you to applaud our community of one.

We are a community collaboratively working for the improvement and transformation of the lives of Washingtonians."

– Bethina Golden, DSHS Social Worker and participant from WF 1

Twenty-one participants from the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) and the Employment Security Department (ESD) came together for a week in December 2013 to focus on better engaging participants in ESD Job Search and improving their employment outcomes. In short, this group tackled what we call, the "Job Search Churn" (i.e. when clients are referred to ESD for Job Search and then referred back to DSHS for non-participation, etc.).

Participants came up with 42 kaizens (ideas for improvement) and have been working on implementing 16. Ideas and plans were organized into eight key groups:

- Pairing DSHS and ESD workers
- Improving staff to staff communications
- Improving staff to participant communications by providing clear information about ESD Job Search benefits and expectations
- Standardizing the reasons why clients may be referred back from ESD to DSHS
- Clarifying when participants are considered "job search ready"
- Celebrating participant successes
- Ensuring that ESD Job Search Individual Responsibility Plans (IRP) are written to support 24 weeks of job search activities

The commitment and teamwork that the ESD and DSHS staff brought to the table were critical. They were motivated to make the process better because a reduction in the "Job Search Churn," is not only beneficial to staff, but most importantly to the families we serve.

kaizen spotlight: Celebrating Participant Success

How do we highlight the successes of WorkFirst participants (aka parents) who gain employment AND provide inspiration about the WF program? Share their successes! Members of WF1 collaborated to create a video called "WorkFirst Success Stories" that highlights the experiences of participants who are now employed. The 17 minute video can be found at:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/WashingtonStateDSHS/videos?view=pl>



WorkFirst #2: Preparing Federal Participation Reports

This event was held in Olympia in January 2014 and focused on the process for preparing and transmitting our State's federal participation reports. The goal for this team included reviewing the process of preparing data (entered by field staff) for transmission to the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and expanding knowledge about the process to a wider group of program experts. We chose to look at this area because we had not really taken a close look at the process since the program's inception and because there was such limited knowledge of the Federal Participation Rate reporting process. We also believed that this work would help us find the best ways to connect the data and information we track each day to the data reported to the Federal government in order to reduce duplicate work and ensure we are capturing and reporting every countable hour of participation.

This nine-person team included representatives from the Information Technology Solutions (ITS), Research and Data Analysis (RDA), Community Services Division (CSD) and the Office of Financial Management (OFM). They developed 24 kaizens and are now working to implement 13 of their ideas focused on educating staff about the Federal Participation Rate, the data reporting structure and ways we can work together to ensure collection of more complete and accurate data.



Kaizen: A Japanese term meaning incremental continuous improvement that increases effectiveness of an activity to produce more value with less waste.

“WorkFirst 3 was a great opportunity to get WorkFirst partners together to start identifying areas to enhance...It was a week filled with learning, collaboration, and idea forming. As a group we continue to work together to move towards implementation of several Kaizens. The facilitators of the Lean event helped us to stay on track and they continue to be involved...I appreciate that DSHS coordinated this event to help us all continue to work together to create additional positive outcomes.”

– Anna Minor, Department of Commerce, WorkFirst Programs, participant from WF 3

The WorkFirst Lean Experience

I want to share a bit about what I have seen during this WorkFirst Lean journey.

- People gathered from various agencies/organizations to work **TOGETHER!** There was no sense of us and them, only a sense of **US** asking “How do WE collaborate to achieve the best **MUTUAL OUTCOMES?**”
- **LEARNING** happened at every step. We learned about each other as individuals and organizations, about Lean, about how we are interconnected, and about how what we do impacts others. I think in each event I heard (more than once) “I never really knew...”
- Lean is **HARD WORK!!!** Each week was a busy, tough, but rewarding transformation. Every group had a “Wednesday” where we struggled to see the light at the end of the tunnel; a “Thursday” where everything clicked and the sense of accomplishment and empowerment was realized; and a “Friday” where the group proudly shared the fruits of all the labor and received affirmation from leadership of their good work.

There is much more to do to implement all these amazing ideas. But I am **INSPIRED** and **ENCOURAGED** by the **DEDICATION, ENERGY, ENTHUSIASM** and **PASSION** these folks have for this work and for serving people in our communities. The future of WorkFirst is truly bright—and in good hands!

– Carla Reyes, WorkFirst Lean Project Lead

WorkFirst #3: Verifying and Documenting Actual Hours of Participation

W A S H I N G T O N
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WorkFirst Lean: What's Next?

There are now 27 groups working to implement over 60 of those great ideas. Teams will continue work to implement their kaizens. For a complete list of kaizens, go to the WF Lean website at:
www.workfirst.wa.gov/wfLean/default.htm.

In April 2014, WF #4 took place and focused on improving educational outcomes; WF #5 occurred in June 2014 and focused on tightening Transition Gaps; and WF #6 will take place in July and focus on how we engage participants who are not ready for work to address barriers such as mental health, chemical dependency and domestic violence.

Please look for more details about these events in our Final Reflections publication in Fall 2014.

"I cannot say enough positive things about my experience in the Lean events. I think the thing I appreciate about the process is that it fast paced and you see the results quickly. One Kaizen from WF 3 was for an eJAS IT change...it was implemented just over a month after the Kaizen moved forward."

– Diana Leach, ESA/DSHS, Quality Assurance, participant from WF 3, 4 and 5

In March 2014 twenty-nine staff from CSD, Commerce, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, Department of Early Learning, the Employment Security Department, Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance and partners from Goodwill, YWCA, Career Path and Service Alternatives came together in Vancouver to evaluate the field staff processes for collecting, verifying and documenting actual hours of participation. Our mission (and we chose to accept it...) was to identify ways to improve these processes to capture every possible hour of participation in a timely and accurate manner and reduce duplication or excess processing so that we can balance engagement that matters with participation that counts.

The group is working to implement 35 of their 60 Kaizens:

- **IT updates** to improve partner agency access, increase timely and accurate input of verified actual hours, reduce lost hours of participation due to short term closures
- **Review the TANF State Plan** against current policies and practices to identify areas where we can more efficiently capture maximum hours of participation while reducing workload
- **Update policies** to allow/provide increased access by partner agencies, reduce redundant work processes and other changes that may be identified as a result of the TANF State Plan review
- **Review facility capacity** to support increased co-location of partner agencies
- **Update forms** to create more standardization and reduce workload associated with mailing/distribution to clients
- **Provide training** to educate partners on employment screens, use of EJAS and notifications of TANF closures
- **Upgrade internal CSD procedures** on notifying partners for TANF closures and creating better communication procedures for WorkFirst Case Managers

kaizen spotlight: *Using Automation to Improve Communication*

One kaizen focused on lost participation credit when a TANF case is closed by someone other than the WorkFirst Program Specialist (WFPS). When this happens and the closure is due to a new job, it is likely that we are losing the opportunity to properly capture actual and historical hours of participation. The solution: Create an automated "tickler" to the WFPS from the Document Management System (DMS). This will enable the WFPS to code actual and historical hours that may have otherwise been missed.

Check out our Website at:

www.workfirst.wa.gov/wflean/default.htm 