

Measure H Funding Recommendations Process- FYs 2020-23

Homeless Initiative Policy Summit #6
Employment

Wednesday, October 30, 2019

Key Points:

- 1. To address the persistent barriers to employment that many homeless job seekers face, more investment in employment services and supports and a greater emphasis on the centrality of employment to homeless services is needed.** Homeless job seekers face a wide range of barriers to employment, ranging from being homeless in and of itself, to institutional racism and stigma, to legal, health/mental health, and logistical challenges. While some homeless service providers have adopted successful models to assist participants with securing employment, there is wide variation across the system. In addition, the public workforce and public benefits systems must intensify their commitment and capacity to serve homeless jobseekers.
- 2. We should build on innovative employment models that are already working in LA County and elsewhere, while also tapping into underutilized resources that could be supporting homeless jobseekers' pursuit of employment.** Models such as Individual Placement and Support (IPS), Social Enterprise, and Alternative Staffing are already in use or beginning to be in use in LA County, but could be expanded and replicated to serve more participants. At the same time, we may not be maximizing opportunities available through Community Colleges, Adult Schools, Regional Occupational Centers and Programs (ROC/Ps), apprenticeships, partnerships with unions, and others.
- 3. Inadequate job quality can be a significant barrier to successful job placement and retention. While most participants want to work, the jobs they are most often directed toward may not enable them to sustain market rate rents in LA County.** Job quality concerns can be addressed through advocacy at the systems level; through investments in wage subsidies; and at the individual level, by targeting placement in higher wage jobs, connecting participants to high road employment programs, and building skills that open doors to sustainable career pathways.
- 4. Employer engagement and support is crucial to accessing greater opportunities for homeless jobseekers.** We can pursue a range of approaches to building relationships with employers, including by drawing on the homeless services system's experience with landlord engagement (for example, by setting up a hotline for employers, to enable rapid responses to concerns that may arise when they hire our participants), utilizing a workforce with sales experience and skills to engage employers, and providing appropriate training and ongoing supports to employers to help them foster workplaces that are responsive to participants' needs and challenges. Further, understanding employers' business needs and striving to train and market homeless job seekers in a way that is responsive to these needs is essential.

Employment Policy Summit Notes (Discussion Questions in bold)

What are the biggest barriers people experiencing homelessness face in obtaining employment? Where are there as yet untapped (or insufficiently tapped) opportunities to remove these barriers?

Discrimination and legal barriers

- Homelessness is a barrier in itself. Being a person of color, member of LGBTQ community, etc. are additional barriers.
- Criminal records and need for record expungement are both major barriers; agencies need to be better equipped to direct clients in this process; employers need to be more willing to hire people with records.
- Retention services are needed, including providing stipends and incentives for retaining employment.
- We need to examine data that shows who did and did not obtain employment after accessing employment services. We need to look at this data with an equity lens and see who is and who is not successfully connecting to jobs.
- There is still a lot of stigma around hiring people who have experienced homelessness; we need to reach out to employers directly and provide financial incentives for them to hire.
- Laws severely limit what jobs people with criminal records can access. This is discriminatory and needs to be changed.
- We can't look at general employment rates and think they apply to the population we are serving. Even in the midst of record low unemployment, the population we serve is still struggling significantly.
- How do we ensure that public workforce systems are equitable, especially for those who have historically been left behind?

Logistical challenges

- Women experiencing homelessness often stay up all night for safety reasons and then struggle to job hunt during the day due to lack of sleep.
- Transportation is a major barrier (even agencies that can provide some transportation for clients cannot provide enough money). Discussions about creating something between a bus pass and bus tokens is currently underway with Metro.
- Childcare is a major challenge for families. Often workplaces, childcare facilities, and places participants are staying are far away from each other; a parent may need to leave early for work before a childcare facility opens, and may not be able to pick up his or her child until well after the facility closes.
- Transportation provided through the CalWORKS GAIN program is insufficient. Clients sometimes end up becoming ineligible for it.
- Individuals on probation/parole face additional challenges while looking for work.
- Burdensome fines and fees are also a barrier.
- Not having IDs or a Driver's License is a barrier.
- Suspended licenses are a major barrier; sometimes the only issue here is that the person simply can't pay the DMV to reissue the license. We should explore opportunities to have fees waived, similar to the way birth certificate fees can be waived.
- Owing child support back pay can be a barrier to employment.

Appearance-related barriers

- Need more workforce development funding for clothing, soft skills training, coaching on how to “present well,” storage for belongings while people job hunt (The Bin currently has a waitlist), childcare, and transportation.
- Dental care is essential; there continues to be a stigma around hiring someone who doesn’t have teeth. (Dental care can be funded through Medi-Cal.)
- Medi-Cal’s dental care protocol is to “pull not preserve,” so people end up getting teeth pulled rather than getting the root canal they really need; eventually the person ends up needing dentures. This is a policy that Medi-Cal needs to reexamine.

Mental health, trauma, well-being, and self-confidence challenges

- People who have experienced homelessness need help in building their self-esteem and self-confidence. Some aspects of this include:
 - At bridge/interim housing sites, before even looking at jobs, residents should learn how to get up at the same time every day, clean up after themselves, check in with how they are doing mentally, emotionally, etc. (More structure in the day leads to greater self-awareness about how one is doing.)
 - Mental health care is essential (before, during, and after job placement).
 - Essential to connect people to jobs that they want to do.
 - Need to ask ourselves what job readiness really looks like.
- We need to look at how trauma impacts employment attainment and workplace behavior.
 - Behaviors that we observe and label “lack of motivation,” for example, are normal responses to trauma.
 - Need to help employers understand how trauma is impacting their employees.
- Social isolation is a barrier to employment. Peer support groups are needed.
- People with severe mental illness are lacking support and access to IPS services and benefits.
- Everyone working in the homeless service sector needs to be trained in trauma-informed care.
- Facilitated peer support groups are needed so that people can talk through their mental health challenges, job seeking process, etc.

Job skills, career pathways, and retention supports

- Need to create pathways to jobs beyond the entry level.
- Skills gap is a major barrier; there is not enough engagement with employers to know what skills are truly needed for various positions. Clients need to receive specialized training for the specific role they will occupy.
- Men of color suffer most from skills gap issues; many lack work experience as a result of their experiences of discrimination.
- Concern about certain jobs we might connect clients to becoming obsolete due to technology.

System barriers in the workforce development system

- Public workforce system overall continues to work with the easiest people to serve and the easiest jobs to locate.
 - Federal performance measures drive focus on easiest to serve.

- Employment centers need more support in gaining capacity to serve higher barrier individuals.
- Funding for employment centers has declined.

Other barriers

- More homeless agencies need to be willing to hire youth and people with lived experience.
- Housing programs need to set more realistic expectations—some transitional housing programs/rapid re-housing (RRH) programs aren't truly "Housing First"; some require youth to be employed before they can obtain housing.
 - LAHSA states that this wouldn't be the case for programs they fund.
- Real and perceived benefits cliffs are a barrier. This can result from lack of communication/education to front line staff and from front line staff to clients about the transition from living on benefits to living off earned income, leading to fears about getting off benefits; need to educate employment services providers so they can let clients know what that transition will look like.
- It is challenging for providers to meet the needs of high acuity clients or those who have been justice-involved, when searching for employment.
- People who are employed should receive housing prioritization (perhaps through RRH).

Untapped opportunities

- Untapped resource: trade unions. For example, the Carpenters Union has a "My Brother's Keeper" program. Many clients who have been referred to this program have been hired.
- Unemployment is at a record low, which is an opportunity, but pathways to finding jobs are completely broken and present a barrier.
 - More subsidies may be needed to offset costs; federal and state programs that offer subsidies are difficult and competitive for employers to use.
- Need to think about the person here, not just the system
 - Consider the human factors: majority of the people we are serving do not have a GED, may struggle with reading and writing, may struggle with substance use, have inconsistent work history.
 - Need to focus first on basic skills—reading, writing, and getting sober.
- Would be helpful to have a coach who could help clients show up to job training and help them problem-solve on a daily basis; this role can be filled by someone with lived experience. People with lived experience often love this type of role and see it as a form of giving back.
- Job retention and wage growth post-employment is crucial.

How can we most effectively help adults experiencing homelessness who will not receive a rental subsidy to secure employment?

Employment should be a key part of problem-solving work

- Problem solving practices hold promise for lower/mid acuity clients – employment should be at the center of problem solving. Need to integrate connections to workforce development in these conversations.
- We need "employment-specific" problem-solving.
- As a part of Employment and Homelessness Taskforce recommendations implementation, there will be flexible funds administered via problem solving staff. This will initially be implemented in some regions and may be expanded in the future, based on experience.

- Transparency regarding access to resources is necessary for people to make decisions about employment; it's important to tell people they won't get a housing subsidy if they won't get it.
- We are over-subsidizing housing for people who want to/can work
 - To address this, subsidize employment (rather than housing).
 - Can we have publicly-sourced jobs for these low acuity clients?

Cultivate high road employment opportunities

- Need "higher road" opportunities that get people systematically connected to jobs with benefits, etc.
- We should have a coordinated waitlist/prioritization system for high road employment opportunities.
- For Hospitality Training Academy, partnership with Goodwill (and HealthRIGHT 360) has been essential; they are doing a great job.

Innovations and specific sectors hold promise

- ASOs (Alternative Staffing Organizations) are a good opportunity for lower acuity clients; county is currently funding two ASOs; they can provide temporary employment to bridge the gap until clients can obtain permanent employment.
- Need place-based strategies. For example, the Refresh Spot (RS) in Skid Row:
 - All staff (100) providing services at RS are homeless and live in immediate area.
 - This addresses issues with ability to get to work and access services.
 - Now there is an opportunity to build on that with businesses/contracts in the surrounding area.

Job quality/compensation is an important factor for long-term success and client autonomy/choice

- Need to look for employers who could eventually pay a wage that would allow clients to live in market-rate housing.
- People don't want to work for minimum wage; work needs to be meaningful and provide a living wage.
- Pay clients who go to training.
- Federal law does not allow for federal funds to be used for stipends in job training (opportunity for change here).

Create supportive workplaces for people exiting homelessness/experiencing trauma

- Employers need to make mental health care more accessible.
- Encourage flexibility among employers: if employees are late, for example, help them understand the way trauma impacts people so they will be more gracious towards their employees.
- Need to support employers. A lot of people want to employ our clients but are fearful about retention.

Require service providers, government contractors, and/or government agencies to hire people with lived experience of homelessness

- Explore possibility of having contracts that require hiring people with lived experience.

- Recognize that having a degree does not necessarily mean you have common sense; consider removing degree requirements for some jobs in homeless services system.
- There aren't any carved out employment incentives for the county to hire people with lived experience.
- Need to have a policy in place requiring that 51% of people employed in the homeless service system should be people with lived experience.

Provide appropriate supports for employers that hire people experiencing homelessness.

- We need “employment whisperers” who can build connections with employers and be called if employers have concerns/ if something goes wrong; hold employers accountable and encourage them to hang on to employees.
- Create an Employer Hotline (similar to Brilliant Corners’ Landlord Hotline, which has been very successful). Hotline would provide rapid resolution to employers’ concerns and promote job retention.

Provide necessary supports/barrier removal for homeless job seekers

- Childcare is essential for families, but is hard to access and is too expensive.
- Need flexible cash assistance to help people with transportation, childcare, etc.
- Make jobs geographically accessible where clients are already accessing services.
- An intermediary is needed in geographic “clusters” (for Employment and Homelessness Taskforce implementation) to provide “glue” in the pilot program (so the program can continue past the one-year commitment).
 - Two coordinators have been hired to do this work, one for each of the two pilot clusters.
- Would be helpful to have a liaison to help people who are completing job programs but are still experiencing homelessness.
- WorkSource centers need to provide more intensive services—sometimes they are only helping clients with résumés.
- California Policy Lab is working on new research on the relationship between homelessness and employment; it will evaluate which subgroups could most benefit from employment services and job training.

How should we increase efforts to help rapid re-housing (RRH) participants to secure and retain employment?

Utilize innovative models that been successful in LA and elsewhere

- Consider using IPS (Individual Placement and Support) model, which attaches employment specialist to a client. This model has been very successful at the VA. Employment specialists should be embedded in treatment teams.
- Utilize “ABC model”- Get any job, get a better job, then get a career.
- Pilot underway at A Bridge Home sites, placing social enterprises on site, in partnership with REDF. Social enterprises can help housing providers and employment providers integrate; they also can provide training for frontline staff.
- Need to work with employers to create “career ladders/lattices” so that entry level jobs can lead to higher positions.
 - Metro has been successful in this; Metro’s contracts require them to hire from the pool they train.

- We have a lot of programs that are working. How can we highlight those best practices and invest more funding in what we are already doing? We don't need to reinvent the wheel.

Provide RRH programs with adequate funding and staffing

- Many RRH programs do not have employment specialists but need them.
- It's a challenge that RRH is geared towards higher acuity clients; RRH has insufficient funding to provide field-based job development.
- We need more employment-related funding. A percentage of RRH money should go towards job certifications, uniforms, etc.
- Need more money going towards low acuity clients so they don't become high acuity.
 - Hard to identify who among low acuity group will resolve and exit into housing and who will become high acuity.

Improve, modify, or enhance RRH service delivery and workforce development system service delivery to meet the needs of homeless job seekers

- Need to change the way we deliver services and the hours we offer them. It is very difficult for clients who are employed to access services since the services are only available during normal business hours; case managers need to be meeting clients in the field wherever they are.
- Need employment/workforce sector to take responsibility; it is not just the responsibility of the homeless services sector to address employment for homeless job seekers.
- Employment programs need to be targeted towards women who have experienced trauma. In some cases, serving this population is more effective with an internal employment specialist, rather than referring out to an external agency.
- Stabilization services can be used to help people retain their jobs; we need to talk to clients about the level of accountability expected from them in starting their jobs.
- Need to acknowledge that RRH is not for everyone; some people might need more skill development than a fixed term housing subsidy will allow. Consider extending the subsidy in this case.
- All RRH models need to include employment services, and these employment services should be intertwined with the program from the beginning.
- Challenge of varying speeds: in RRH, housing is addressed urgently, but employment can take time.
- Need to define the true purpose of RRH and stick to its original purpose; shouldn't some RRH funding go towards prevention? Wasn't that in the original RRH plan?
- We need greater clarity about what various programs do; people need to know that employment is a key part of the homeless service system.
- There is a lot of variation across agencies and what they are able to provide; one model may not work for all agencies in this large county.
- Stipend in RRH for additional training would be helpful.
- Need better coordination between employment services and housing case managers.
- Employment and prevention services need to be connected. People in need of prevention are often under-employed or have been recently laid off.

Appropriately engage employers to “sell” them on hiring people experiencing homelessness and help them create environments where people experiencing homelessness will thrive

- Instead of getting people ready for jobs, we need to get jobs ready for people.
- Need more on-the-job training earlier on (perhaps through subsidies).
 - We could taper off housing subsidy after the first year, then begin an employment subsidy.
- Employer engagement is “salesy” – we need staff who can operate like salespeople to work on employer engagement. May not be the job of a social worker.

Address unique personal and institutional challenges that homeless jobseekers face

- Legal advocacy is needed (especially regarding background checks); People who have served their time have served their time; let’s move on from that.
- Need to acknowledge that it is a challenge for clients to get turned down from jobs; often more discouraging for them than for someone not experiencing homelessness.
- Geographic challenge: People may be living, working, and accessing services in different SPAs.
- There is a difference between “ready” vs. “competitive” in job readiness.
- People who are homeless are competing with people who are not homeless for jobs, which is a major challenge.
- Need to help clients truly specialize in their passions.

Clients need access to career pathways that lead to living wages

- A lot of clients are already working, but simply can’t pay market rent.
 - Need to work towards aligning market rents and wages. Otherwise, we will continue to have people returning to homelessness when their subsidies expire.
- It is very difficult to search for a better job while maintaining a minimum wage job.
- How do we move people up in a job?

In seeking to connect people experiencing homelessness to employment, how should we balance the immediate need for a job with a long-term need for a job that pays a living wage? In other words, where should job quality fit into our efforts to connect people experiencing homelessness to employment? How should we address the reality that people experiencing homelessness are often finding jobs that will not pay enough to enable them to independently pay the rent in non-shared housing?

and

Are we maximizing opportunities to partner with private industries to provide secure, well-paying job for people experiencing homelessness?

- Right now, we don’t use dollars to train/coach people who are already employed but seeking better employment.
- People need general coaching on balancing their job, job training, childcare, etc.
- AJCC’s have resources for trainings, but who is accessing training? Primarily those with lower barriers.
- Need to invest in apprenticeships.

- Adult Schools, Regional Occupational Centers and Programs (ROC/P), and Community Colleges are all resources that could be more effectively tapped. However, may be difficult to navigate these programs.
- A navigation specialist is needed to assist people throughout the employment process.
- We need to “shoot for gold,” not for low-paying jobs where people will get stuck and be treated as “less-than.”
- GEDs are crucial.
- We need to leverage the right services for the right people at the right time (and better utilize social enterprises).
- For County jobs, background checks and drug tests should not be required; major barrier for the people we serve.
- Homeless services organizations need to live their missions – pay staff a living wage.
- Construction industry is an area where housing crisis and job crisis could intersect to our clients’ advantage.
- Using employment subsidies is important for creating a narrative that will be well-received by the public: shows public that our clients can and do work, but housing is simply too expensive.
- While tracking wages and aspiring to higher wages is important, setting wage targets for providers who place clients into jobs will incentivize “creaming.”
- We need to speak to the needs of private employers – what are their business needs and how can we meet them? AJCCs need to have better awareness of opportunities in the job market.
- Need to advocate to change quality of the jobs available to our clients.
- Job quality/participant choice should come first; at the beginning of intakes, we need to ask clients what their goals are.
- Public Workforce system does nothing but stamp and sign for people so they can get GR; they need to be doing more.
- Transitional employment is very successful in leading to better, higher-paying jobs.

Public Comment

- Need to change our perspective. If the goal is self-sufficiency, considering client goals is essential. Need to consider success in employment services by race; there are additional challenges for Black people. 50% of Black people in LA are either underemployed or unemployed. There needs to be frontline staff training in working with Black population.
- Need pilot program in the next 1-2 years for TAY and RRH clients to be able to access education. People need to know that tuition can be free. Transportation and clothing could be made available through this pilot, too.
- Need to invest in the people skills that lead to success—value, dignity, team-playing, etc. Clients need help in turning their challenges into opportunities; we need to truly tap into the potential of our clients.
- Domestic violence and trauma are major barriers because they remove people’s voice; need to “clothe” people from the inside out. Empowerment classes are essential.
- Black, middle-aged women are disproportionately experiencing poverty. Black people with lived experience need to be hired by providers. There is a disconnect between what’s happening in the system vs. on the ground.
- Need to prioritize people who are employed/underemployed in RRH.

- Need to increase CalJOBS access.
- Veterans are often not getting paid enough; need to arrange service provision around times they aren't working.
- This is a great conversation; need to discuss funding streams, which are difficult to access. Can we use Measure H funding specifically for employment services?
- Incorporate mandatory training for frontline workers so they do not re-traumatize people.
- To everyone here, you're doing a great job; need more collective effort of homeless service providers creating employment services. Again, it is important to "get jobs ready for people," rather than "get people ready for jobs."