

## **Workforce Development for Homeless Families: Success Models in Western Massachusetts**

In December, 2011, the Paul and Phyllis Fireman Foundation funded the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness (“Network”) to produce a 2 year action plan regarding workforce development for homeless families. The Network retained the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute to assist with the research and production of this report and, in April, 2012, the Network released its plan: *Getting to Work: An Integrated Approach to Workforce Achievement for Western Massachusetts Homeless Families*.

Since that time, Network partners have been working on the plan’s implementation. As part of this effort, the Network presents here a summary of current workforce development efforts that have the potential for expansion and duplication elsewhere in the region. They include the following:

### **Career Point/Shelter Provider Collaboration**

CareerPoint and HAPHousing joined together in 2011 to create a pilot program that offered 5 workshops over a 3 month period, including orientation to Career Point, self-assessment/job readiness, resume development, and other job training skills. Coordinated by a student intern at CareerPoint (who also happened to be a former employee), 16 single parents participated and after 3 months: 4 individuals had jobs, 1 was in college, 1 was in a GED program and the remaining 10 were coming to Career Point on their own. This effort built an excellent bridge between the employment and housing specialists on the ground level, reflecting the goals expressed in the Network Action Plan.

Currently, CareerPoint has partnered with HAPHousing, New England Farm Workers Council and Center for Human Development on a collaboration that will support a full-time employment specialist for homeless families. Services, slated to begin mid-September, will include assessment, career counseling/case management, a 3 week series of job readiness workshops held 2-3 times a week once a quarter, and job development and placement assistance once individuals have completed the workshop series. The plan also offers structures for on-going communication between the participating organizations and reporting and accountability measures for CareerPoint.

### **The Mom Squad**

Square One, a child care agency based in Springfield, MA that serves families across Hampden County, launched this innovative model that uses the community service component of public assistance benefits to help train mothers for the workforce. Under state regulations, enlisting in community service satisfies state eligibility criteria to receive a child care voucher, enabling a parent to obtain critical work experience. Square One provided community service opportunities at their agency, including reception and filing work, and in so doing provided skills for the workplace environment. These skills translated into confidence-building and other practical knowledge that enabled women to pursue other paid job opportunities. The program has served 15 mothers since its start in February, 2012 and has seen 8 mothers obtain jobs in the paid workforce. The primary barrier to sustaining this program is the need for program coordination. Square One has applied to DHCD for special project funding to continue this program. This model has the capacity for expansion through other agency participation in providing community service job opportunities.

### **Homeless Employment Opportunity Program – Valley Opportunity Council**

The Valley Opportunity Council (VOC), which serves Holyoke and Chicopee, has launched a program that provides employment and child care for a family who is homeless but has work history. Housing search, which takes into account transportation needs, and additional career support services are also provided. In this program's initial efforts, VOC has hired a resident of the Quality Inn as a full-time substitute teacher and enrolled her son in VOC's child care center where she will be working. VOC will also subsidize her education to become fully teacher certified and advance her along the career ladder. Additional support is necessary to expand this program, which VOC is currently seeking from DHCD.

### **Going Places Network**

This model is part of a nationwide partnership between Dress for Success and Walmart, which provides \$15-17,000 grants to run a 12 week program that mentors 16 similarly situated women in their employment training and job search. In our region, referrals to the local program occur via FutureWorks, Springfield's career center. The key components of success are excellent staff and peer mentors. Through additional fundraising efforts, this model could expand to provide more women with effective training and peer mentoring services.

### **The MA Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) Intern Program**

The DTA offers a program that provides an opportunity for a TAFDC recipients to work as an office intern for \$75/week for 30 hours for up to 6 months without any effect on cash assistance or SNAP benefits and with the benefit of a child care voucher. Those individuals who have utilized this program have experienced great success.