**Secure Jobs Initiative Western Massachusetts**

In 2013, The Fireman Foundation funded Western Massachusetts to implement its "Secure Jobs" program. It joined forces with regional housing provider HAPHousing's own collaborative workforce project with its local career centers. Together, the programs provided new employment for 143 families in the program's first year, exceeding program goals.

The statewide success of the Fireman Foundation pilot project inspired state investment in Fiscal Year 2014, growing the program both regionally and across Massachusetts. That joint private/public investment continues this fiscal year, while the program continues to evolve with even greater integration of workforce development efforts directly within the housing agencies.

Following are the outcomes from the first two phases of the program:

**Salary Outcomes at end of Fiscal Year 2015:**

The salary wages range from $8.00/hour to $22.50/hour

Median Wage was $10.46

**Current Salary Outcomes for Fiscal Year 2016:**

Median Wage is $11.50

The goal for FY16 is to obtain positions that pay a living wage, increasing sustainability for participants. The team has been effective in this task and has raised the median wage over $1 per hour in a period of 5 months.

**Current Goals and Outcomes for FY16:**

|  |
| --- |
| **Hampden County**  |
| **Proposed Outcomes** | **Goal**  | **Current** |
| Assessments | 136 | 138 |
| Enrollments | 67 | 65 |
| Placements | 54 | 31 |
| **Berkshire County** |
| **Proposed Outcomes** | **Goal** | **Current**  |
| Enrollments | 25 | 21 |
| Placements | 20 | 8 |

**Secure Jobs Initiative (SJI) Structure Fiscal Year 2016:**

HAP Housing dedicates the following staff:

* 2 internal Employment Specialists
* 1 internal Job Developer
* 1 Director over SJI contract and subcontracts

HAP subcontracts with one stop career center (Career Point) that dedicates the following staff:

* 1 Job Developer at 50% of his time dedicated to SJI
* 1 Career Specialists to facilitate cohorts at 100% of her time dedicated to SJI

HAP partners with all One Stop Career Centers, area shelter providers and area stabilization providers.

**Primary Employment Barriers for SJI Participants: Access to Child Care and the “Cliff Effect”**

***TAFDC Childcare Voucher Challenges:***

* If the participant is not required to work by TAFDC, s/he must first obtain a job to qualify for a child care voucher.
* If TAFDC cash assistance is terminated, the participant has one year to obtain a voucher from the date of termination but must be employed in order to obtain a child care voucher.
* Due to these limitations, participants do not have access to child care for training and job readiness programs, significantly compromising their prospects to obtain gainful employment.

***DHCD Childcare Voucher Challenges:***

* Only available for children ages 5 and under
* Not available for before or after school programs
* Only available for state contracted child care agencies
* Time-limited, typically only for one year
* Extremely limited number of vouchers available.
* Vouchers are income-based and therefore child care costs rise as income raises, undermining the value of employment

***SJI Workarounds for Childcare Voucher Challenges:***

* If the participant is not eligible for a TAFDC voucher until employed, SJI can utilize the DHCD voucher until the participant obtains employment (at which point SJI can facilitate an application for a TAFDC child care voucher).
* In EA shelters/motels, participants will develop DHCD approved babysitting agreements to have other participants watch their children; however, this arrangement can result in program complications and does not ensure reliable childcare.
* SJI can provide bridge funding to cover some child care costs when a participant will have the capacity to pay the costs once employed. This option is not sustainable due to limited program resources.

**The Cliff Effect:** As SJI participants’ income rises upon employment, they are faced with a resulting reduction in their rental subsidy, child care voucher, food stamps, fuel assistance and other state and federal benefits. Participants can become worse off in affording their lives, creating a very real and compelling disincentive to work. Resolutions to this problem require coordinated state and federal intervention.