

Investing in Families

Initial Briefing Paper on Employment Service Needs of Homeless Families –March 2012

Report Methodology

This is a brief report on the employment services provided to families enrolled in Investing in Families (IIF). The report data is preliminary as many families are in the process of receiving services.

The data on this report was drawn from the following sources:

- First Quarter Pre/Post employment ratings of 35 families served by the YWCA; key demographics and ethnicity of families; including information about the demographics, education and employment backgrounds of these families.
- Interviews with YWCA staff shedding light on the point of time (end of February 2012) status of a larger group of families working with the YWCA at that time.
- Interviews with eight (8) families served by the YWCA.

Background

Employment services were identified as a critical need in the Investing in Families Landscape Assessment and Implementation Plan. In response, these services were procured using Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Title I-B funding. The YWCA of Seattle-King-Snohomish Counties was the employment partner selected by Workforce Development Council Snohomish County to provide critical connections to housing as well as employment and wraparound supports to improve the economic and housing stability of IIF families. The services of the YWCA are addressing the Economic Opportunities pillar, and in some cases, the Housing and Tailored Services pillars, of the Snohomish County Investing in Families Plan.

The YWCA staff report that their work with and for families includes coaching, referrals, and administrative work. They note that they utilize strength-based interviewing, administer work/life assessments, and help participants set employment and training goals to bridge skill gaps. They also promote the development of life skills, focusing on personal hygiene and time management, and help participants learn how to interview and use job search tools. YWCA staff refers clients to WorkSource workshops, and enter them into the SKIES system. They also recruit new clients and meet them at other locales, including the three WorkSource Centers, libraries, housing sites and restaurants in Everett, Lynwood, Bothell, Mill Creek, Marysville, Stanwood, Granite Falls, Snohomish and Monroe. In addition, staff enrolls the individuals referred into the appropriate WIA program as determined eligible for service.

YWCA staff reported that the YWCA lacked laptops or access to computers with SKIES at WorkSource Monroe, where staff works one day a week. They noted that this has reduced staff ability to input general data into SKIES in a timely manner. To address this issue laptops have been ordered by the WDC because the YWCA has a policy that only one computer is given to staff. The laptops will be available in the near future.

As of March 1, 2012 the YWCA staff report that they are working with 80 families. They communicate on a quarterly basis with the IIF Navigator about the progress of clients on the self-sufficiency matrix, a scale that defines the current situation of families as either *in crisis*, *vulnerable*, *safe*, *stable*, or *thriving*.

The scale is initially completed by the IIF Navigator for screening and referral purposes and then forwarded to the YWCA. Staff at the YWCA review, and as needed, revise the initial pre-assessment rating and then share updated quarterly post assessments with other IIF partners. This process is intended to support families' progress toward self-sufficiency, provide information about IIF system strengths and gaps, and drive informed discussions about where and how the service system needs to be strengthened.

The IIF process assumes that the assigned YWCA Housing/Employment Navigator is responsible for addressing the diverse need of the families referred to ensure that they have optimal ability to successfully pursue and achieve their education and employment goals.

What Did Investing in Families Learn about the Employment Needs of Families?

- **Some families referred to the YWCA were ready to plan and pursue their career goals.** YWCA staff helped a few families get into GED and college classes and helped some get jobs. They also helped participants get job-related resources such as GED Math Books and work clothes and into workforce training programs in demand industry cluster program such as health care, computer training, A & P Mechanics, and AAS Auto. Family engagement in the YWCA services was voluntary. In an effort to engage families, the YWCA sent out announcements about hiring events, job openings, WOW computer training, Computer Basics, Boeing Application, the CATCH Program, Conviction Careers, and other opportunities. They also issued YWCA bus tickets and gas vouchers and scheduled Working Wardrobe appointments. Some examples of success stories include the following:
 - One woman obtained her business license and enrolled into a local health training program. She felt that her business, focused on a natural health, and her health training were complementary. The YWCA also referred her to the Northwest Women's Business Center, Small Business Accelerator Program, SCORE, and Washington C.A.S.H.
 - One man overcame a felony to interview with Boeing for an assembly mechanic job, and applied for course work that would be a pre-requisite to A&P Mechanics training at Everett Community College.

- Two participants made progress on their GED tests and two are in progress.
- One woman got a full-time job at the Washington State Liquor Board and later entered a job at Boeing.
- **Many families were facing a long path to becoming self-sufficient.** Some participants had very limited educational backgrounds and multiple issues to address (childcare, health, mental health) but still were making some efforts to connect with the YWCA. Their follow-up on referrals and sustained engagement with the YWCA were often inconsistent and erratic and some lost contact with the agency. Though families in time-limited subsidized housing and families who were receiving time limited financial support, such as unemployment compensation, were particularly vulnerable, their actions did not always reflect the imminent nature of these situations. Customized integrated housing/career plans that profile this data in tandem to families might need to be developed to help families see why they need to begin their education and employment efforts now to address forthcoming changes in benefits.

As of March 1, 2012 one of the YWCA Housing/Employment Navigators had a total of 43 clients on her caseload. This number included 13 people who are or were employed during this timeframe and 14 who were in education or training. Some of her clients were in the “parking lot” and were not able to focus on job search due to health issues, pregnancy, childcare responsibilities and lack of response to YWCA invitations to engage. She also had 14 new clients who she had not been able to establish a first and/or second meeting, and reported that 30 percent of her clients had not returned calls or emails or had disconnected numbers.

The other case manager had 37 clients on her caseload including 35 from IIF and 2 other non-IIF individuals (per the terms of the YWCA contract). She had not been able to contact 1 person, and 3 had requested that they cease service because they were moving or for other reasons. One (1) of the persons referred was living in a tent in the woods and did not want to engage in job search. Nine (9) of her clients were in job search only and 4 were in job search and working, and 4 were working only. In addition 3 were in health care training, including 1 who was enrolled in this training prior to enrolling in IIF. Seven were enrolled in WIA and employed, and 1 was employed and not enrolled in WIA. The employment status of one other person was not known.

- **WIA documentation was difficult for YWCA/clients to obtain in a timely manner.** The process to get people enrolled in WIA often hinged on clients finding missing documents. For a variety of reasons, clients often had difficulty securing these resources. YWCA staff may need technical assistance to learn how to enroll clients into basic WorkSource services which does not require extensive documentation and additional technical assistance in how to facilitate acquiring the documentation needed to complete the WIA enrollment process.

- **Some clients were already enrolled in WIA.** As of March 1, 2012, 24 individuals were enrolled in WIA. Six were already working with another WIA Employment Specialist when they were referred to the YWCA. As a result, the YWCA staff needed to work with the assigned Employment Specialist to facilitate a transfer to the YWCA. YWCA staff reported that sometimes the original assigned WIA Employment Specialist was not located in an area nearby because the family had relocated and that high mobility presents an ongoing challenge. While the WorkSource system has protocols for transferring participants between staff in Snohomish County and across Washington State, the YWCA staff may need further training in these protocols. Additionally, due to the high interstate mobility of families, the YWCA staff may need training on how to make facilitated referrals to the national one-stop system portals in other states.

- **Some participants had legal needs they needed to address.** Many different legal issues were confronted by IIF families, underscoring the need for integrating education, employment, and legal services. Some of these examples are presented below:
 - One participant was not able to enroll in WIA because he was not in compliance with the Selective Service Act and one was not authorized to work in the United States, both conditions of program eligibility. Another had been offered a job at a local communications company but had the job offer rescinded after they did a background check. When he appealed their decision he was told to come back after he got the record expunged for an offense he committed in another state. YWCA staff made a referral to Conviction Careers, a WorkSource partner, to address this last issue.

 - Staff was dismayed to learn that one of their clients who had a previous conviction was enrolled in a training program for an industry which requires a clean record before being referred to the YWCA. They were working with this client to consider transferring to a different training program because the client would likely be denied a job upon graduation. Though the client still held out hope that she would find a forgiving employer, the circumstance raised an issue that is now being discussed with education partners.

 - One woman who was working in a low wage retail job wanted to make a career change but had a bench warrant out in another nearby county. She was worried that if she tried to change her job, her legal problems would be revealed and she might lose her daughter. Unless this woman addresses this issue, she will always be fearful of being “caught” and will not be likely to get a different job. Currently, IIF does not have access to criminal lawyers other than through use of the Flex Fund. However, the cost of lawyers is extremely high as was documented in the Legal Life domain report. Therefore, the partners may need to consider ways to access limited pro bono legal help to address criminal issues.

- **Some participants can't engage effectively in job search because they need medications to manage their behavior but cannot afford them.** Four participants needed medication to manage their behavior before they could adequately focus on job search.
- **One family was not eligible for onsite counseling by the YWCA because she was an active domestic violence victim.** One individual ran into another roadblock when she was unable to start counseling at the YWCA because she was engaged in a domestic violence situation and would not be eligible for the YWCA counseling program, because her situation posed a risk to others. Staff identified a need to identify affordable outside counseling services for persons experiencing domestic violence. One other person needed domestic violence assistance, but has not been in recent contact with IIF.
- **Some families may need to be referred for family plan development support in order to engage in job search.** During a cross domain (housing, education, and employment provider discussion) the IIF Navigator noted that because one family had broken up, they would likely benefit from being referred for family plan development. This recommendation resonated with the group and pointed to another key referral area which would likely help stabilize families so they could focus more effectively on job search.
- **Several families have young children and need affordable childcare to engage in education and employment services.** The need for access to childcare is great for five families who realistically cannot work outside of the home. Some of these families could, however, focus on home-based study of GED or other coursework. A couple families reported in interviews with the Evaluator that they might be interested in these types of opportunities.

How Are Families Progressing?

By the end of the first quarter some of the 35 participants (representing 26 families) are making progress in education and employment and a few have experienced setbacks in these areas. They range in age from 18-60, and have extremely diverse education and career backgrounds. Coordinated Entry data revealed that the families were referred to IIF by many different agencies, including Project Self-Sufficiency, the Department of Social and Health Services Sky Valley Community Services Office, the Interfaith Association of Northwest Washington, the CATCH Program at Edmonds Community College, Monroe Public Schools, and the Refugee & Immigrant Forum of Snohomish County.

The education data showed that 13 were making gains in education and 22 remained at the same level, indicating that many were still persisting in their education goals.

| Education Pre-Rating | Post-Rating Level 1 | Post-Rating Level 2 | Post-Rating Level 3 | Post-Rating Level 4 | Post-Rating Level 5 |
|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Pre-Rating 1=0 | | | | | |
| Pre-Rating 2=5 | | 4 | | 1 | |
| Pre-Rating 3=23 | | | 13 | 9 | 1 |
| Pre-Rating 4=5 | | | | 3 | 2 |
| Pre-Rating 5=2 | | | | | 2 |

The employment data showed that 10 participants were making employment gains, and four had experienced setbacks, including loss of jobs. The majority (21) stayed the same. Subsequent reports will explore the reasons influencing family progress in more detail.

| Employment Pre-Rating Levels | Post-Rating Level 1 | Post-Rating Level 2 | Post-Rating Level 3 | Post-Rating Level 4 | Post-Rating Level 5 |
|------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Pre-Rating 1 =25 | 17 | 7 | 1 | | |
| Pre-Rating 2 =9 | 3 | 4 | 1 | | 1 |
| Pre-Rating 3=1 | | 1 | | | |
| Pre-Rating 4 =0 | | | | | |
| Pre-Rating 5 =0 | | | | | |

Recommendations

Continued efforts to facilitate staff knowledge of various options for documenting eligibility may be needed. YWCA efforts to enroll people in WIA have been challenging. Many families lack proper documentation. Continued efforts to facilitate staff knowledge administrative efforts to streamline the WIA enrollment process are also needed as are ongoing discussions between ResCare, the WorkSource Snohomish County Site Operator, and YWCA staff to ensure that YWCA staff fully utilizes WorkSource and WIA resources.

Individual Employment Plans which include key information about career goals, education, and employment strategies may need to be revised to include important information about the participant's housing and length of time in subsidized or other housing as well as any time-limited subsidies. If not, the education and employment efforts may not be occurring at the speed necessary to address imminent changes in family housing and income. Also, if the participant is going to be moving soon, the Housing/Employment Navigator may want to help the participant coordinate education and employment strategies that accommodate these moves. Easy to exchange information about these issues needs to be shared routinely by housing, education, and employment providers and mutually reinforced by staff in all three domains. If a YWCA staff member knows that a family member has lost her/his job and is living in non-subsidized housing, s/he may want to proactively contact the YWCA housing staff to notify them that the family may need to look for another housing option and model proactive problem-solving with the participant. Staff from all three domains may also want to add questions to their follow-up with families that explore whether the family is experiencing problems that will influence any or all domains.

Many different legal issues were confronted by IIF families, underscoring the need for integrating education, employment, and legal services. More extensive referrals to legal services and identification of areas where legal services are unable to help families are needed. The education and employment success of many families is contingent upon these services being available.

Transportation barriers are limiting some families' access to services. Some families' access to jobs was limited by loss of driver's licenses, tickets, or distance from public transit. These issues will need to be considered when families move or make next step training or employment decisions. Resources to help participants' access affordable, low interest cars, "earn back" licenses, and stop penalties on tickets from accruing are needed.

Some individuals may need supportive employment fidelity model services supports that include work experience in a fidelity model framework, accommodations, and specialized job placements. Feedback from families and staff suggest that providing work experience in a supportive employment fidelity model framework that takes into consideration the needs of families might be needed and could include links to such resources as legal and benefit advocacy services, the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, and other services.

Social enterprise participation might be an effective option for some participants. Some expressed an interest in outdoor work and would likely do well in grounds keeping or carpentry jobs if they could launch their career pathways in a social enterprise. In interviews with the Evaluator, two people who did not engage in YWCA workforce development services voiced an interest in these types of fields.

Structured weekly meetings to reflect on the story behind the domain ratings is needed to ensure that all partners discuss ways that they can better work together to mutually support families. In addition, the YWCA Employment staff may want to meet with the Snohomish County Navigator and Catholic Community Services Housing Resource Specialist on a quarterly basis to specifically discuss the education and employment ratings to see if they need to make any midcourse changes in how they support families and work as a team to serve participants. The above meetings also serve as a productive venue for identifying participants who are hard to reach in case one of the partners is aware of how to contact them. The meetings also provide staff with an opportunity to discuss how they use and can better align IIF flex funds and YWCA support service funds.