

Welfare-to-Work Programs Create Options for Battered Women

This issue explores how welfare-to-work programs can help battered women. It is important that the welfare-to-work system responds appropriately to women who face barriers to employment due to violence in their lives. Domestic violence programs can access welfare-to-work funding and collaborate with welfare-to-work programs to assist battered women.

The federal welfare-to-work program was formed as part of the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, and its purpose is to target specialized services to welfare recipients deemed "hard to employ." It is administered by the U.S. Department of Labor and is designed to complement the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) program. Every state is eligible to receive welfare-to-work funds, as long as it meets matching requirements and produces a state plan. Up to 15% of these funds can be set aside for "special projects," which can include services to victims of domestic violence. In addition, non-profit community-based organizations and other private entities are eligible to apply to the Department of Labor to develop welfare-to-work programs.

This issue highlights three community-based programs that are responding to welfare-to-work issues, and provides a list of Internet resources designed to increase understanding of this complex system.

Kentucky Pilot Project

Kentucky's Welfare-to-Work Formula Grant State Plan identifies domestic violence, substance abuse, and mental health issues as barriers to employment. The state chose to use its 15% set-aside funds to create five pilot projects that address the needs of welfare recipients for whom domestic violence and substance abuse create barriers to work. Building strong community networks among domestic violence programs, substance abuse treatment facilities, mental health centers, and welfare offices is a key component of the project. Of the five projects funded across the state, three are within substance abuse programs and two within domestic violence programs, one of which had already integrated services for women with domestic violence and substance abuse problems.

The grant supported 30 new staff to conduct outreach, create community collaborations, and work as counselor advocates. While program components are varied across the five projects, the model for service delivery includes an intake screening to determine eligibility for services, identifying the client's immediate and long-term needs, establishing client goals and objectives, referrals to appropriate service providers, and ongoing assistance in

meeting client-identified goals. At each site, counselor advocates help to locate safe and affordable housing, and provide pre- and post-employment counseling and case management services, including job search and job preparedness classes. Additionally, each site offers educational outreach to increase understanding of the needs of welfare recipients who are victims of domestic violence.

This project has encouraged the development and maintenance of community collaborations, including ongoing interagency meetings, cross training and other educational programs, and on-site placement of staff (for example, a domestic violence advocate works at the substance abuse treatment facility). This collaboration has augmented each agency's knowledge about available community resources as well as the barriers battered women face.

While Kentucky's participation in the welfare-to-work program will end June 30, 2001, the state has chosen to continue the services of the five projects using 100% TANF funds. For more information, please contact Barbara Ramlow, University of Kentucky Women's Institute, (859) 257-6441.

PATHWAYS, Houston Texas

The Montgomery County Women's Shelter in Texas collaborates with a welfare-to-work program at the North Harris Montgomery Community College. PATHWAYS, a project of the college funded through a competitive application to the Department of Labor, was developed to assist welfare recipients in overcoming barriers to employment.

PATHWAYS case managers reach out to women at the shelter, provide an orientation to their program at shelter meetings, and offer job-readiness courses – including resume writing and job interviewing. Additionally, shelter staff present information about domestic violence and the center's services during PATHWAYS courses, and refer battered women to the program. The director of the women's shelter also participates on the advisory committee.

The PATHWAYS program offers many educational options, including GED, ESL, and Driver's Education classes; fast-track job training in the fields of customer service, nursing assistance, cabling, and administrative assistance; as well as life skills, communication, and cultural diversity training. Mobile laptop labs introduce participants to computers. Case managers help those interested in completing a 2-year degree program apply for financial aid. Additionally, the Women's Shelter has an educational scholarship program, and this year will give out \$13,000 (11 scholarships) for books, tuition, child care and transportation costs. The shelter also provides women with clothing for job interviews and professional work environments.

Case managers working with PATHWAYS participants have a variety of supportive service funds at their disposal to help remove barriers to work. For example, funds are available for women at the domestic violence shelter to help establish a permanent household, including money for security and utility deposits, transportation and childcare. For more information about PATHWAYS, contact Tonya Willingham at 936-273-7088. Contact Nancy Harrington for more information about Montgomery County Women's Shelter at 281-292-4155, ext. 229.

The Diffendofer School, Maine

In 1998, Caring Unlimited, a domestic violence program in Maine, received a combination of federal and state funding to develop a transitional housing program for battered women. In an effort to develop meaningful economic development services, program staff designed a plan with four areas of concentration. The first provided a forum for women to learn about existing community resources and to make connections with organizations doing economic justice and anti-poverty work.

As an outgrowth of this work, Caring Unlimited created an experiential learning course that is now offered to women in its transitional services program. Caring Unlimited advocated with the welfare system so that participation in the course meets TANF work requirements. The first course participants named the class "The Diffendofer School" after the Dr. Seuss book which celebrates learning to think and having fun while doing it. It is an alternative to the traditional classroom, where many women have had negative experiences. The class meets twice a week for eight weeks for a total of 96 hours. Course content includes an outdoor adventure challenge "ropes" course, journal making, and budgeting by sharing meals and discussing the costs. Eight women attended the first course offering, and all are now either enrolled in college or employed full-time.

In seeking funding to support future course offerings, the class was named "The Bridge to Economic Self-Determination." Caring Unlimited recently received a grant from the Maine Women's Fund and the Maine Community Foundation to offer more courses and expand into other counties. For more information, contact Janie Soucy Waterhouse at (207) 490-3227, ext. 112.

Internet resources

- ✓ The **U.S. Department of Labor** welfare-to-work page at: <http://wtw.doleta.gov>.
- ✓ The **Family Violence Prevention Fund** welfare-to-work collaborative project of the California Institute for Mental Health at: <http://www.cimh.org/project.html>.
- ✓ The **Project for Research on Welfare, Work, and Domestic Violence** at: <http://www.ssw.umich.edu/trapped>.
- ✓ The **Welfare Information Network** at: <http://www.welfareinfo.org>.

Let us know what you think of this newsletter. Any suggestions on topic to cover? Any leads on interesting economic justice work within the battered women's movement? Call or send an e-mail to: Amy Corr
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