

Homelessness and Employment: Milwaukee Challenges

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Introduction

This research was commissioned by Hope House of Milwaukee to assist in effort to improve the employment prospects for homeless individuals and families in the Milwaukee area. The research has three components:

- 1) Homeless Worker Employment Profile and Insights;
- 2) Employment System Stakeholders' Views; and
- 3) Best Practices Review.

Homeless Worker Employment Profile and Insights provides data from the 2007 Point in Time Survey conducted by the Milwaukee Continuum of Care as well as input directly from homeless people through focus groups conducted at Guest House of Milwaukee and Hope House of Milwaukee.

Employment System Stakeholders' Views presents information from 'inside the system' relative to service access, employment barriers, and strategies for change. Included in the stakeholders views are representatives of the State of Wisconsin, Milwaukee Area Technical College, Milwaukee Area Workforce Investment Board, a W-2 (TANF) operator, and several employment and homeless services providers.

The *Best Practices Review* presents summaries of two key research articles – one which profiles the effectiveness of various federal employment resources relative to homeless employment and one which looks at a reorientation of employment services in the homeless services context to emphasize a “work first” approach.

The research suggests that Milwaukee faces many challenges but has the tools and resources necessary to create new employment solutions for homeless people. The opportunity afforded by current efforts to create a 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness is a unique chance to forge the cross-system, communitywide collaboration necessary for innovation and long term impact.

Homeless Workers Employment Profile and Insights

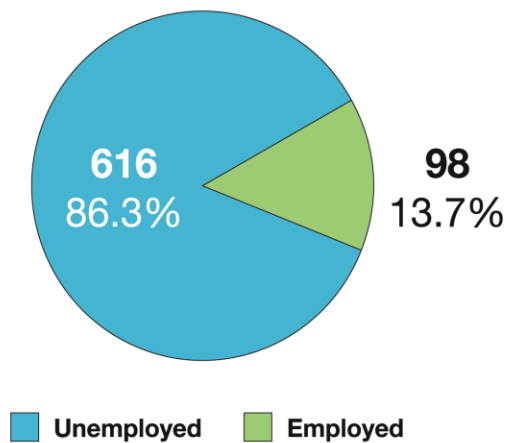
Homeless Employment Rate

According to the 2007 Milwaukee Continuum of Care Point in Time Survey, 14% of homeless people had employment income.¹ Chronically homeless people were less likely (10%) to have employment income than non-chronically homeless people (16%).²

The Point in Time Survey asked homeless individuals: “Are you or is anyone in your family receiving any Benefits from a job?”

As shown in Figure 1, nearly nine out of ten respondents (86%) reported that neither they nor someone in their family were receiving any benefits from a job (unemployed). Only about one in seven (14%) reported that either they or someone in their family were receiving benefits from a job (employed).

Figure 1: Homeless Employment Status



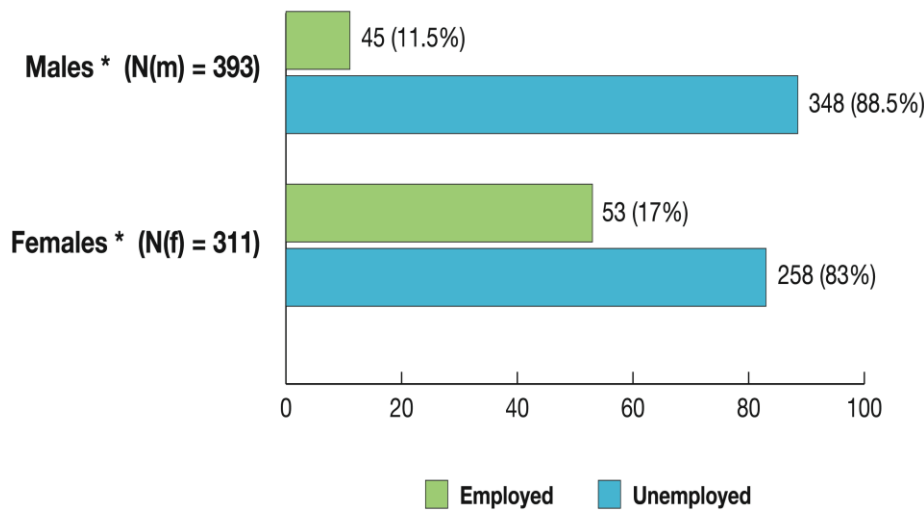
Employment Status and Gender

There are *significant differences between males and females* relative to employment status. The results demonstrate that males are much less likely than females to report receiving any benefits from employment. The employment rate for men who were interviewed in the Point in Time Homeless Survey was 11.5%; for women the rate was 17.0%. In other words, the employment rate for women was nearly 50 percent greater than that for men. It is important to note that the employment difference between males and females was statistically significant.

¹ Employment income refers to pay received as a result of working any number of hours (full time, part time, or episodically). In the case of the Point in Time Survey, respondents were asked if they were *currently receiving* employment income.

² “Homelessness in Milwaukee: Results of the January 25, 2007, Point in Time Survey of Milwaukee’s Homeless Citizens, Milwaukee Continuum of Care, July 2008. Note: A chronically homeless person is an individual with a disabling condition, with no dependent children, who has been homeless for a year or four or more times in the past three years.

Figure 2: Employment Status by Gender



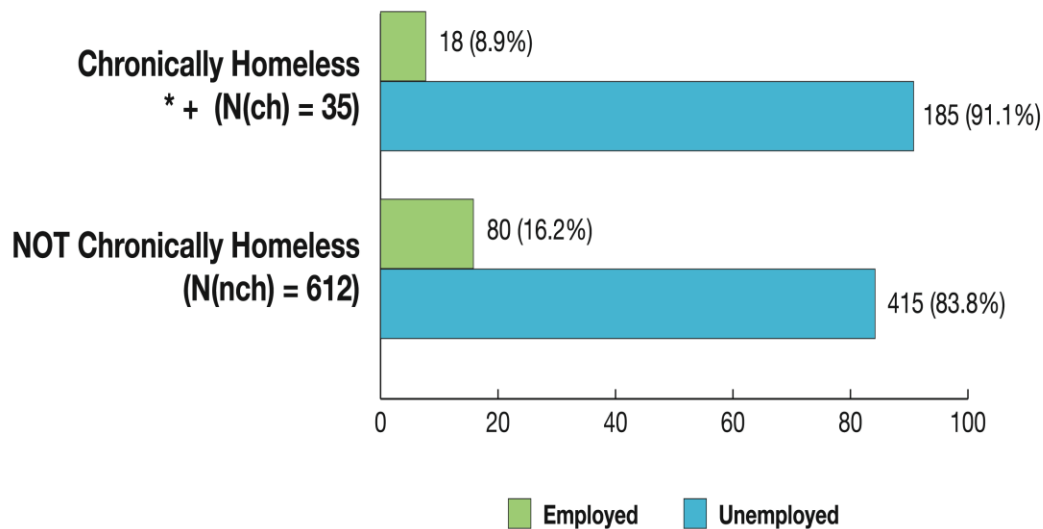
* Statistically significant difference (p<.05)

There are several possible explanations for the higher employment rate among homeless women. One is that a higher proportion of men are single adults who are more likely to be chronically homeless. In fact, 72.4% of the chronically homeless were male, compared to 47.3% of the non-chronically homeless population. As data presented later in this report indicates, chronically homeless individuals are less likely to be employed than non-chronically homeless. Also, there is growing evidence nationwide that homeless people with children (more often women) are more likely to be employed and to have better employment histories. This is also borne out by the local survey data described later in this report.

Employment Status and Chronic Homelessness

Individuals who were identified as being *chronically homeless* were much less likely than non-chronically homeless to have received employment income (be employed). The term chronically homeless refers to a classification developed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to describe a group of single adults, usually men, whose homelessness is lengthy or very frequent and who appear to use a disproportionate share of homeless services and resources. To meet the definition of chronic homelessness, an individual must be a single adult with a disabling condition, e.g. mental illness, alcohol or other drug abuse, physical/medical condition, who has been continuously homeless for one year, i.e. living on the street, in shelter, or in places not meant for human habitation, or has had four or more episodes of homelessness in the past three years.

Figure 3: Employment Status by Severity of Homelessness (Chronic vs. Non-Chronic)

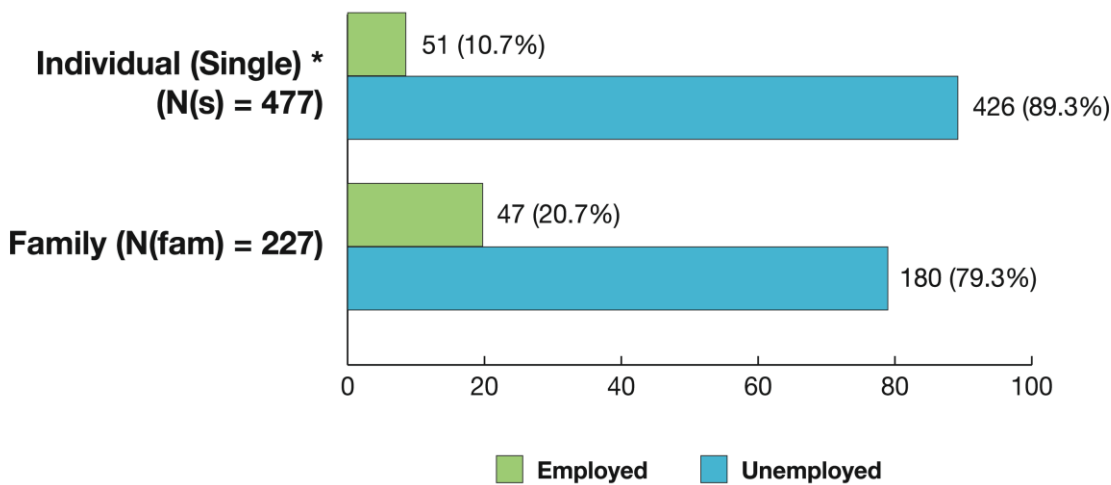


* Statistically significant difference (p<.05)
+ Cell size less than 5 – statistically less stable.

Employment Status and Children

Homeless people with children were twice as likely to be employed as those without children. The Point in Time Homeless Survey reported that of the 161 homeless people with children, 46 or 22.2% had employment income. This compares to 52 or 10.7% of the 433 homeless people without children. This difference is statistically significant at the p<.05 level.

The differences may be attributable to a variety of factors, including a higher incidence of long-term homelessness and/or repeated episodes of homelessness among childless adults as well as higher levels of disabilities, possibly lower levels of educational attainment, and poorer work histories.

Figure 4: **Employment Status by Family Composition**

* Statistically significant difference ($p < .05$)

Employment Status and Disabilities

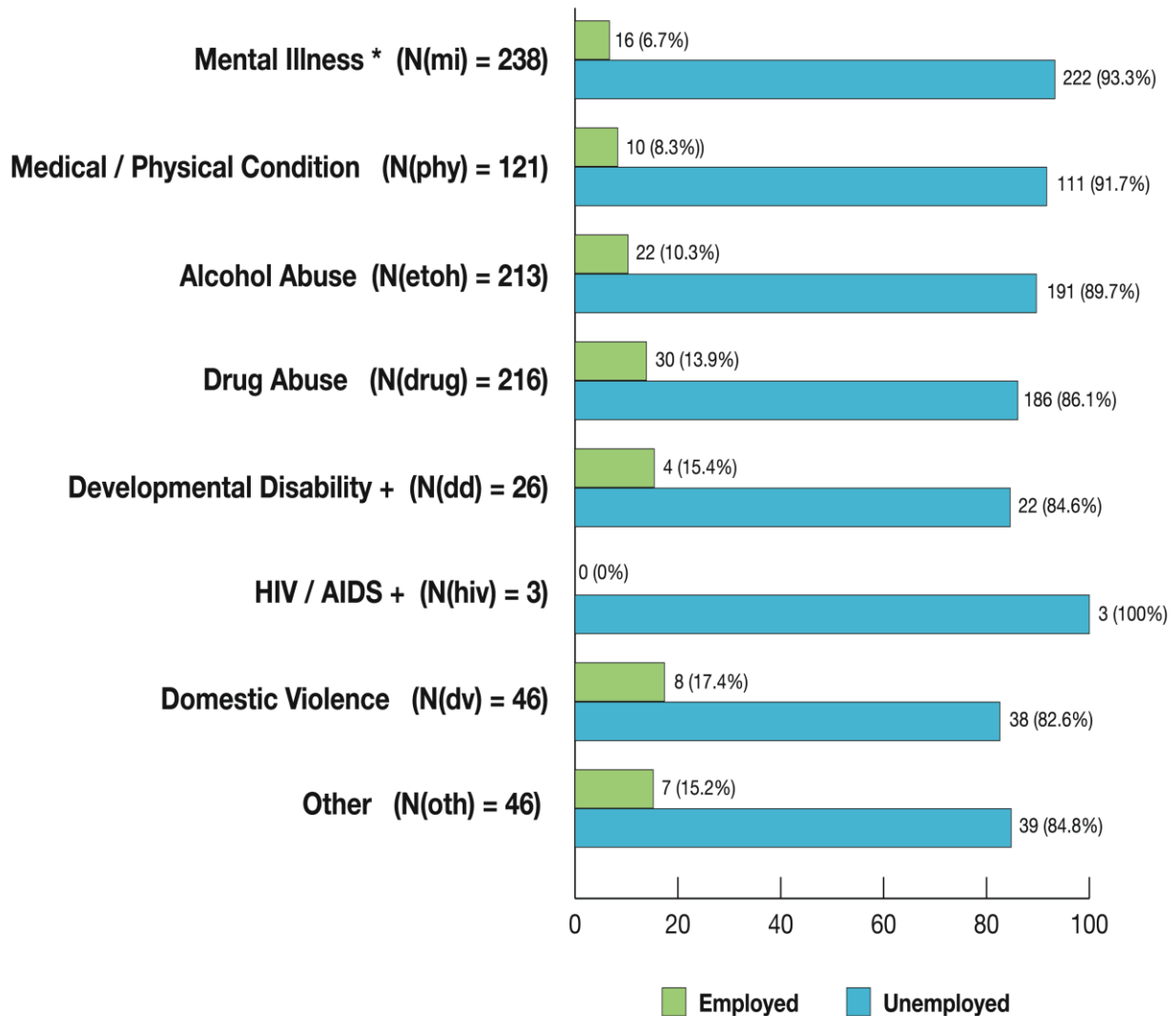
As part of the 2007 Point in Time Survey, homeless people were asked whether they had or had been told that they had any disabling condition or if they were victims of domestic violence. The conditions included mental illness, medical/physical condition, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, developmental disability, HIV/AIDS, domestic violence, or other. A total of 508 of 714 homeless respondents or 71.3% reported having one or more disabling conditions. Conversely, 205 or 28.7% reported having NO disabling conditions.

A comparison of the employment rates of disabled and non-disabled people indicated that persons reporting no disabilities were much more likely to be employed. However, the employment rates for both groups were very low. Disabled respondents reported employment income at the rate of 12.0% or roughly one out of eight. Non-disabled respondents reported a higher employment rate of 18.0%, approaching one out of five. The difference between the two groups was significant at the $p < .05$ level.

Of all of the disabling conditions, it appears that mental illness, medical/physical condition, and alcohol abuse have the greatest negative impact on employment status. Individuals reporting these disabling conditions were much less likely to report employment income. In the case of individuals reporting mental illness, the employment rate was less than half the rate of the homeless population at large (6.7% compared to 13.7%). This difference was significant at the $p < .05$ level. Individuals reporting medical/physical conditions or alcohol abuse also showed lower rates of employment (8.3% and 10.3% respectively), these findings were not statistically significant.

Other disabling conditions seemed to have little impact on employment status. Individuals reporting drug abuse, developmental disabilities, HIV/AIDS, domestic violence and other all reported slightly higher rates of employment than the overall homeless population.

Figure 5: **Employment Status by Disabilities**



* Statistically significant difference (p<.05)

+ Cell size less than 5 – statistically less stable.

Additional insight into the prevalence of employment among the homeless population is provided by the Annual Performance Reports (APR) filed by HUD-supported transitional and permanent housing projects which, in 2008, indicated that 29% of persons exiting such projects reported employment income.³ This is substantially higher than the 14% rate indicated by the Point in Time; the discrepancy may be due to the fact that the HUD reports include only those people who have been assisted by transitional or permanent housing projects while the Point in Time includes this group as well as unsheltered people.

Summing up: Homeless Employment/Unemployment

- ≈ Most homeless people are not receiving income from a job although, as the focus group input suggests, many may be earning money from various forms of self-employment which they don't consider or refer to as a "job".
- ≈ Homeless women are significantly more likely than homeless males to be employed.
- ≈ Chronically homeless persons were significantly less likely than non-chronically homeless persons to be employed.
- ≈ Homeless persons with mental illness were significantly less likely to be employed than those without mental illness.
- ≈ Homeless people with medical/physical conditions and those with alcohol abuse issues were somewhat less likely to be employed than those without those problems but the differences were not statistically significant.
- ≈ Homeless people reporting drug abuse problems were as likely to be employed as the homeless population at large.
- ≈ Supportive housing programs, i.e. HUD-supported transitional and permanent housing projects, appear to have a positive impact on homeless unemployment.

³ Data compiled from 2007/2008 Annual Performance Reports submitted to HUD by programs with federal Supportive Housing Program funds.

Homeless Workers' Insights

Three focus groups were conducted as part of this research project. Two groups were conducted at Guest House of Milwaukee and included single adult men and one group was conducted at Hope House of Milwaukee and included both single adults (male and female) and adults with families. Both groups were asked the same set of questions, all designed to gauge how homeless workers viewed the challenge of finding and keeping jobs.

Focus group questions:

1. Where are homeless people finding work and what kinds of places do you think could hire more homeless people?
2. What are some of the skills and abilities that homeless people have that help them qualify for employment?
3. What concerns do you think employers have when they hire the homeless?
4. What problems do the homeless face when looking for a job?
5. When a homeless person gets a job, what are the unique issues they have to deal with to be able to stay on the job and keep the job?
6. What kind of support should be in place to help homeless employees stay on the job and keep a job?
7. What do you think an employment coalition of agencies and shelter could do to help homeless people find and keep jobs?
8. From what you've discussed this evening, what are some of the key issues that you see as important to improving employability for the homeless?

The focus group data was analyzed using individual responses as the level of analysis, i.e. categorizing responses by type in order to assess their comparative importance.

Where are homeless people working?

Low-skilled service jobs were most frequently identified as the kind of places where homeless people were either currently working or most likely to get jobs; 52% of responses identified low-skilled jobs such as cooking, dishwashing, general labor, outdoor maintenance, grocery store and hotel work. A smaller percentage of responses (24%) included *skilled trades* including electrical work, welding and construction. Self-employment that served as a source of quick cash were mentioned 14% of the time, while working events or recreational venues represented 10% of the responses.

Table 4: Where are homeless people working?

Low-skilled service jobs (52% of responses)	Skilled trades (24%)	Self-employment (14%)	Events/recreation (10%)
Cooking Dishwashing General labor Grocery stores Downtown hotels Restaurants Sanitation Security Newspaper delivery	Electrical work Welding Metal shops Construction	Cash jobs Scrapping	Casinos Carnivals

What skills do homeless people offer?

This question sought insight into what homeless workers bring to the table in terms of skills and experience that would be useful or relevant to employers. Immediately, the most striking difference in responses to this question compared to the prior question has to do with the significantly greater focus on marketable skills possessed by respondents – skills far exceeding the requirements for the low-skilled jobs they indicated as their most promising job prospects.

Following are examples of skills mentioned by homeless workers in the focus groups: heavy equipment operation, concrete finishing, bricklaying, plumbing, assembly, roofing, warehousing, carpentry, rough end finishing, landscaping, painting, dry walling, die casting, foundry work, machine operation, truck driving, bartending, and auto repair. Critical takeaway message from this question: homeless workers have a range of work experiences and skills. Whether their skills are current or meet employer expectations is another question; however, the focus group discussions clearly indicate that many have had on the job experience in many skilled work settings.

What are employers' concerns about hiring the homeless?

Here is where the disconnection between homeless workers and employers starts to become clear. Focus group participants tended to see a wide range of employer concerns, all of which acted to limit their willingness to consider hiring homeless workers.

Looking at the specific responses is very informative. Think of the responses in terms of what homeless workers believe employers think about them.

<i>Economic issues:</i>	<i>No transportation or stable housing</i>
<i>Physical/mental issues:</i>	<i>Hygiene issues, mental illness, physical challenges, deformities, and poor health</i>
<i>Education/communication:</i>	<i>Poor education, poor communication skills, low educational level</i>
<i>Bias:</i>	<i>Racial bias, sexual harassment, handicapped, “they look at you like you’re no good”</i>
<i>Poor work habits:</i>	<i>Bad work history, poor attendance, vanity, lack of experience, laziness, slacking on the job, trustworthiness, lack of social skills, can’t make decisions, resistant, can’t do a quality job, not dependable, incompetent</i>
<i>Addictions/violence:</i>	<i>Drug addiction, violence, domestic violence, criminal record, theft, drug dealing, drunkenness</i>

What problems do homeless workers face when they are *looking for work*?

Focus group participants looking for work indicated that they experience fear and apprehension as part of the job search process. The three major problems that received the most attention in the discussion were experiences around being ill-prepared or equipped to work, fear of a variety of possible negative encounters that could threaten job security, and actually handling the physical and mental challenges of the job. It seems that not feeling prepared for work creates a cascading set of problems that increases the difficulty of adjusting to the work environment. Here are the focus group responses to the question: What problems do the homeless face when looking for a job?

Feeling ill-prepared	Physical/mental challenges	Fear of bias or embarrassing encounters	Balancing shelter life and work
No money	Physical challenges	Employer stigmas	Lack of sleep that affects work
No clothes or wardrobe	Mental challenges	Prejudice	Conflict with shelter programs and schedules
No phone access	Poor nutrition	Lack of diplomacy	
No drivers license	Mental illness	Race barriers	
No address	Addictions	Gender issues	
No insurance		Age issues	
No transportation		Criminal background	
Lack of education		Language speaking difficulty	
Lack of tool/equipment		Court appointment interference	
Lack of experience		Poor credit check	
No place to wash clothes			
No places to get phone messages			
No place to call out or receive messages			
No bath/shower facilities			

ties No home address No residence Getting started early Getting kids to day care Official identification Social security number			
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What problems do homeless workers face *on the job*?

The focus groups' answers to this question and the previous question paint a very scary picture of how homeless workers perceive the job market. Bottom line: getting a job is difficult but dealing with a job on a day to day basis and keeping it over the long term was seen as fraught with impediments and challenges. Since the question was asked in the negative, i.e. *what problems do homeless workers face*, rather than a more balanced assessment of the pluses and minuses of most work environments, we got what we asked for – essentially very negative perceptions of the workplace. Still, the responses are revealing. For many homeless workers (at least those in our focus groups), getting and keeping a job is extremely intimidating.

Their focus group responses tell the story best.

Problems pertaining to work environment: *racism, cultural differences, recovering person in user environment, out of date or poor tools, repetition and monotony, politics from work power plays, getting paid as little as possible, distance for the work location, work location in a bad neighborhood, forced to make poor quality products, age discrimination, bad safety practices at work site, bad management, employee harassment, negative employees, conversation skills, lack of cooperation, judgmental environment*

Work requirements, performance and preparation: *Transportation, not eating before work, not making the transition from short-term to long-term employment, rushing to take a job that doesn't fit or not qualified for and saying nothing about it, staying focused on the task, proving yourself*

Personal issues: *Mental illness, criminality, family problems, health condition, different beliefs, job documentation to shelter and employers, third-party interference, don't know how to handle money, not taking time for self-development, no moral support, no support from friends, fighting self-sabotage, emergence of bad habits, not enough rest*

Schedule conflicts and other: *Shelter schedule conflicts, mandated shelter programs conflict with the job, medication regulation conflicts, inflexibility of the shelter schedule based on job shifts, access to phone and computer, not getting messages*

What supports should be in place?

Practical support was the most frequently identified need. This category included such things as providing bus tickets, carpooling opportunities, wardrobe help, internet access, information about shelter support capabilities and more involvement directly from employment agencies. Assistance pertaining to **workers' individual needs and issues** was the next most frequently cited. This category included help with developing coping skills, problem-solving, social skills, anger management, listening skills, how to follow orders on the job, how to manage time and stay focused, how to handle difficult situations, spiritual support, family support, drug treatment. The last area of emphasis was **work cultural training and skills**; this included how to interview, job etiquette, how to request medical assistance on the job, how to use continuing education and skills to create leverage on the job, educating employers on the homeless situation, positive office politics, monitoring the work from start to finish.

Here the primary theme is that workers saw a need for survival skills that would help them stay on the job. While they clearly see the workplace as difficult and inhospitable, they also felt that homeless workers needed to build up their personal capacity to withstand and manage workplace challenges. *Overwhelming* is the word that comes to mind when listening to the focus group participants talk about working and jobs. Homeless workers' deep concerns about the workplace have much less to do with performing the actual jobs than with having the personal strength and ability to manage the work environment and interpersonal relationships.

Summing up: Homeless Workers' Insights

- ≈ Homeless workers have a fair amount of fear of the workplace. The fear is manifest when they talk about job-seeking and with reference to keeping a job.
- ≈ Their ability to handle or manage their place in the work environment was of paramount concern.
- ≈ They expressed much less concern about their ability to actually perform the work involved in a job.

Employment System Stakeholders' Views

Like every major urban area, Milwaukee has a substantial employment and training infrastructure. Significant resources are committed to addressing issues of workforce development, primarily focusing on reducing unemployment and improving the quality of the local labor force to support future economic development. How well this infrastructure supports the employment of homeless and formerly homeless individuals was the topic of a series of intensive interviews conducted with nine employment system stakeholders. Included in this group were representatives of public and private entities who are generally recognized as leaders in the development and implementation of employment and training programs in the Milwaukee community.

Stakeholder interview questions:

1. Aside from personal challenges such as educational background, work history, substance abuse and mental health issues, what do you perceive as the major systems barriers that impede employment opportunity for homeless individuals?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of education and training programs available in Milwaukee?
3. Are these programs accessible to the homeless population? Why or why not?
4. Are shelter and transitional staff adequately connected to employment and training programs? Conversely, are various employment and training programs responsive to the homeless population and case management efforts? If not, what needs to be done to assure stronger linkages at this point of coordination?
5. In terms of employers, is there resistance to hiring homeless individuals? Are there adequate incentives for employers? What challenges exist related to retention?
6. Within the current system, how can employment and training programs and community-based resources be fully utilized to assure stable and long term employment? In other words, what are the major strengths within the system and how can they be maximized?
7. What regulatory or legislative barriers exist? What can be done to overcome and address those barriers?
8. Are various stakeholders within the system working together adequately? Where are the linkages the strongest and the weakest?
9. If Milwaukee had unlimited resources and political will, what areas of programming, policies or organizational capacity would you recommend to assure access to training and ultimately stable employment for the homeless population in Milwaukee. What needs to be done to make the system more responsive?

An *analysis of stakeholder responses* for each question is presented below. The analysis addresses six critical areas:

- Major systems barriers that impede employment opportunity for homeless individuals
- Strengths and weakness of the education and employment system
- Accessibility to services for homeless individuals and cross-agency/system collaboration
- Employer attitudes toward homeless
- Regulation/legislative barriers to improving services for homeless people
- Strategies to improve employment opportunities for homeless people

Major systems barriers that impede employment opportunity for homeless individuals:

- **Lack of an integrated employment and training system:** The *lack of an integrated employment and training system* was the most frequently cited barrier to opportunity for homeless people. This issue played out most frequently around the issue of the Job Centers which were initially envisioned as one-stop shops for job seekers of all types where employment and training resources from various sources could be easily accessed. The Job Center system includes three comprehensive Job Centers (Northeast Comprehensive Job Center – YWCA of Greater Milwaukee, Job Center Northwest – Maximus, and Job Center South – UMOS) along with the specialty centers (the HIRE Center, REACH Youth Center/Milwaukee Career Center, and the Mature Workers Resource Center).

Stakeholders described the Job Centers as falling short of the vision of integrated service delivery, particularly in terms of easing access to WIA (Workforce Investment Act) supported training programs. Navigators stationed at each Job Center, with the express purpose of facilitating job seekers' access to appropriate resources, were described as hard to access. As one stakeholder described, *"Unemployment individuals repeatedly state that they have a difficult time finding and getting services from the Navigators located at the Job Centers. The Job Centers are trying to meet the needs of everyone when in fact they should be focusing their services on high risk populations."* At the same time, the lack of an integrated system was seen as a detriment to employers as well. One stakeholder noted, *"There is no integrated system that provides an inventory of job seekers that use the Job Center, the Learning Labs, and other employment resources and programs available at community-based agencies. This capacity would help employers' access to this pool of individuals especially if it was organized around employment requirements, skills and abilities."*

A related theme regarding the lack of an integrated employment system is the *level of complexity represented by different eligibility requirements* and performance measures for each program. Rather than being a seamless system for job seekers – along the lines of a "no wrong door" philosophy, the Job Centers and in fact the entire employment and training infrastructure was described as having multiple, extensive, and often costly eligibility requirements. Because the employment and training infrastructure has been difficult to access and navigate, several homeless providers have embarked on developing their own

employment efforts. However, because these entities are generally much more skilled and experienced in other, more traditional homeless services such as finding permanent housing and coordinating substance abuse and mental health treatment, their employment efforts are sometimes less effective. One stakeholder commented, *“Systems support what they are familiar with.”*

Access to FSET (Food Stamp Employment Training) has narrowed due to Milwaukee County’s increasing difficulties in efficiently processing Food Stamp applications. Additionally, FSET which was once a mandatory element of Food Stamp participation was recently made voluntary, further decreasing the number of people using this employment resource.

- **Legal Issues:** Documentation required for participation in WIA programs can be burdensome and present significant costs:
 - Driver’s License – Many employers require a valid driver’s license for employment; not having a DL is sometimes interpreted as the sign of untrustworthiness and becomes one more reason to hire. If an individual has had his/her DL revoked, it is usually for nonpayment of fines; therefore reinstatement requires a plan to pay the fines either with cash or community services and can take 4 to 9 months.
 - Criminal Background – Wisconsin’s online C-CAP (Consolidated Court Automation Program) system has facilitated access to criminal records checks and because City of Milwaukee Municipal Court records are also accessed via C-CAP this means that employers have access to nuisance violations, misdemeanors and disorderly conduct charges that may or may not directly relate to an individual’s suitability for employment.
 - Child Support Enforcement – Child support arrearages and the prospect of garnishment of wages can be disincentives to work in the primary labor market. While child support issues generally don’t affect an individual’s ability to get hired, they can act as a deterrent to regular employment if job seekers think they will be able to keep more of what they earn in the secondary labor market or underground economy. As arrearages accumulate, people tend to become overwhelmed, opting to work for cash (underground economy) or not at all. A related problem of tax arrearages also affects a portion of homeless workers as many homeless individuals have either not filed taxes or owe significant back taxes.
 - Bonding – Some positions require bonding; the process of obtaining bonding involves background checks related to criminal and financial histories.
 - Selective Service Requirement – In order to receive WIA (Workforce Investment Act) services, individuals must have registered for the Selective Services when they were 18-26 years old. If they seek WIA services at the age of 26+ and are unregistered, they must obtain a waiver.

- **Logistical Problems:** Chief among these is *transportation*. The inability to get to early 1st shift and 3rd shift jobs due to buses not running at those hours of the day; lack of public transportation to suburban locations where many new jobs are located; lack of a vehicle and/or driver's license all contribute to homeless workers' vastly reduced capacity to get where they need to be. One stakeholder noted, *"Transportation is a huge barrier. For example, bus service to New Berlin where some entry level jobs existed was discontinued about 6 months ago. Patrick Cudahy has good jobs but 1st shift starts at 4:30 a.m. and there is no bus service to that location at that time of day. Many unemployed and homeless individuals do not have a driver's license or insurance. Some of them drive anyway and when they get caught, they get involved in the criminal justice system which may further limit their ability to secure employment. Shuttle services are needed, especially for suburban job opportunities."* Communication issues are also critical, specifically in terms of having phone, email, and regular mail access. Being able to contact employers and to receive employer emails, message, and phone calls in a dependable way are key elements of successful job-seeking.
- **Gaps in Basic Skills:** Training programs are generally targeted to people with a minimum 8th grade reading and math competency. While a significant proportion of homeless individuals are high school graduates, they may still lack essential academic skills. Longer term, pre-employment services that improve basic skills and prepare workers for more structured training programs are lacking. Computer literacy is a major problem. Access to computers and basic computer skills, including using the internet for job search are challenges.

One stakeholder observed, *"Clients are deficient related to required skill levels and it is getting worse. If an individual does not have a high school diploma or 8th grade math proficiency, they face an immediate barrier. Many individuals do not have a 6th grade reading level either. Lower-end jobs that don't require this level of education and proficiency are decreasing. Truck driving, delivery jobs, machinists, etc. all require computer literacy. Agencies cannot place individuals with a 3rd grade reading level with no computer literacy in these jobs. Even cleaning jobs targeted to those with Limited English Proficiency need people to be able to read directions on cleaning supplies and understand safety instructions. It's a liability issue."*

Another stakeholder summed up the situation, *"If you are a high school graduate, have a driver's license, have an 8th grade reading level or were previously incarcerated, you have a host of training programs available to you. There may even be more training slots than people (approximately 20% of the unemployment population) who fit these criteria."*

Strengths and Weakness of Education and Training Programs:

Stakeholders who were interviewed presented very honest descriptions of the current strengths and shortcomings of the education and training system in Milwaukee. Most striking was the consensus among stakeholders that each major program/resource had much to offer –

the quality of training resources was not in question. However, the connection between programs and their clientele – both job seekers and employers – was often seen as weak and/or barrier-ridden. Programs’ weak responsiveness to worker and employer needs is a recurring theme among key stakeholders.

Program/Resource	Strengths	Weakness
MATC (Milwaukee Area Technical College)	Instruction, facilities, equipment Special needs testing Associate degree programs Adult High School	Weak employer linkages Curriculum inflexibility Traditional education approach Not set up to serve high risk populations Ineffective GED program Not responsive to marketplace Course offerings not demand-driven Inflexible ESL program
WRTP (Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership)	Instruction, union relationships Commitment to women and minorities Good access to employment	Extensive screening requirements Unions’ weak commitment to hiring locally
WIA (Workforce Investment Act) Milwaukee Area Workforce Investment Board	Broad eligibility Pays 50% wages during some on-the-job training Tax credits	No priority for high need Emphasis on high wage jobs Highly structured, sequential education Lack of income while training Academic requirements Eligibility documentation
One-Stop Job Centers	Services for W-2 recipients Reading and math refresher courses Potential for integrated services	Weak link to WIA services Lost core mission Hard to access services Not geared to ‘hard to serve’
Community-based Programs/Homeless Providers	GED programs Case management Commitment to clients Strong network of agencies serving Latino clients	Staff turnover Weak ties to employment sector Lack of employment services knowledge and skills

- **Accessibility to services for homeless individuals and cross-agency/system collaboration:**

Are services accessible for homeless people? The consensus among stakeholders was no. Any service outside the walls of the homeless provider organizations was seen as very difficult to access. Job Centers, designed to be the one-stop shops for job seekers of all types, were seen as disappointing at best. *“When an individual presents themselves at one of the Job Centers, they get directed to a computer screen without an adequate assessment of need.”*

Accessibility to training and employment often hinges on computer accessibility and skills. *“Lack of computer literacy is a huge barrier for the homeless population. Access to a computer on a regular basis and computer training and skills are needed to engage in a productive job search.”*

Moreover, participation in training programs is likely to require other supports like child care and food stamps; yet there are great delays (3 weeks+) in processing applications for these resources. Even with child care and food stamps, however, people in training programs generally do not receive any other income or stipend. This is a significant deterrent to participation.

The structure of training programs themselves was seen as a critical issue for homeless people who need a more flexible approach to stay engaged. *“These programs are not accessible to the homeless population. It can be difficult to engage homeless individuals and/or the chronically unemployed to engage in traditional employment training programs that are structured on a semester basis. They need a more flexible approach with early success in order to stay motivated. It is essential that training and employment is viewed as a long-term growth process that eventually results in a commitment to a career path.”*

Are providers collaborating to improve access? There was a sense that education and training organizations had a history of competition and weak cooperation but that recent efforts to reshape the Workforce Investment Board were beginning to show improvements in this area. As one stakeholder noted, *“Relationships have improved a lot in the last year. People are trying to work better together against the backdrop of historically competitive relationships. However, agencies are sometimes competing for the same pots of money and the same job openings for their clients.”*

Connections between training resources and employers, however, continue to be problematic with nearly all stakeholders seeing serious issues with a) employers' expectations of training programs; and b) training programs' responsiveness to employers' needs. A frequently cited example focused on the need for welders. When a major local company complained about the lack of welders, the training response generated a very limited number of individuals trained in basic welding; yet the employer's was for highly trained, specialized welders. Closer collaboration and a long-term training partnership would have increased the likelihood of a good match between training content and results.

Homeless service providers demonstrate varying degrees of connection to education and training resources. Like most service advocacy, success depends upon an individual case manager or job developer’s relationship with key individuals in resource institutions. Where those personal relationships are strong, the collaboration works. As one observer noted, however, *“Staff turnover at transitional housing facilities is a problem and relationships and resource knowledge are not institutionalized.”* At the same time, another stakeholder noted that there are often *“...inadequate linkages between transitional housing and shelter staff and workforce development resources. Case managers operate from a social service perspective and may not have specific skills and abilities related to job development and employment case management. Homeless shelters should not duplicate what the Job Centers are supposed to be doing.”*

- **Employer attitudes toward homeless:**

Stakeholders were asked their opinions about employer attitudes toward the homeless. Therefore, the answers to this question reflect their experience in working with employers and/or trying to placement homeless people in employment. We did not ask employers directly whether they had issues employing homeless people.

Generally, stakeholders saw two types of employer reactions. On the one hand, stakeholders felt that employers had biases about homeless people that represented very negative stereotypes. On the other hand, stakeholders ascribed employer reticence to hire homeless workers as indicative of their ‘bottom-line’ thinking. Some comments are provided below as illustration.

Employer Biases	Bottom-Line Thinking
Assume previous incarceration Stereotype based on job developer affiliation Misconceptions about homeless education and experience Assume irresponsible and undependable Assume lack of skills Basic hygiene and lack of permanent address Unstable or “spotty” work history Racism Non-traditional worker Stigma: lazy, dangerous, violent, mentally ill Unreliable – attendance & punctuality	Cost of getting worker fully productive Worker will cost more than contribute Turnover expensive Better to use temp agencies to screen Delay paying health benefits No meaningful incentives to hire Training programs not connected to real employer needs Resistance to government paper work Transportation issues Lack of fit between skills and job Desire to hire en masse Cost of meeting homeless long term health and social service needs Weak commitment to solving community problem

- **Regulation/legislative barriers to improving services for homeless people:**

The *inflexibility of federal funding* was blamed for much of the inaccessibility of WIA (Workforce Investment Act) training resources for homeless people. Here are the key themes:

- ≈ Federal funding is categorical with each program having its unique target population and eligibility requirements.
- ≈ Federal funding is increasingly outcomes-focused but at a level that emphasizes achievements high on the employment ladder, i.e. high wage rates, long term retention, rather than pre and early-employment incremental steps. One observer noted, *“WIA’s high wage requirement precludes support for more remedial education and training for those with greatest need.”*
- ≈ Department of Labor funding requires 18-month tracking of job placements which many non-profit organizations cannot achieve; additional resources are needed for longer-term tracking and supportive services.
- ≈ W-2 (TANF) work participation requirement limits active job search to 6 weeks per year; this is often inadequate.
- ≈ WIA (Workforce Investment Act) funding is focused on training and re-training of recently unemployed workers with higher levels of education and work experience.
- ≈ *“Wisconsin’s Care Giving Laws serve as a barrier to individuals who have a criminal record who are interested in careers as nurses, certified nursing assistants, and day care teachers.”* Individuals interested in these careers may have criminal records that represent youthful indiscretions such as shoplifting which may have little or no relationship to the training or employment opportunity.
- ≈ Progression/content of WIA-funded and MATC training programs is prescribed; not flexible to needs of workers.
- ≈ Wisconsin Department of Revenue is unwilling to work with homeless providers to address tax arrearages.

Access to criminal records may have resulted in an over-use/over-reliance on criminal background checks to screen out applicants for training programs and employment. As one stakeholder noted, *“Legally, employers cannot discriminate based on criminal records, but the definition is broad and publicly available records are challenging to interpret accurately.”* *“Arrests records are interpreted as guilt.”*

Stakeholders noted that with public access to criminal records through C-CAP (Wisconsin’s Circuit Court Access Program), employers can readily access information about individuals with just his/her name. However, as stakeholders pointed out employers may have difficulty putting criminal records into context, distinguishing between arrests and convictions, and separating out criminal behavior which might impact employability from personal or unrelated behaviors which may not. In addition, Milwaukee Municipal Court is the only city in the state that puts its information on the internet, adding to the likelihood that a prospective employee with previous municipal citations will be screened out of employment. In a troubled economy with high un-

employment, an individual with even a minimal entry, i.e. traffic violation, on C-CAP is likely to be passed over in favor of a comparable applicant with no record.

- **Strategies to improve employment opportunities for homeless people:**

Stakeholders were asked their views on how to improve employment and training opportunities for homeless people in Milwaukee. Their responses are categorized as follows: Training and Services, Employers, Access, Workforce Development Plan, and Leadership.

Training and Services:

- ≈ Employment and training programs need to be integrated within homeless service organizations.
- ≈ Workforce development training and employment programs need to emphasize career development and not just employment.
- ≈ Training programs need to be more connected to employers and their current and future needs. An authentic exchange of needs and solutions are needed between workforce development agencies and employers.
- ≈ We need to serve the most difficult clients first – those with minimal levels of education, experience and soft skills. And we need to change the definition of success from 6-month job retention to a system that recognizes and rewards interim steps and achievements.
- ≈ Homeless individuals need a dedicated advocate to increase access to public benefits; stipends for FSET recipients to support them while in training should be established.
- ≈ We need additional funding to mitigate legal barriers to employment and training.
- ≈ Start with the perspective that everyone has talents and assets and build upon them rather than just identifying deficiencies.
- ≈ Shelters need on-site training and employment programs integrated with other services that they provide. Many homeless individuals have job skills but need a pathway, guidance and monitoring to support them in finding their own jobs.
- ≈ WIA services are focused almost completely on mitigating unemployment so funding and resources are dedicated to agencies that provide job placement and retention. More resources are needed for pre-employment services and this preparation needs to be better integrated with more formal workforce development programs.

Employers:

- ≈ The race issue among employers needs to be addressed. Diversity within the workplace needs to be addressed. Diversity enhancement goes beyond providing a few workshops.
- ≈ Employers need potential employees referred to them who are a good fit in order to establish trust and a successful working relationship. If an individual is not qualified for a job or doesn't have the soft skills needed, then the agency or organization loses credibility.

- ≈ Employers should see reducing unemployment as an important community benefit that will help economic growth.

Access:

- ≈ A clearinghouse of available jobs is needed that is targeted to the homeless such as opportunities in the construction, hospitality and janitorial fields.
- ≈ A one-stop shop that is more expansive than the existing Job Centers is needed for the homeless population where multiple services and programs are co-located in the same building. Services should include DVR, VA, housing, medical, dental, transportation, legal and tax help.
- ≈ There should be a specific employment and training system for the homeless population. Each Job Center should have a specialist focused on serving the homeless population so that people are served when they attempt to access resources.
- ≈ Stakeholders need to collaborate to create jobs and employment opportunities for their clientele rather than just responding to employers' needs. Organizations need to be proactive in identifying what the marketplace needs and become entrepreneurs.
- ≈ Although WIA and W-2 serve different clientele, these clients may be competing for the same jobs. We need to develop a central job placement function across all workforce development and community agencies to share job leads and job applicants and provide the best potential employees to employers. This function needs to be supported by shared software that links employers to potential employees.
- ≈ Reduce the regulatory and paperwork requirements of WIA and replace its antiquated computer system.

Workforce Development Plan:

- ≈ Require all funding sources (state, federal, private, technical college) to develop and implement a shared workforce development plan as a condition of receiving funding. This will force the development of an integrated system.
- ≈ Obtain waivers to implement a flexible approach to utilization of funding to fill the gaps vs. being stuck with categorical funding and programs. Funding is needed that is not attached to eligibility categories such as W-2 or Food Share so that there are resources to address gaps in the system.

Leadership:

- ≈ More leadership in Milwaukee is needed for employment issues. Visionary leadership is needed to galvanize all resources and stakeholders into an integrated system. It is not about money. A solid plan is needed and people are hungry for a solution.

Summing up: Stakeholder Views

- ≈ There are significant issues of inter-agency and cross-system coordination and collaboration over and above specific concerns regarding the homeless population.
- ≈ The employment and training system may be working for some unemployed people but it is not working for homeless people looking for permanent employment.
- ≈ Access to resources is a huge problem. Job Centers are not functioning as one-stop shops for homeless people or those who are trying to help them.
- ≈ Eligibility criteria are problematic for the homeless including extensive legal documentation as well as academic performance standards.
- ≈ Homeless people are more diverse – in skills, experience and motivation – than training providers or employers realize. Stereotyping and stigma as well as racism are critical factors in the employment and training picture in Milwaukee.
- ≈ Milwaukee is at a critical juncture in terms of pursuing strategies to make the current system more responsive to homeless people or finding ways to tailor-make an employment and training system customized to the needs of the homeless.

Best Practices Review

Excellent information about best practices in improving employment opportunities for homeless people can be obtained from the following articles:

“Employment and Income Supports for Homeless People,” 2007 National Symposium on Homelessness Research, authors David Long, John Rio, and Jeremy Rosen, 2007.

“Recognizing Work as a Priority in Preventing or Ending Homelessness,” Journal of Primary Prevention, authors Gary Shaheen and John Rio, 2007

The first publication (“Employment and Income Supports for Homeless People”) is very relevant for Milwaukee’s homeless employment planning efforts. This article provides an inventory of existing mainstream resources aimed at employment and income supports and provides an assessment of each in terms of effectiveness for people who are homeless.

Key findings from “Employment and Income Supports for Homeless People”:

Employment barriers:

- ≈ Lack of vocational engagement skills: stress and time management, interpersonal skills, and ability to manage/coordinate work logistics;
- ≈ Mental and physical health issues, especially if combined history of incarceration;
- ≈ History of incarceration by itself;
- ≈ Challenges for homeless families mirror challenges for low-income families in general – child care, transportation, educational deficiencies, and higher incidence of substance abuse;
- ≈ Lack of computer knowledge and access coupled with fear of failure.

The authors note that there is extensive evidence that, despite these barriers, homeless people are able to succeed at employment when they receive good, sustained support and training. Those most likely to succeed are individuals with a history of full time employment.

Federal employment assistance resources:

- ≈ Social Security Administration: SSI (Supplemental Security Income), SSDI (Social Security Disability Income), and Ticket to Work provide income and employment supports to people with disabilities but utilization is very low across the U.S.
- ≈ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: *TANF* (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families known as *W-2* in Wisconsin) research suggests that investment in training and education has benefited *TANF* recipients but that *TANF* mandatory work

requirements may have contributed to increased homelessness. Several localities have used TANF funds in combination with other public and private resources to develop homeless employment initiatives. (Sound Families in Seattle and Hearth Connection in Minneapolis-St. Paul) *SAMSHA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) demonstration programs: Access to Community Care and Effective Services and Supports* (18 demonstration programs in 9 states: IL, CT, MO, NC, PA, TX, VA, and WA). ACCESS research indicates that “...homeless people with serious mental illness can use vocational services, and that receipt of these services is significantly associated with an increased likelihood of being employed.”

- ≈ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs: Although a low percentage of homeless veterans receive veterans’ disability payments or pensions, two programs (Capital Grant and Per Diem Program and the Compensated Work Therapy Program) are in place. The Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP funded by the Department of Labor) works with Capital Grant and Per Diem participants. Compensated Work Therapy operates Transitional Residence and Veterans Industries. HVRP has shown positive results; other programs have not had formal evaluations.
- ≈ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development: Housing assistance, which is means tested, may discourage work; research shows that housing assistance had no relationship to work outcomes. The Family Self-Sufficiency Program has shown preliminary positive results; another demonstration program called Jobs Plus has shown positive results in Dayton, Los Angeles and St. Paul. McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance has strengthened its emphasis on employment outcomes but no evaluation has been conducted of outcomes. Supportive Housing programs which incorporated strong employment supports showed outcomes relative to increased earnings and reduced dependence on benefit programs.
- ≈ U.S. Department of Labor: Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds state and local workforce development systems that emphasize universal access through a national network of 3,500 One-Stop Career Centers. Evaluation results were described by the authors as follows:

“...the WIA system is not designed to pay special attention or deliver specially tailored services to people who are homeless. Indeed, DOL (Department of Labor) does not currently count the number of homeless adults or homeless dislocated workers served by WIA and apparently has no plans to do so in the future (counting homeless clients is not mentioned in DOL’s Strategic Plan for 2006-2011). Under WIA’s predecessor, the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), about 2 percent of the 151,580 individuals served in 1998 by JTPA’s adult programs were homeless; and 2.4 percent of homeless participants in 1994 were homeless (GAO, 2000). A subsequent report estimated that 416,000 WIA participants received training in program year 2003. If the estimated percentage of homeless participants in JTPA applies to WIA, then perhaps

8,000-10,000 people who are homeless are served (in the U.S.) annually under WIA. However, given WIA's demanding performance requirements (which discourage programs from working with hard-to-serve clients), the percentage of WIA participants who are homeless might be less than under JTPA.

Some specialized homeless employment efforts have occurred with WIA support including One-Stop Centers serving homeless people specifically have been developed in Tucson, Portland OR, and Portland ME, each with connections to the local homeless services provider network.

Other DOL programs that do/could serve homeless people include: Adult and Dislocated Worker Program, WIA Youth Program, and Welfare-to Work. A multi-site evaluation of Welfare to Work found positive impact on homelessness, but not in Milwaukee's project. DOL and HUD jointly sponsor the Ending Chronic Homelessness through Employment and Housing; projects are currently operating in Boston, Indianapolis, Portland OR, San Francisco, and Los Angeles; early results are positive.

- ≈ U.S. Department of Agriculture: Food Stamps and employment programs connected to Food Stamps (FSET – Food Stamps Employment and Training Program) utilization is low; evaluation of FSET effectiveness has not been conducted. Seattle, Houston and Boston have developed special FSET initiatives to assist homeless people.
- ≈ Internal Revenue Service: Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is underutilized by homeless workers for a variety of reasons – lack of knowledge, inability to document income, not filing income tax.

The second article, “Recognizing Work as a Priority in Preventing or Ending Homelessness,” offers a comprehensive review of the literature focusing on a “work first” approach. The authors provide a set of recommendations for redesigning employment supports to better fit homeless job seekers’ skills and readiness. A graphic depiction of the “work first” system excerpted from “Recognizing Work as a Priority in Preventing or Ending Homelessness” is provided on the following page.



Key steps in shaping a work first system for homeless people include:

1. "Shifting the culture of services" – this includes expanding the definition of job skills to include day to day survival skills as well as formal work records as well as "vocalionalizing" services within a shelter or transitional housing facility to emphasize work from the point of first contact.
2. "Making a credible, standing offer of work" – this means developing the capacity to immediately offer paid work within the facility or in a day labor setting.
3. "Addressing systems fragmentation" – this includes aggressive efforts to integrate homelessness and workforce development planning at the local level; ongoing resource mapping to understand how employment services are deployed is critical.

4. “Build employment capacity” - cross training, relationship development, addressing cultural competence, and leveraging resources are all key steps in building employment capacity; in essence, the authors suggest that homeless providers replicate the capacity and relationships they have in AODA and mental health treatment in the employment sector.
5. “Replicating what works” – numerous guides and evaluations are available; suggested is the SAMHSA/Center for Mental Health Services Toolkit on Supported Employment’s “no wrong door” to employment. The authors describe the system as follows:

“Meeting people “where they are at” means that people should have options to engage in work even in the earlier stages of recovery. ...people recovering from homelessness often need a slower entry ramp to jobs and can benefit from the ability to choose from an array of individualized options in addition to a “fast track” into the competitive labor market.”

“Whatever the path the individual chooses, he or she is guided by employment specialists who help negotiate the employment process or assist in making course corrections if need. This approach is consistent with the key evidence-based Supportive Employment principles that lead to better employment outcomes such as “zero exclusion” (people are not precluded from participation based on severity of disability), “rapid access to competitive jobs” (getting people into real work for real pay quickly) and “time-unlimited services for job retention, continuous assessment and advancement” (ongoing support to maintain and advance in the job for as long as needed).

6. “Seek new partners” – multi-sector approaches must be developed that reflects issue as a community problem; homeless providers can lead the way by expanding their existing partnerships with community organizations and faith-based groups to include employment beyond traditional charity.

The authors provide two prototype programs for consideration: a) Los Angeles: Portal to Employment which partnered a large homeless shelter with a WIA-funded One-Step Center to work with homeless people in downtown LA; portal is open in evening to shelter residents and replicates services provided at regular One-Stop Centers. B) Indianapolis: Threshold Project which provides employment services on-site at a supportive housing project.

WIA Waivers: Many localities have used waivers obtained by their respective states from the Department of Labor to enable the more flexible use of WIA (Workforce Investment Act) funds to address the employment needs of homeless people. Information provided by an official working with the Milwaukee Area Workforce Investment Board indicates that there are sixteen (16) types of possible waivers that states may request to enable them to most effectively utilize WIA resources. In addition, a state may submit a “work-flex” plan which allows a governor to waive WIA requirements for local areas. The local WIB has expressed interest in pursuing sev-

eral waivers although it is not clear whether there has been movement on these requests or whether any of them would have a positive impact on efforts to improve services for homeless people.

Summing up: Best Practices Review

- ≈ There are numerous federal programs that could potential help homeless people improve their employability.
- ≈ Utilization of these programs is much lower than documented need.
- ≈ Mainstream programs have had limited success in reaching hardest to serve and homeless populations, e.g. Food Stamp Employment and Training, Workforce Investment Act programs.
- ≈ Demonstration projects focused on homeless employment have shown positive results but are active in a limited number of cities.
- ≈ Waivers have enabled several localities to make better use of WIA services for homeless people.
- ≈ Improved access to services has been coupled with a new “work first” approach in many areas that ‘vocationalizes’ services at every stage of contact/engagement with homeless individuals and families.
- ≈ Successful programs have redefined homeless employment issues as a community problem vs. a problem just of the homeless services system.

Conclusion

This report draws on a variety of data sources to formulate a snapshot of the issue of homelessness and employment. Employment is a huge issue for homeless people and this is borne out by survey data that places the employment rate at 13.7%. Women, people with children, and people without disabilities are more likely to be employed – but the rates are low (less than one in five) even among these more ‘advantaged’ groups. At the same time, the system put in place to assist unemployed citizens is generally recognized, even by system insiders, to be largely unresponsive to the needs of the homeless population with the bulk of employment and training resources targeted to individuals with better academic skills and better job histories. On the bright side, a brief literature review indicates that other cities have found creative ways to bring system resources to bear on homeless employment issues in ways that make sense for homeless people, local businesses, and the broader community. Hopefully, the information in this report will generate discussion of possible options for improving the employment status of Milwaukee’s homeless citizens.

