CoC Employment Roundtable Discussion 5/18/16

Purpose of roundtable: share experience of high performing programs around employment outcome and what has worked for them, identify barriers to employment for clients and come up with solutions (either new ideas or what is already working in some organizations), and gather ideas for the Request for Proposals for the CoC Planning funds (approx. $100,000 for improving employment outcomes)

After a brief introduction to the purpose of the roundtable, attendees were given to post-it notes and told to write two barriers they face in helping their clients gain and maintain employment. They were told to try to come up with barriers that might be unique to their organization or populations served. After collecting the post-its HAWNY staff grouped them into 4 different broader categories of barriers:

1. Collaboration and communication
   ○ Most prevalent themes include lack of knowledge about services available, lack of knowledge from employers regarding homelessness, and a need to become familiar with agencies for referrals
   ○ Other barriers include housing providers unable to keep communication with clients; lack of knowledge about and connection to services like ACCES-VR (adults vocational rehabilitation services), Goodwill, Restoration Society, and workforce development; and lack of partnerships with Welfare-to-Work program
2. Client barriers
   ○ Many of the barriers in this category involved mental and physical health or substance abuse issues preventing clients from achieving successful employment.
   ○ Others include clients who are unmotivated to find work or that fear losing benefits if they begin work; clients with inconsistent/lack of job histories; and questions about work rules and "under the table" work
3. Lack of resources
   ○ This category of barriers includes a few larger groups of barriers: lack of workforce training, transportation barriers, need for more employers, and lack of affordable childcare for working families or during the time seeking employment
   ○ **Clients needing more training on basic job skills (including education and soft job skills) and lack of affordable and reliable transportation for those employed and those in rural areas were the top 2 cited barriers to employment**
4. Administrative and Funding
   ○ The most common barriers grouped into this category include clients not having appropriate paperwork or ID in order to obtain employment, and providers not having enough funding for case management and staff

Attendees then gathered into four groups to brainstorm solutions to addressing each barrier and share their organization's experience and successes. Each group was instructed to pick a few post-it notes with specific barriers to discuss from their assigned category, and then after 5-10

minutes they would switch categories with another group and select a few barriers from that category to discuss, ultimately presenting their ideas and discussion to the larger group (see table 1).

Table 1. Group Presentations on Solutions to Employment Barriers

Barriers to Employment	Ideas for New Solutions and What Already Works
Provider communication with clients	- Free government cell phone assistance - Connect with shelters to better locate clients - Ask client if they have family or a friend to act as a point of contact if unable to reach client
Client legal history preventing them from obtaining employment	- Job readiness programs that link client skills experience and barriers and match them with appropriate employers and in some cases, be recruited. (It Takes A Village Action Organizations, Goodwill Employment Solutions, ACE Employment) - Support Ban the Box advocacy that will eliminate considering one's ex-conviction status during the hiring process.
Lack of affordable and reliable transportation to employment	- Work with NFTA to advocate for expanded bus routes, number of routes, and routes to rural areas (e.g. Niagara County) - Link Ticket to Work for those with SSI/SSDI benefits or PASS Plan program: https://www.ssa.gov/work/, contact the PASS cadre for more information: https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/wi/passcadre.htm - Emphasize finding local jobs that are close to where clients live - When apply for grant, be mindful about transportation need. If eligible, apply for token, or a van to accommodate client's need - WNY Independent Living, Catholic Charities Services and other services provider may provide transportation or tokens for clients
Housing barrier	- Employment agency and housing providers can be partnered to assist client's both employment and housing need
Recovery/Personal Support	- Communication and resources from client treatment provider - Provide appropriate referrals to treatment and services based on the barriers and needs of clients. - CoC funded RRH has allowable expenses on childcare. May modify the budget to accommodate the need
Student loans preventing clients from further education	- Discussing loan payment plans directly with the lender can significantly reduce payment plans to a more

	manageable amount.
Lack of employers or employer reluctance to hire population	- Invite big employers to a roundtable discussion to have an honest discussion about the barriers clients face and what employers are looking for - Develop training and programs around the needs of employers (see Manchester Bidwell, http://manchesterbidwell.org/) - Create incentives to employing clients: consolidated funding for special populations (contact Regional Economic Development Council, http://regionalcouncils.ny.gov/content/western-new-york) - Share employment resources - Having targeted Board members that will act as a link to employment services can be a great resource. (Goodwill has board members that provide insight into employment need from the community, allowing training to focus on need.) - Work Opportunities Tax Credit (WOTC), Disabled Veterans Credit, and Workers with Disabilities Employment Tax Credit (WETC) offer employers federal tax savings for hiring people with barriers to employment.
Lack of basic work skills	- Welfare to Work Programs and soft skills training (e.g. Hope Works, Restoration Society Inc., Buffalo City Mission), have benefits for both clients and providers
Need for clarity on work rules and "under the table" work	- Share knowledge about SSI and SGA (substantial gainful activity). Calculate eligible income for the client to ensure they will not lose their benefits. SGA= $1,130 (2016) - *Working While Disabled* at-a-glance summary: https://www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-10095.pdf
Administrative barriers, including needing copies/faxing	- Clients should ask their case manager for help making copies or faxes, or may be able to go to their local library or Fedex/Kinko's
Clients don't have appropriate paperwork or ID	- Senior clients can get ID from Senior Services for free - Erie County Department of Mental Health has free ID days. However, other documents still need to be presented. - Service providers may be able to provide funds for ID through their program budgets - Service providers can write grants to cover costs of client ID - DSS may be able to provide copies of paperwork used to obtain an official ID - Clients born in the city of Buffalo with photo ID or appropriate paperwork can go to City Hall to get a copy

	of their birth certificate for $10, or a photo birth certificate for $25
Lack of knowledge about programs	- Improved connection/Training on programs that will link them to job readiness like WNY Independent Living, Catholic Charities Services, 211, ACCES-VR (adults vocational rehabilitation services), Goodwill, Restoration Society, and workforce development
Client motivation to obtain and maintain employment	- Empower clients by offering assistance and access to tools that will help them find a job. For example, computers, resume building workshops, and workforce counselling. For example, ECC's One-stop Employment Centers, 77 Goodell (BETC), or the public library.
Clients need quality and reliable childcare in order to work	- Advocate for DSS to pay for childcare for clients who are actively looking for employment. - Check to see if funding can cover childcare

After each group shared what they discussed and HAWNY staff recorded their ideas, Kexin asked what attendees would like to see in the Request for Proposals for CoC Planning funds. Some of the ideas presented earlier by the groups would be appropriate for Planning funds. Additionally, establishing employee readiness and providing training for case managers were introduced (see table 2 for a more complete list of potential RFP ideas). With the ideas from the roundtable discussion in mind, the Request for Proposals should be ready by the end of June.

Table 2. CoC Planning Funds Request for Proposals for Employment

Roundtable with employers	- Host discussions with employers to start dialogue about barriers to employment and stereotypes of homeless population - Have honest discussion with companies about why they won't hire clients and how to get them to work with our clients
Sharing resources and connecting providers	- Share resources and knowledge among organizations - Share contact information for those involved, creating connections and leading to more potential meetings
Advocacy	- Advocate for DSS to budget for childcare costs in Welfare to Work program - Work with NFTA to create more bus route locations and times that accommodate for work schedules
Case manager trainings	- Hold trainings for case managers on client employment, assessment of clients using strengths-based assessments, and appropriately matching clients to employment opportunities

Establish employee readiness	- Finding resources related to resume reviewing, soft skill training, volunteer opportunities, interview practices, interview/job outfits etc.