



**Evaluation Report of the Workforce Solutions Midtown
at SEARCH: Helping Homeless Job Seekers Get and
Keep a Job**

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Introduction

The Gulf Coast Workforce Investment Board (GCWIB) initiated a research and demonstration project in its workforce investment area to address the needs of homeless job seekers and to help the Harris County community address the challenge of reducing homelessness. The Board's administrative agent, the Houston-Galveston Area Council (HGAC) contracted with Service of the Emergency Aid Resource Center for the Homeless (SEARCH) Inc. to develop and operate the Workforce Solutions¹ Midtown Office at SEARCH's building at 2505 Fannin Street in Houston. As part of the three year research and demonstration contract, SEARCH agreed to conduct an evaluation of the initiative and sub-contracted with Advocates for Human Potential to independently evaluate the Workforce Solutions career office located at SEARCH, Inc.

The GCWIB, HGAC and SEARCH collaborated in an innovative project aimed at an underserved population that presents substantial challenges to the City of Houston and Harris County. As the region develops strategies and moves forward to address homelessness, guided by a ten year plan, employment and earned income plays an important role. Few communities demonstrate this kind of leadership and effort to help homeless people reclaim their stake in our society as a productive, contributing member through their employment. The evaluation of this research and demonstration project was not designed to provide information about the causes and effects of the interventions or to generalize findings based on the outcomes of the homeless people in this study. Research and demonstration projects are taken up in order to learn and better understand what happens when an effort is made to try an intervention or strategy that is outside usual practices. In this respect, we offer descriptions of the Midtown career office project and describe relevant findings that may prove useful to planners and program leaders as they move forward to continue their good works.

¹ Initially called The WorkSource - Midtown, the Board changed the name of its one stop career centers to Workforce Solutions in July 1, 2008.

This evaluation is exploratory in that it provides readers descriptive information about the SEARCH research and demonstration project serving homeless job seekers. The 18 month study period is April 1, 2006 to September 30, 2007.

Throughout the report we use the term homeless. The term “homeless” or “homeless individual or homeless person” includes—

- an individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; and
- an individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is—
 - a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill);
 - an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or
 - a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

Homeless people who meet this definition and who also have both a disabling condition and have been continuously homeless for a year or longer or who experienced 4 or more episodes in the past three years are considered chronically homeless.

Overview Homelessness and Employment

There are assertions and supporting evidence throughout the research literature that all segments of the homeless population—unaccompanied adults, heads of family households, and youth—face significant and multiple barriers to employment. These barriers are personal, programmatic, and systemic. People who are homeless often lack skills in stress management and social interaction, independent living skills, and skills for vocational engagement (Munoz, Reichenbach, & Hansen, 2005), as well as a place to live and financial resources. Barriers such as lack of transportation and educational credentials are prevalent among homeless people in both urban and rural areas (Taylor, 2001). In addition, homeless young adults and youth experience high levels of trauma and typically have poor educational and vocational preparation (Barber et al., 2005).

Mental health and physical health play central roles in the employment and program participation of people who are homeless or at risk for homelessness. Disabilities are well-documented barriers to employment, although the extent of the hindrance varies. For example, the employment of persons with schizophrenia is impeded by a range of specific clinical problems. People with schizophrenia who have greater cognitive impairment experience more difficulty in the labor market and require more vocational support than those with lesser impairments (McGurk et al., 2003).

Substance use disorders, alone or in combination with disabilities, substantially reduce the income people receive from work (Zuvekas & Hill, 2000). Competitive employment is further impeded by receipt of disability payments (and concomitant adverse work incentives) and by race (Rosenheck et al., 2006). Among homeless people with severe mental illness, those with a history of incarceration have more serious problems and show less improvement in community adjustment domains (McGuire & Rosenheck, 2004). Incarceration can decrease the types of employment available after release from jail or prison, and a history of incarceration has been shown to alter how homeless ex-offenders conduct job searches (Cooke, 2004).

The barriers faced by homeless families are generally similar to those of other low-income families, including families on welfare. The key issues are transportation, child care, educational limitations, and substance abuse (Burt & Anderson, 2005; Burt, Aron, & Lee, 1999; Taylor, 2001). Severe mental health problems and histories of incarceration are less common for homeless family heads than they are for homeless adults who are unaccompanied.

In addition to these barriers, the digital divide remains a deep chasm for homeless populations. Competing for jobs today requires some understanding of and comfort and competency with information technology. Miller and colleagues (2005) identified the lack of such facility among homeless men as an important barrier to employment. Because they lacked computer knowledge and feared failure, the majority of study participants had not sought to use computers available through public access.

These limitations help to produce poor labor market outcomes for homeless people. Unemployment among homeless populations is widespread, and the problem is especially great during economic downturns. For example, at the end of 2002, there were 3.2 unemployed workers for every job opening, compared to 1.3 at the end of 2000 (Bernstein & Chapman, 2003), and low-wage job seekers, including people experiencing homelessness, suffered as a result. In addition, the jobs that homeless people and tenants of supportive housing most frequently secure are low paying—laborer positions, jobs in the services sector (including food service and hospitality), and clerical or office positions (Isaac, 2001; Rog et al., 1999; Trutko et al., 1998).

As formidable as these barriers may seem, there are consistent reports in the literature that homeless people rise above the barriers and find ways to earn income from employment (Sowell et al., 2004; Theodore, 2000). Indeed, mounting evidence counters the view that homeless people face insurmountable barriers or are simply work shirkers. Given the opportunity, training, and sustained support, even people who have been homeless for long periods or who have experienced frequent episodes of homelessness have succeeded at working (Frey et al. 2008; Burt 2007). Evidence of homeless individuals' desire for jobs and tenacity in working has emerged from case studies and surveys of homeless people (Burt, Aron, & Lee, 1999; Weinberg & Kogel, 1995; Evans, 1998).

Homelessness, Employment and Mainstream Workforce Programs

Nationally, as many as 3.5 million people experience homelessness in a given year (1% of the entire U.S. population or 10% of its poor), and about 842,000 people in any given week. Most were homeless temporarily. The chronically homeless population (those with repeated episodes or who have been homeless for long periods) fell from 175,914 in 2005 to 123,833 in 2007. Over the past 8 years and based on research evidence, the Bush Administration directed the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to prioritize permanent housing in order to end chronic homelessness in the United States. To do so means other federal agencies need to insure that mainstream federal programs, including the Workforce Investment Act system, are accessible and used by homeless individuals to support the Administration's goal. Unfortunately, reports indicate that homeless people frequently experience difficulty in accessing mainstream program services in part because of the inherent barriers in these programs that were designed to serve large populations. There are no national estimates for the number of homeless people who seek assistance from the nation's one stop career centers. The U.S. Department of Labor does not

collect nor require states to report such information. HUD does require the homeless programs it funds to report whether or not people leaving their programs do so with employment. The employment rate for those exiters in 2006 was 17%; in 2007 it was 20%.

At the local level, the Coalition for the Homeless in partnership with leaders from the City of Houston and Harris County prepared a 10 year Strategic Plan to Address Homelessness. The Coalition leads the area's Continuum of Care and conducts an annual enumeration of homeless people as required by HUD. The Coalition reports there are more than 10,300 homeless people in the Houston and Harris County community according to the 2007 enumeration conducted by the Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County, Inc. Of these, 3,108 are estimated to be chronically homeless. Over the course of a year, the Coalition estimates as many as 32,125 people experience homelessness. However, there are fewer than 2,000 permanent housing beds in inventory and only about 20% of those become available in a year. The plan states that in order to maintain permanent housing, 35% of homeless persons will require lifelong, extensive care; 55% will need on-going contact with at least one service provider, and only 10% are affected by short-term, one-time homelessness.²

The United Way of the Texas Gulf Coast indicated that homeless persons surveyed for the Blue Ribbon Commission report cited the lack of a job as the most common reason for becoming homeless. Fifty-nine percent reported that they lost their housing because they or a family member lost a job. The survey provides strong evidence that homeless persons have a desire to work, with 77% indicating a need for job placement services and 70% indicating a need for job training. Housing alone will not end homelessness. Jobs and the supportive services to keep them are required.

The Coalition's 2007 enumeration report extrapolated findings from a detailed survey of homeless individuals (N=1147). It indicated that more than two-thirds of the respondents reported no income. Another quarter indicated an income greater than \$10,000. Focus group data support the findings that homeless persons consistently struggle with generational and situational poverty. Generational poverty, as the term suggests, is defined as a condition of persistent, familial poverty that can be associated with unemployment or underemployment, food anxiety, lower educational achievement, health disparities and substandard housing. Situational poverty implies a condition wherein a person is unable to earn or maintain an income. It can be associated with mental health disorders, physical disability, unemployment or underemployment, or substance abuse. A small percentage of respondents reported income above \$21,000. These tend to be women who become homeless because of domestic violence, persons who lost their jobs, or those who were unable to continue to work because of mental illness or other disability.

The incomes of homeless persons with mental illness in Harris County reflect the likelihood of their access to systems of care and to some degree of employment especially for respondents in transitional housing. Those who are employed work primarily at supported wage or low wage

² Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County, Inc. (2006). Strategic Plan to Address Homelessness in Houston/ Harris County, Blue Ribbon Commission to End Chronic Homelessness Houston/Harris County, May.

jobs. Although faced with many challenges, homeless people in this group want to work with 71% who indicated job placement as a service need.³

The Workforce Solutions provides comprehensive human resource services for businesses and residents of the 13-county Houston-Galveston Gulf Coast region. The Workforce Solutions offices help employers solve workforce-related business problems and area residents build careers, so that both can better compete in the changing worldwide economy. Some 35 community-based career offices help residents get a job, keep a job or get a better job – offering placement, career counseling and financial aid services. Of these 20 are located in Harris County. As the lead agent for the GCWIB, HGAC manages the Workforce Solutions offices under contracts and collaborates with businesses, training and educational institutions, a variety of community based organizations as well as leaders in the cities and counties within the region.

The Workforce Solutions is funded by state and federal tax-dollars that are redirected back into the Gulf Coast region. There are no charges to customers for workforce services. In 2007, The Workforce Solutions system served more than 20% of the 121,000 businesses in the region. It recruited, screened and referred candidates to fill almost 50,000 open jobs, and it provided current economic and labor market data, human resource consulting and outplacement services for 6,997 workers from 67 companies. Through its region-wide network of local offices, the Workforce Solutions served more than 410,000 individuals, helping more than 200,000 people go to work or get a better job, including almost 20,000 welfare recipients; 34,000 veterans; and 4,000 ex-offenders.

Evaluation Purpose and Design

In 2003, on behalf of the Gulf Coast Workforce Board, the HGAC contracted with SEARCH, Inc. for a research and development project that would test the utility and feasibility to effectively serve homeless people in the largest workforce investment area in the Country. How well homeless customers do in moving from no or extremely low income to earning greater income from employment was of interest. Planners believed that the best outcomes are likely to occur if services are provided by practitioners in an organization where they are skilled at helping this particular population and where resources are intricately intertwined with each other sharing the same goal, that is, to end homelessness.

The evaluation was designed to provide descriptive information regarding the homeless populations and their Work Source utilization in addition to exploring their employment outcomes. The study period is April 1, 2006 to September 30, 2007. It begins six months after the contract start date of October 1, 2005 during which time the program ramped up its operating procedures, hired staff, developed a facilities plan and started to deliver services. Because wage data can take time to post after a customer begins work, the study period ended in September 2007 to provide sufficient time for earnings to be reported and posted in the Unemployment Insurance (UI) database

³ Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County, Inc. (2008) 2006-2007 Homeless Enumeration and Needs Assessment. Houston, Texas: Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County, Inc. Available at www.homelesshouston.org/images/hh/Documents/Downloads/Enumeration%20Report%202007.pdf

This pre-post design included 9 months of quarterly employment data prior to entry into the Work Source as well as 9 months post employment data by quarter. The primary hypothesis to be tested was that homeless people who sought employment assistance at the Workforce Solutions Midtown and who were dually enrolled in homeless assistance services (specifically the job bank and resource center) at SEARCH would show superior employment outcomes in their entry into employment, wages earned, and job retention when compared to homeless job seekers who only had access to Workforce Solutions services from a typical one stop career office. AHP was asked to address the following considerations in its evaluation of the project:

- **A description of the homeless population using Workforce Solutions Midtown and any differences from a typical One-Stop program.** Using existing TWIST and Service Point data, describe the homeless population accessing employment services at SEARCH and how these demographics differ from the more typical One-Stop program.
- **A description of the range of services that Workforce Solutions Midtown participant's use, and how they differ from a typical One-Stop Program.** Using Twist and Service Point data, this component catalogues the range of services available and those utilized by Workforce Solutions participants. This data will be compared to services used by participants at a typical One-Stop shop.
- **Determine success rates for key project outcomes.** Using existing TWIST and HMIS (Service Point) data, this component explores outcomes for Workforce Solutions participants as compared to the typical One-Stop program.
- **Determine which Workforce Solutions Midtown components are considered most effective in meeting program outcomes.** Using focus groups with Workforce Solutions participants, staff, and administrators, this component explores which services are most valued in promoting positive outcomes as well as the unique challenges and accomplishments of implementing a Workforce Solutions program within a homeless assistance program.

The initial design was developed to compare the approach and results of the Workforce Solutions Midtown with a typical one stop career center in another city. After an exploration of possible comparison sites including Tucson, Chicago, and Seattle, a suitable comparison site could not be identified because One Stop career centers and their parent workforce development systems do not identify or track customers' housing status nor whether a customer meets the definition of homeless. Therefore a population of homeless job seekers using typical one stop services could not be located outside of Houston.

To evaluate these aims, the evaluation design called for gathering demographic data, information about employment and training services, and employment outcomes for a population of homeless job seekers in Harris County. To further explore the results of the workforce services provided by SEARCH, the design included a comparison group of homeless people who did not use SEARCH services or other homeless assistance services. Working with staff at SEARCH and HGAC, evaluators identified two Cohorts who were homeless and used a Workforce Solutions service during the 18 month period from April 1, 2006 to September 30, 2007:

Cohort 1 - Homeless adult men and women seeking job assistance at the Workforce Solutions Midtown who were also receiving homeless assistance services at SEARCH. SEARCH staff is trained in using the above definition of homelessness and attest that customers met that definition.

Cohort 2 – Persons who self-identified their homelessness to staff during the process of seeking employment assistance for the 20 Workforce Solutions offices in Harris County and who were not registered in the countywide HMIS.

Methods

Data Sources and Cohort N’s

Data about this population is contained in four data sets that were used in this study. These included Work In Texas (WIT); The Workforce Information System of Texas (TWIST); Unemployment Insurance (UI); and the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) manages workforce development information at its WIT website to meet the needs of employers and job seekers. It also managed the UI data base for the State that includes wage data information. The HMIS is Service Point, a data base for managing human services and is required by HUD for communities receiving funding through its Continuums of Care. The Coalition for the Homeless of Houston and Harris County operates the areas Continuum of Care and the HMIS in partnership with its member agencies.

The TWIST, WIT, and HMIS data sources provided the demographic, service, as well as credential and housing outcomes for the homeless population while the UI data source provided outcomes for employment, income, and job retention outcomes. Each domain examined in this report as well as the corresponding data fields and source is presented in Table I.

Domain	Data Field	Detail	Source
Demographics	Birth date	month - day - year	TWIST/WIT
	Primary race	American Indian/Alaskan Native; Asian; Black or African American; Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander; White	TWIST/WIT
	Ethnicity	Hispanic or Latino; non Hispanic or Latino	TWIST/WIT
	Veteran Status	yes/no	HMIS
	Education	highest level achieved	HMIS
	Gender	male-female	TWIST/WIT
	Offender	yes/no	TWIST/WIT
	Disabilities	Mental Illness; Alcohol Abuse; Drug Abuse-HIV/AIDS; Developmental Disability; Physical disability	HMIS
	Prior Living Situation	Permanent: Rental Housing-public housing-section 8-shelter plus care-HOME subsidized unit-other subsidized unit-home ownership; Transitional: Transitional housing for homeless-moved in with family/friends; Institution: Psychiatric hospital-inpatient alcohol/drug treatment – jail/prison; Emergency Shelter: Emergency shelter; Other: Other supportive housing-places not meant for habitation-other	HMIS
	Source of Public Assistance	Type and amount of benefit	HMIS
Employment	Amount of earnings in total dollars for the three quarters	UI	

Table I. Data Sources			
Domain	Data Field	Detail	Source
	earnings in quarter before entry	prior to enrollment in the WorkSource	
	Employment status	Employed during three quarters prior to entry – not employed during three quarters prior to entry	UI
	Enrolled in WorkSource	See Appendix II.	TWIST/WIT
	Credentials Attained	Yes/No	TWIST/WIT
Employment outcome	Employed in first, second, and third quarter after exit	Yes/No	UI
Wages/Earnings outcome	Total earnings after exit	Amount of earnings in total dollars for the three quarters after exit September 30, 2007	UI
Education outcome	Credentials	Credential outcomes for homeless customers who received occupational skills training	TWIST/WIT
Homelessness outcome	Prior Living Situation/Destination	Permanent; Transitional; Institution; Emergency Shelter; Other	HMIS
Services Received	Homeless Assistance	Job Bank and Resource Center Services received from SEARCH	HMIS
	Workforce Solutions	See Appendix I	TWIST/WIT

Data for both Cohorts was drawn from TWIST and included 2,159 homeless customers seeking employment assistance from any one of the 20 Workforce Solutions offices in Harris County during the study period. For each individual record a unique identifier was assigned to protect the confidentiality of these homeless job seekers. The unique identifier included a person’s initials and part of their social security number. If there were duplicate entries, further information was considered to make sure there was only one entry per customer. Duplicates were removed.

Cohort 1 initially included 435 people who were Midtown customers. This group was further refined to include only those Workforce Solutions Midtown customers who also received homeless assistance services through the SEARCH job bank and resource center programs. A total of 361 homeless customers were identified for Cohort 1.

Cohort 2 was drawn from 1,724 homeless customers who received services at any one of the Workforce Solutions offices in Harris County other than the one located at SEARCH. This group was narrowed to rule out any customer who was also enrolled in the Countywide HMIS. People who receive homeless assistance services, including shelter, transitional or permanent housing that are funded through HUD’s Continuum of Care program must be enrolled in HMIS. Presumably, people not enrolled in HMIS do not receive HUD funded homeless assistance services. Whether or not they in fact did receive other homeless assistance services is not known. The Coalition for the Homeless of Houston and Harris County matched the list of homeless job seekers from TWIST with their HMIS database and identified a total of 1,453 homeless customers were identified as members of Cohort 2. Therefore 347 homeless job seekers receiving services at Workforce Solutions offices did receive homeless assistance services through the Continuum of Care in the county and were not included in Cohort 2.

For analysis, we retained only adult homeless job seekers by removing cases that included funding from WIA Youth. In Cohort 1 we removed three cases for a grand total of 358 adult

homeless job seekers. For Cohort 2 there were 22 cases that were not included in analysis which resulted in a grand total of 1430⁴ homeless job seekers.

Analytic Approach for Quantitative and Qualitative Data

Descriptive statistics formed the basis of the analysis and provided simple summaries about the study population, services received, and outcome measures. At the descriptive level, the distribution and frequency of items were examined. Tables include frequencies and proportions for categorical variables and means and ranges for continuous variables. Depending on the variable type, t-tests and chi-square tests were performed to document the association between pre-entry and post-exit income and employment as well as Cohort differences for these outcomes.

Wage records were the primary data source for tracking employment in the quarter after exit. An individual was considered employed if UI wage records for the quarter after exit show earnings greater than zero. This definition also applies to “Employed in the second and third quarters after exit quarter” except that the period to which wage records refer is the second and third quarters after exit.

A series of key informant interviews, conducted in June-July 2008 supplemented the quantitative analysis. The focus for the key informant interviews was to hear directly from key project staff and customers involved in the research and demonstration project at SEARCH about how the Midtown services are different from other Work Source centers, which services were helpful and which were not, and what impacts SEARCH has had on program participation.

Focus groups were held for 2 hours each and each member was directly asked a question if they did not volunteer an answer. All focus group participants were informed that they could refuse to answer any question with no consequences to their service or employment status. Participants were also given assurances that their responses were confidential and were asked not to attribute any information discussed in the meeting as coming from any one particular person or to associate information with any particular individual. Customers were selected as a convenience sample and were provided a meal voucher or gift card valued at \$25 for their participation in the focus group. Focus group interviews were recorded in addition to note taking during and after the sessions. Data was analyzed for recurrent themes across participants as well as unique perspectives of groups and individuals.

Results

Description of the Homeless Job Seekers in Cohorts 1 and 2

Although there are four times as many job seekers in Cohort 2 than in Cohort 1, the populations in each Cohort are similar as shown in Table I below. Overall, the mean age is 43 (median age is 44) with a wide age range from 17.3 to 77.8. Across the two groups, about 65% of participants are male. Racially, the majority of clients are Black (63.3%) with about a third who are Caucasian (30.8%) and 5.9% reporting “Other.” The Other category consists of 97 clients of

⁴ One case was removed because it was found also found in Cohort 1

whom 82 are multiple races, 6 Asian, 5 Native American, and 4 Pacific Islanders. These were grouped together into “Other” to compare statistically.

		Cohort 1: Homeless Customers Receiving Workforce Solutions Services + SEARCH Homeless Services (N=358)		Cohort 2: Homeless Customers Receiving Workforce Solutions Services Only (N=1430)	
Demographics		N	% or mean	N	% or mean
Age	Mean (range: 17.3 – 77.8)	358	43.9	1407	43.1
Gender	Male	242	67.8	920	64.4
	Female	115	32.2	508	35.6
	Total	357	100.0	1428	100.0
Race	White	100	29.6	404	31.1
	Black	222	65.7	814	62.7
	Other	16	4.7	81	6.2
	Total	338	100.0	1299	100.0
Ethnicity (Hispanic)***	Yes	29	8.9	183	14.6
	No	296	91.1	1073	85.4
	Total	325	100.0	1256	100.0
Last Grade Completed**	Middle to high school grades	36	10.1	223	15.6
	GED/HS grad	197	55.2	686	48.0
	Some college/Credential/Voc skills	96	26.9	379	26.5
	Associate/College or higher degree	28	7.8	141	9.9
	Total	357	100.0	1429	100.0
Offender status	Yes	64	56.6	272	64.6
	No	49	43.4	149	35.4
	Total	113	100.0	421	100.0
Veteran Status	Yes	60	16.9		
	No	294	83.1		
	Total	354	100.0		
Disability	Yes	126	35.2		
	No	232	64.8		
	Total	358	100.0		
Public assistance	Yes	17	4.7		
	No	341	95.3		
	Total	358	100.0		
Living Situation	Permanent	7	2.0		
	Transitional	62	17.6		
	Institution	37	10.5		
	Emergency shelter	175	49.7		
	Other	71	20.2		
	Total	352	100.0		

** p < .05

*** p < .01

Overall, 88% of clients reported their ethnicity. There is a statistically significant difference (p=.008) between the percentage of Hispanic participants in Cohorts 1 and 2, 8.9 versus 14.6, respectively. In terms of education across the two Cohorts, about 1/3 of participants had some post secondary education but there were significant differences in education between the Cohorts as well: a greater proportion of clients in Cohort 1 completed high school or attained a GED.

Both Cohorts included individuals who did not have reported employment during any of the three quarters prior to entering the Workforce Solutions office. In Cohort 1, 46% of the sample had no prior employment and in Cohort 2 37.8% were lacking employment in the 9 months before enrollment. The number of homeless job seekers reporting employment during any of the three quarters prior to entering the career office was higher than we see in other reports on homeless populations.

Both Cohorts included clients that had histories of criminal offenses, which represent a substantial barrier to employment. In comparing the Cohorts, there was not a statistical difference in the incidence of criminal justice involvement between these groups. However, the number of ex-offenders actually served through the Midtown and other career offices in Harris County is greater than the number reported in this study according to SEARCH management staff in a preliminary findings discussion. This study only includes customers receiving Project Reintegration of Offenders (Project RIO) services⁵ and eligibility for Project RIO is limited. Ex-offenders released from the Harris County jail or those with felony convictions but who do not meet Project RIO eligibility, for example, are not counted in this study because offender status is not tracked as a required demographic characteristic in the TWIST nor HMIS database. The number of ex-offender job seekers who sought services from the Harris County career offices could not be determined from the data gathered for this study. It is not readily apparent that such data is routinely collected by either the workforce investment or homeless assistance systems in Harris County. The ex-offender data presented in this report is a sub-set of all ex-offenders seeking employment assistance from Midtown and the other career offices.

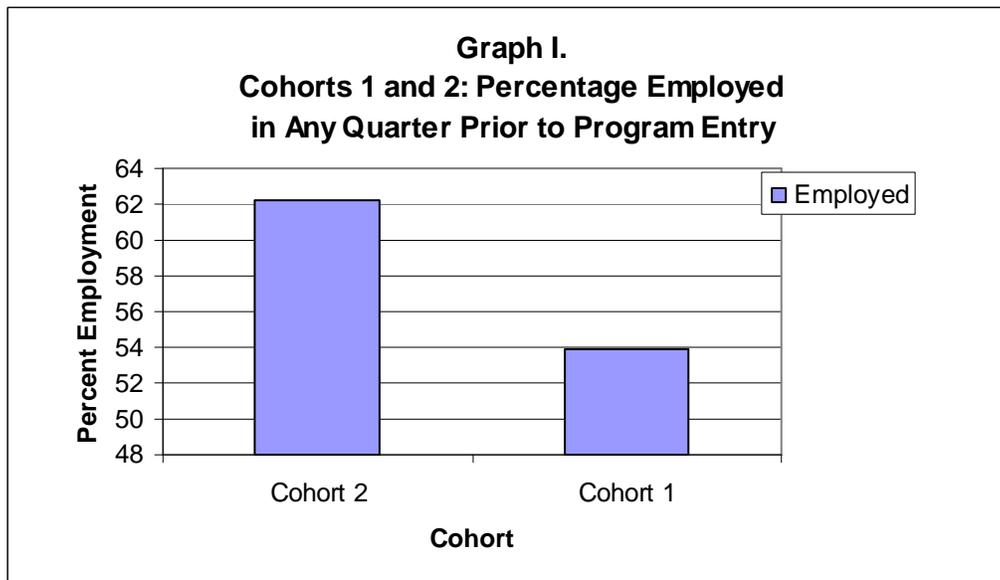
For Cohort 1 there were a number of demographic variables, unavailable for Cohort 2; these are summarized below:

- Veteran status: About 17% or 60 clients in Cohort 1 were veterans.
- Disabilities: One hundred and twenty-six or 35.2% of SEARCH clients were listed as having one or more disabilities including: Alcohol Abuse, Drug abuse, Dual diagnosis, HIV/AIDS, Mental Illness, Physical Medical, Physical/Mobility limits, Vision Impaired and Other.
- Public assistance: A little less than 5% of 17 SEARCH clients received public assistance or income other than wages from the following sources: Veteran's Disability Payment (HUD), Food Stamps (HUD), General Assistance (HUD), Private Disability Insurance (HUD), SSI (HUD), TANF (HUD), and Veteran's Pension (HUD). Income earnings were listed for only ten of the 17 clients and varied widely from \$20 - \$2320 with a mean of \$586.
- Housing status at entry: Information about customers housing was only available for Cohort 1 because Workforce Solutions offices do not track housing status. We recoded customers' living situation based on HUD's tenure/destination taxonomy. At program entry Midtown customers were rarely permanently housed (only 2% were permanently housed) and most often in an institutional setting (about 50% of clients were in institutions initially), transitional housing (slightly less than a third or 28%

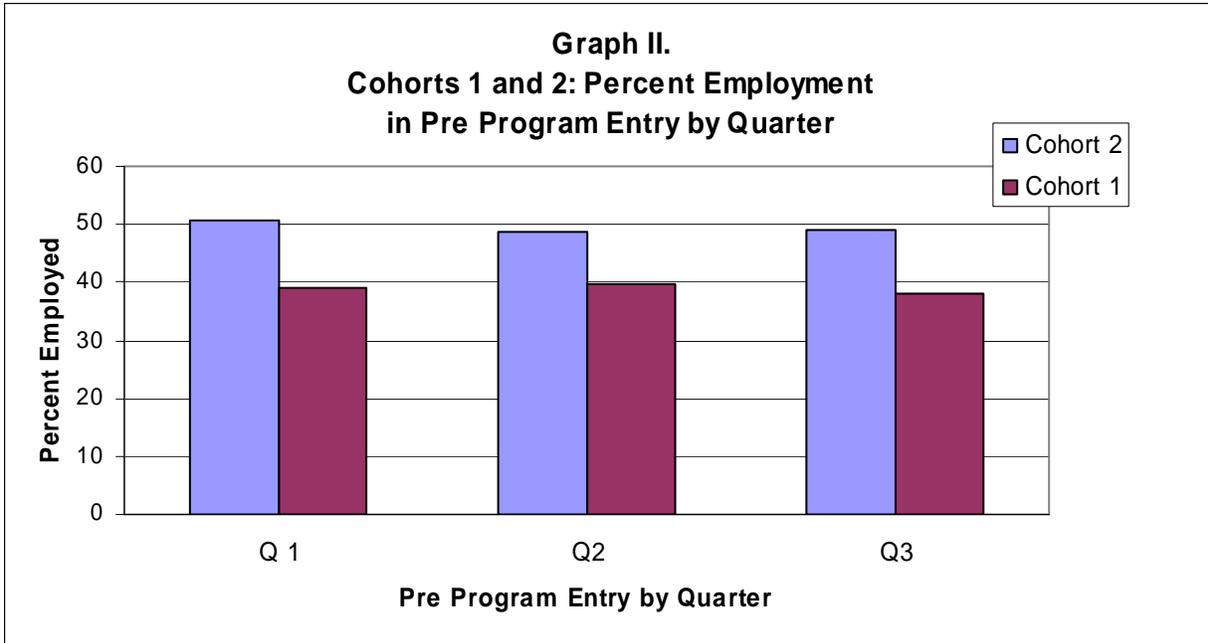
⁵ Project RIO is a dedicated funding stream reflecting a collaborative partnership between three state agencies, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), the Texas Youth Commission (TYC), and the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC). It helps ex-offenders and adjudicated youth re-enter the labor market by equipping them with the necessary skills, attitudes, and abilities, and guiding them toward post-release job opportunities.

were in transitional settings), or some other inhabitable setting (about 20% were in these settings).

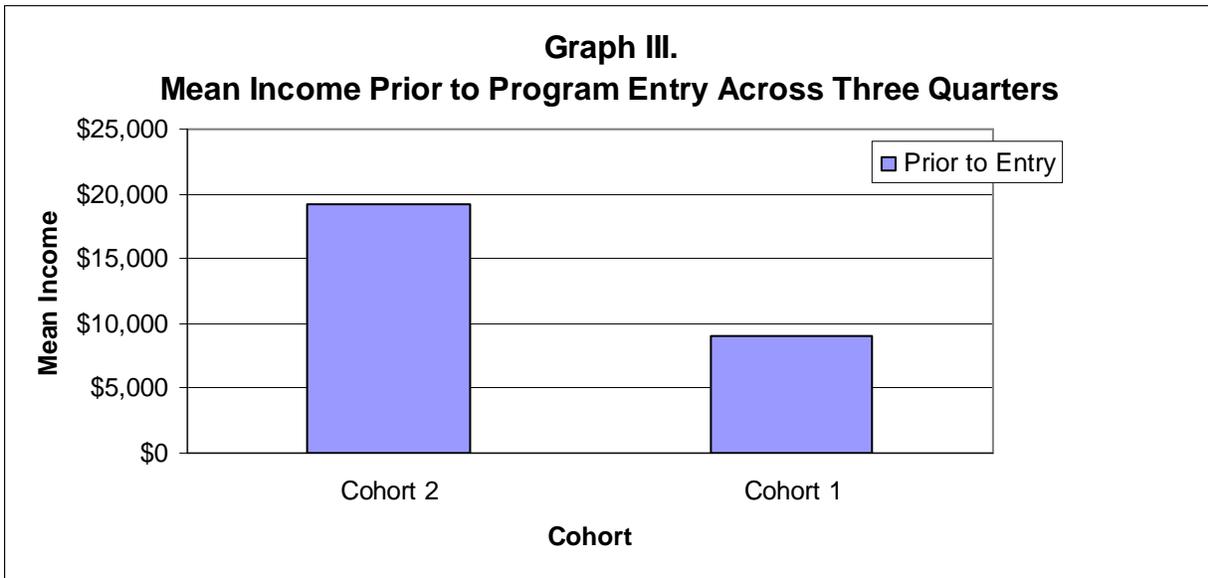
In looking at prior work experience and income history for the Cohorts, Graph I. shows that Cohort 2 had a significantly higher percentage of persons employed over the nine months prior to entry than Cohort 1 (p=.004). Of the customers in Cohort 2, 62% had employment during the 9 months before their initial visit. While in Cohort 1, 54% of the customers held a job during those 9 months.



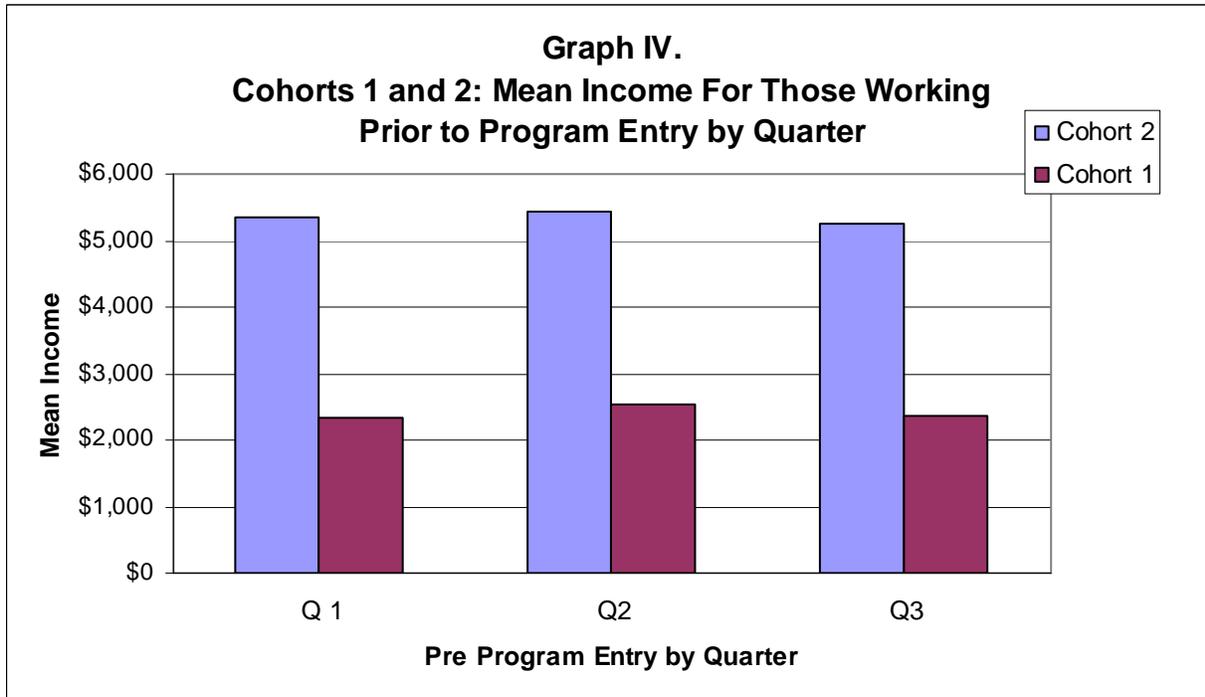
When looking more closely at the nine months before program participation in Graph II., it is clear the group of customers in Cohort 1 who sought services from Midtown had less work in each quarter as well as cumulatively for all three quarters than did customers in Cohort 2. During the quarter customers first came to the Workforce Solutions Midtown, 39% were employed compared to 51% of the customers in Cohort 2.



As seen in Graph III. below, Cohort 2 also had greater income during the 9 months prior to entry to the Workforce Solutions offices, averaging \$19,240. This is in contrast to their counterparts in Cohort 1 earning on average \$9,005.



Graph IV. provides additional information about the income of both Cohorts showing the earnings separately by quarter, and again Cohort 2 show superior income nearly twice as much, to Cohort 1. Average quarterly wages for Cohort 2 just prior to program entry were \$5,353; wages for Cohort 1 in this period were \$2,316. It would appear that the customers who go to Midtown are different in their work experience pre-entry income.



Midtown Career Office Staffing Description

The staff of any one stop career center is an obviously critical resource to operating and delivering effective, quality workforce services. The Midtown office is no different. However, given the customer base of individuals facing multiple and significant barriers to employment the personality and approach staff use may be particularly important to engage homeless job seekers who face multiple complex barriers and whose experience of human services programs may have been previously insufficient to help them out of homelessness. The Workforce Solutions Midtown is staffed by 14 fulltime equivalent staff for most of the study period. The positions included a Career Office Manager; a Supervisor; 4 Personal Service Representatives; 2 Employment Counselors; a Tracker; a Financial Aid Specialist; a Resource Room Specialist; a Seminar Facilitator; a Greeter and a TWC Employment Counselor was added in 2006. Nine of these positions were supported under the contract with HGAC; four were funded by HUD grants; and one supported by TWC.

Staff stability in services to homeless individuals can be an issue in maintaining relationships with clients who may require long term interventions. At Midtown, despite the fact that 25 different people occupied these 14 positions over the 3 year term of the project, there were no reports of negative consequences for customers. However, staff turnover did have impacts on program management and operations of the office. Most notably, important activities, such as building a working relationship with the Texas Division of Rehabilitation Services, could not occur because customer service delivery had priority for staff time. When vacancies in the staffing pattern occurred, other staff and management contributed to fill the gap and persevered to maintain service delivery. The position of Greeter was held by 5 different people. Three staff remains from those originally hired in 2005. All other staff turned over.

Information about staff education and experience was available for nine members of the Midtown career office. Background experiences include previous employment with homeless populations and special needs populations. All staff has a high school diploma; four have a Bachelors degree; and two staff has some college. When asked about their job related skills in their current positions, staff talked about their interpersonal skills to relate with their customers. “You have to be empathetic. We put ourselves in their shoes; listen well to what they say.” They believe staff needs more of a social service background not so much a sales background. “You have to understand the culture of homelessness – the entitlements. It’s important to have a desire to help people overcome their barriers – being creative, flexible – maintain the balance between enforcing the rules and being a bleeding heart. You become part of their lives it’s a responsibility. You have to hope for them until they are able to have hope.”

Description of the Employment and Homeless Assistance Services

Employment and Homeless Assistance Services

All Workforce Solutions office customers, including those at Midtown, can access 48 distinct services depending upon their unique individual needs. In addition to these services, the Midtown customers have access to an additional 48 services offered by SEARCH’s job bank and resource center. These two HUD funded programs at SEARCH are co-located with the Workforce Solutions office. In fact, the services and staff for these programs are adjacent to each other on the first floor of the SEARCH building.

In this study, we categorized the services received across both Cohorts into seven overarching service clusters. The number of times the service was reported; the average number that each was used per customer; and the percentage of the total for each cluster are presented in Table II.

Service Clusters ⁶	Cohort 1 Services Use (N=358)			Cohort 2 Services Use (N=1430)		
	N	Avg. # per client	% Total	N	Avg. # per client	% Total
Assessment Services	13	0.0	0.00	124	0.1	0.01
Counseling/Case Management Services	1086	3.0	0.09	408	0.3	0.04
Customer Employment Planning Services	299	0.8	0.02	1819	1.3	0.16
Job Linking & Searching Services	3283	9.2	0.27	5794	4.1	0.51
Training & Job Preparation Services	497	1.4	0.04	1318	0.9	0.12
Concrete Job Support Services	6764	18.9	0.56	61	0.0	0.01
Miscellaneous Services	243	0.7	0.02	1871	1.3	0.16

⁶ Service clusters were established to organize and reduce the number of services in order to consider and make meaningful the frequency of service use.

Overall, customers in Cohort 1 used more services than those in Cohort 2. The most frequently used service on average by Cohort 1 is Concrete Job Support Services (18.9 per customer), which contrasts with Cohort 2 which had none of this service. It should be noted that career centers share access to a source of funding for many of the concrete job support services. However, the availability of these services is more extensive at the Midtown career office because of its co-location with homeless assistance services provided at SEARCH. Following Concrete Job Support Services, the service cluster used next frequently on average by Cohort 1 customers is Job Linking & Searching Services. For homeless job seeking customers in Cohort 2, receiving services through the 19 Workforce Solutions offices, Job Linking and Searching Services is used a mean of 4 times per client compared to 9.2 times per Midtown customers. Yet, the percent total use of these services is higher for Cohort 2 than Cohort 1 clients (.51 v. .27) which indicates greater overall use of these services.

Length of Stay in Employment Services

In addition to examining service utilization, we also examined the length of time customers remained enrolled in employment services at the Workforce Solutions career office services. Length of stay was determined by the number of days between a customer's date of enrollment and exit date. For customers who had multiple entry and exit dates unique instances were summed. While customers in Cohort 2 had a significantly shorter length of stay than Cohort 1 customers (229 v. 205 mean days), $p=.0001$. There was a smaller range for length of stay in Cohort 1 than Cohort 2 (1791 v. 3290 maximum days). The shorter length of stay in services for Cohort 2 indicates that they may not need as many services or as much time in the program considering that they come into the career office with greater work experience and income than Cohort 1 customers.

Success Rates for Key Project Outcomes

In this section we describe how well customers achieved their credential attainment, housing, and employment outcomes. Readers are reminded that this report describes an innovative demonstration project and the research was not designed to test the power of the interventions used nor make assertions about cause and effect relationships. The outcome data presented here is best used to further understand the complexities of addressing homelessness for this population.

Credential Attainment Outcome

Cohort 2 attained a credential at a significantly higher rate than customers in Cohort 1, 2.3% (N=2) versus .6%, (N=33), $p=.03$. Achieving recognized credentials can help job seekers secure better, higher wage jobs (Matus-Grossman, and Gooden 2001). While this fact may contribute to their post exit earnings picture, we did not control for prior levels of credentialing.

Housing Outcomes

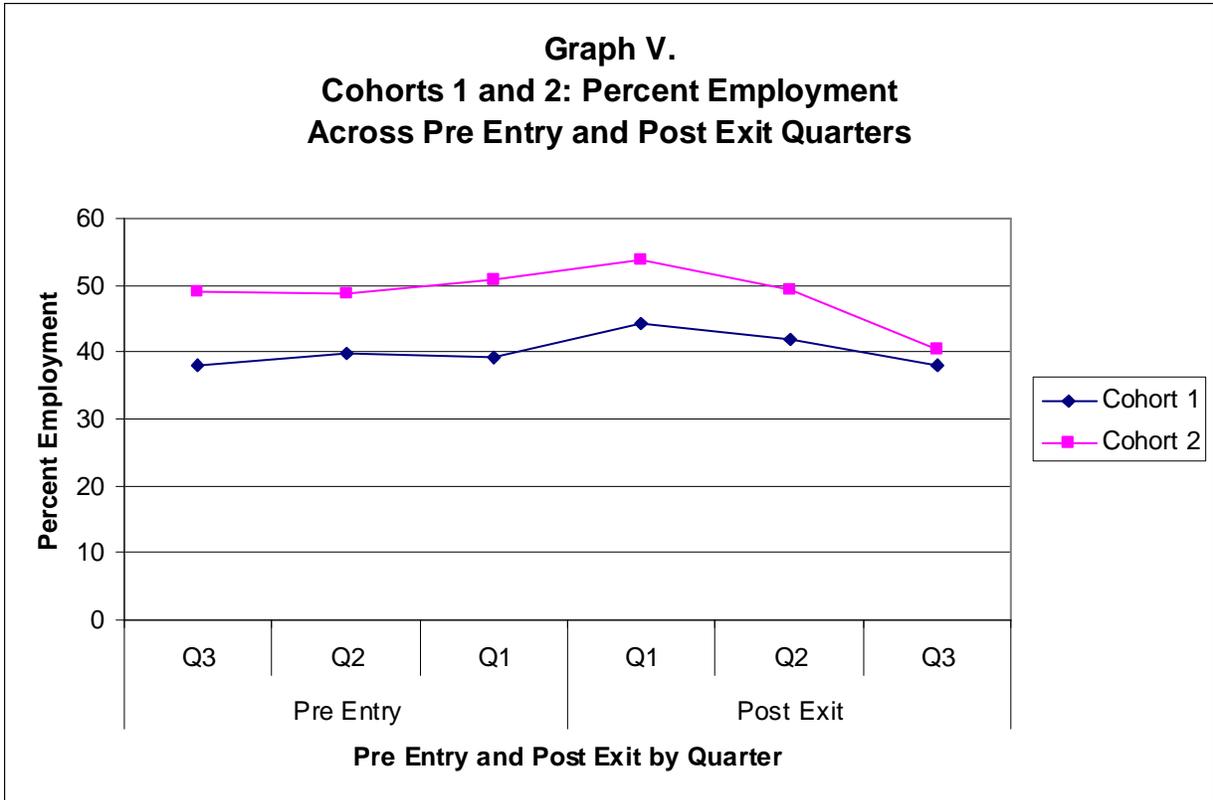
As previously noted, ending homelessness is about people entering permanent housing and having the income needed to maintain that housing and meet personal expenses. Table III. shows that for customers whose whereabouts were known at the time of exit from SEARCH's job bank or resource center, almost half ended their homelessness having attained permanent housing (renting an apartment or house, receiving a subsidy for housing, residing in Section 8 housing, etc.) as compared to 2% who were permanently housed prior to receiving SEARCH services. Almost 44% were in transitional housing including living with family or friends versus 28% at program entry. Finally, a very small percentage of clients (6.8%) ended up in institutional, emergency, or other settings at exit as compared to 80% of clients at program entry. These very large shifts in types of housing from program entry to exit especially as seen in permanent housing are in the right direction and indicate that the program may be helping customers to achieve the goal of obtaining permanent housing.

Type of Housing	N	Percent
Permanent	138	49.3
Transitional	123	43.9
Emergency	1	.4
Institution	13	4.6
Other	5	1.8

Employment Outcomes

In examining employment rates prior to program entry across a 9-month period, we found that Cohort 2 had a higher percentage of employed persons than did Cohort 1, 62% v. 54%, respectively (as detailed in the demographic results). With this difference in mind, we examined the employment trends post program exit for each Cohort. Graph V. reveals that:

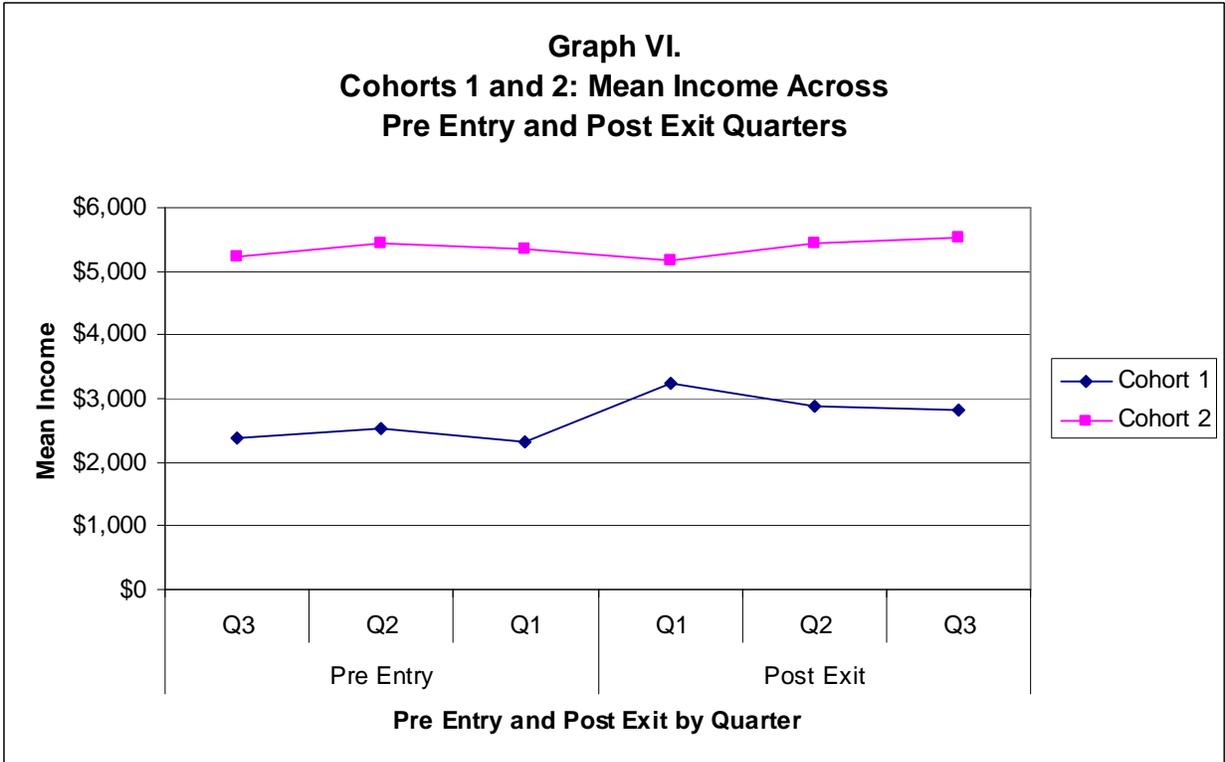
1. There is a trend towards improved employment when participants exited the program (i.e., the difference between Quarter 1 pre-entry and Quarter 1 post-exit ($p=.06$ for Cohort 2), indicating that the Work Source services may be impacting employment.
2. Both programs show similar patterns: a slight increase in the first three months post exit followed by decline in the following six post exit months.
3. The decline appears steeper in Cohort 2 indicating that SEARCH may be helping participants maintain employment better over time.



Income Outcomes

As with the pre-enrollment employment data described above, the income earned prior to program entry across three quarters was higher for persons in Cohort 2 than those in Cohort 1, \$19,240 v. 9.005, respectively. Surprisingly, we don't see the same pattern for income that we saw for employment. When we examine post exit earnings (see Graph VI.):

1. Combined 9 month post-exit income significantly increases from pre-program income for Cohort 2 ($p=.02$).
2. In comparing Quarter 1 pre-income earnings to Quarter 1 post-exit earnings, there is a trend towards improved income for Cohort 1 ($p=.08$).
3. Mean wage earnings appear to remain relatively stable over time while the average earnings for Cohort 2 appear to gradually increase or at least doesn't decrease as we saw in employment.



Relating Employment and Income Outcomes to Length of Stay

We examined the relationship between employment, income, and length of stay and found the following:

1. For Cohort 1, individuals who obtained a job had shorter length of stays than those who did not (143 v. 236 days), $p=.02$.
2. For both Cohorts 1 and 2, there is a significant relationship between shorter lengths of stay and improved income from pre program entry to post program exit, ($r=-.213$ for Cohort 1; $r=-.111$ for Cohort 2), $p=.01$.

Not surprisingly, these findings indicate individuals who become employed (at least in Cohort 1) and go on to earn income, require a shorter amount of time in the program than those who remain unemployed and do not earn income.

Workforce Solutions Midtown Components Considered Effective

In this section we consider which Workforce Solutions Midtown components are considered most effective in meeting program outcomes. Using focus groups with Workforce Solutions participants, staff, and conversations with administrators, this component explores which services are most valued in promoting positive outcomes as well as the unique challenges and accomplishments of implementing a Workforce Solutions program within a homeless assistance program.

Focus Group Findings

A total of 26 individuals participated in the key stakeholder interviews using a semi-structured protocol specific to their role in the project (see Appendix III and IV). Interviews included: 11 Midtown career office staff and 15 Midtown customers. Project staff was interviewed as a group and customers were interviewed in separate group meeting. The customers, who were recent members of Cohort 1, used the services at both the Workforce Solutions Midtown and either the job bank or resource center at SEARCH. Six customer focus group participants were actively seeking employment and nine were employed. Their jobs were mostly full-time and included work in food services, construction, medical office, sales and other services. All participants were homeless at the time of this focus group or recently acquired permanent housing. Two were in permanent housing situations following a stay in the area's rapid re-housing program. Others (13) were living in shelters or transitional facilities or "bunk houses".

Findings are grouped around themes that emerged from the overarching goals focus group goals: how the Midtown services are different from other Work Source centers, which services were helpful and which were not, and what impacts SEARCH has had on program participation.

Services at the Midtown Career Office and Other Career Offices

Combining Midtown and SEARCH services helps meet the diverse, comprehensive needs of homeless job seekers in Harris County

The two sets of services provided by the career office and SEARCH's resource center and job bank are comprehensive and not available at any other career office in Harris County. Midtown customers can access many diverse services from job leads to job training to supportive services such as purchasing tools, uniforms, boots, transportation assistance, bus passes, child care, assistance with job placement including resume assistance, online applications, and computer classes (access to 20 computers and 4 telephones). In addition workshops are offered to build customer skills such as resume writing, computer orientation, grooming and personal hygiene. Braiding the funding streams supporting these programs means customers can seamlessly access what they need to get or keep a job. For example, the Workforce Solutions career office can pay for training in only high demand occupations, where as the job bank can purchase training for occupations that may not be high demand/high growth, but for which employment is available, such as dog grooming training. Homeless job seekers, especially those with multiple and significant barriers to employment, need access to concrete job support services and those such as daily lunch, community voicemail, laundry facilities, showers, etc. are co-located and readily available.

Midtown and SEARCH attracted a homeless job seeker population motivated to work and in need of many diverse services

Midtown customers were clear about the importance of work in their lives not only as a source of income but, perhaps equally, if not more important, were the other gains that work brings to their lives – "independence, self-esteem, participation in society". One customer described how

unemployment affects him: “Not working for me means having too much time on my hands and when I do, well...it brings me down and that’s not good for my mental health”. Those that do go to work do so in a variety of occupations but may be restricted to “starter jobs” that is work that does not pay a living wage or one that allows them to afford market rate housing and the things they require to meet their needs. Generally, customers hoped for more satisfying work and better paying jobs, but found such jobs illusive. Other career offices send to Midtown their “high risk” customers or those who are outside of their “customer base”.

Midtown’s “vocationalized” culture supports homeless customer motivation to get a job and for customers to do as much for themselves as possible

Midtown is a welcoming place and the staff is helpful. However, as one customer put it “if you come to the career office thinking that the staff is going to give you a job, you are mistaken. They will help you help yourself. You can talk with staff about how to interview, how to address work history gaps or felony convictions, but you have to be prepared to follow through on contacting employers and selling yourself. It’s up to you.” This firm but supportive and highly interactive strategy with homeless customers reflects the competency training and experience with the population among the Midtown staff. Staff are aware of such strategies as motivational interviewing to help customers overcome their challenges and secure jobs. Absent the Midtown career office to go to, most customers would not be as far along in their job search journey as they are and, for some, they would not be able to secure employment.

Midtown offers a welcoming environment to homeless job seekers.

According to customers and staff, the Midtown career office has “the most services to help homeless people”. They reported the atmosphere and staff attitudes as different and welcoming in comparison to other career offices. Midtown’s location was important as it was “more bus friendly” and near other services. The positive remarks from these career office customers sharply contrast with a survey report about homeless customer experiences with one stop career centers in Chicago who were not satisfied with the services they received (Chicago Coalition for the Homeless 2005).

Which Services Were Helpful and Which Were Not

Once you get a job, you can’t easily get to Midtown for help to keep it

Customers have challenges in maintaining employment but are not sure what services might help them to keep a job or how they could access job retention services if they are available. Once employed its hard to keep a connection with supportive services that might contribute to continuous employment. For some such services might focus on staying away from potential pitfalls (e.g. Going back to the old neighborhood where you used drugs in the past; using paychecks for partying and not paying bills; managing critical feedback about job performance, etc.). The prescribed roles that staff is allowed to perform may inhibit a focus on the kind of job retention services homeless customers may need to keep their jobs. Post employment “vocational case management” is lacking – especially for the first 90 days of employment that might include on the job coaching in which staff might interact with the employer for a new worker.

SEARCH services are distinct from Midtown services

Registration for each set of services is separate; physical access, although adjacent, requires customers to physically exit the building and re-enter the building through a different door.

According to one customer, “if you are going to use either service, you’d better plan to spend the day. It takes a long time and you have to wait to get help.” The wait does not seem attributed to poor operational procedures, but is more likely a function of too few staff helping too many people.

“I was told ‘you don’t look like you’re homeless, you need to get a homeless letter’”

The separation of services means rules and personnel are different which customers believe is not seamless or easy to access.

Access to resource center services is not prioritized for people who are actively job searching. Standing in line to take a shower and wait even though a customer has a job interview to go to can and does occur. Customers believe that people who are doing things to help themselves leave homelessness should receive some priority to access services.

More than half of the participants supported the experience described by one customer who said, “I am homeless and looking for work....I went in to the wrong door and had to go around the SEARCH building to a different door.....when I got to the reception desk and asked what do I need to do – I was told ‘you don’t look like you’re homeless, you need to get a homeless letter’. I thought what is this – where am I to get a homeless letter; I was looking for a job, so I was dressed for interviews, you know wearing a dress, nice shoes and makeup. The receptionist said I did not look like I was a homeless person. I went to one place to get this letter. They told me to come back that afternoon and stay overnight, and then I could get a letter. This is a bunch of bull....homeless letter! I had to call a friend at Star of Hope. She helped and faxed me a letter”. As illustrated by this consumer, customers indicated that the interactions with resource center staff were experienced as being disrespectful and lacking in understanding about customers’ efforts to find work and permanent housing. However, customers did find the Midtown employment staff to be considerate and helpful.

Workforce development services are not closely linked with permanent housing, not even for customers with disabilities or long-term homelessness

Once employment is secured, homeless workers face the challenge of keeping their job. At times, facing insurmountable odds, one participant described his situation as other group members listened intently, nodding their heads as if they identified with this experience. He said, “I am having trouble getting housing while I’m working. I’ve been looking for 6 months; clean and sober for 12 months. The stress of it all starts to affect my work. It pushes me to the limit.”

SEARCH Impacts on Program Participation

Homeless ex-offenders face significant difficulties to leave homelessness and secure employment

Many homeless job seekers have histories which include felony convictions. This ex-offender status presents significant challenges for homeless job seekers.

“Everybody makes a mistake, you can’t punish me forever. I paid my dues. But, they make it very hard to get to where you want to go. Having a felony means you can’t easily get a job or housing.”

Despite completing their jail sentences for the crimes they committed, upon release

customers find employers and landlords unwilling to hire or rent to them. One respondent put it this way, “Everybody makes a mistake, you can’t punish me forever. I paid my dues. But, they make it very hard to get to where you want to go. Having a felony means you can’t easily get a job or housing.” The staff possesses the skills to help homeless ex-offender customers seek and secure employment. This was recognized by focus group members. Staff speculated that if they had the ability to pull criminal background checks with a customer’s permission they could secure the facts about a customer’s criminal justice involvement to develop an appropriate job search plan thereby improving their services to these customers.

Finding out about jobs and services frequently occurs outside the formal service referral system

While advertising and marketing strategies attract some customers, the word of mouth network among homeless people seems to help job seekers find Midtown or SEARCH services and also to find job leads. Whether it’s hearing about an employer who is hiring from a peer during a day labor stint or from a friend of a friend who is working and whose employer is seeking new hires or if a fellow shelter or transitional housing resident suggest SEARCH as a helpful place, Midtown and SEARCH draw a particular homeless population to its doors. The SEARCH reputation services as a key marketing tool that brings to the agency a clientele in need of a variety of services and who want to use concrete job support services as well a job linking services.

Transportation to a good job is not always possible

Getting a job or keeping a job, particularly good jobs or jobs that pay well is difficult because public transportation is not available in certain areas. For example you can’t take a job in Baytown, Conroe or Pasadena areas because of limited public transportation. Respondents claimed that they can’t even take a job, save money and buy a car – it’s too expensive and gas prices put driving your own car out of reach of most customers. Recent changes in the Metro bus transfer policy were identified as a hardship for homeless job seekers. It requires riders to use a bus transfer from one bus to another within a 2 hour time limit. This change has increased transportation costs for homeless individuals. Transportation is not an insignificant issue for these customers nor is it one that SEARCH can impact alone. Nonetheless, transportation challenges have negative consequences for homeless job seekers.

SEARCH helps customers by providing housing, but more is needed

During the past year, Midtown gained access to temporary housing through the City’s Rapid Re-Housing program for homeless people who can get a job and earn income sufficiently to secure permanent housing in 90 days. Unfortunately, the need for these beds is far greater than the number of beds available. Several focus group members acknowledged the importance of this resource. The YMCA, rapid re-housing program, Star of Hope and other temporary housing are options for some customers. For others continued living on the streets is necessary until they secure enough money for housing. Not all customers are aware of these temporary housing options available to them. SEARCH might have greater impact on their customers’ success if there were direct linkages with permanent supportive housing that could improve the employment outcomes for customers at Midtown.

The amount of services available to help homeless job seekers is far less than the demand

In sum, it became evident from the focus groups that the need for services outstrips the resources available. Homeless job seekers, especially those with multiple barriers and special needs require staff to help customers based on their individual needs. Services may need customizing or may need to be tailored to the individual and be client-centered. Respondents suggested several remedies to improve career office services to homeless people. These included:

More Workforce Solutions career offices need to combine services with homeless assistance agencies; blending the two tighter and creating more of them;

The amount of resources available at the Midtown career office should be available at other Workforce Solutions centers;

More employers are needed that hire people with felony convictions. Customers need help with the trapped experience of being an ex-offender and homeless. Customers need help on how to handle situations in applications and interviews with employers.

Post employment job retention services are needed to assist newly hired workers to keep their jobs, and when possible advance to better ones. No member reported receipt of supportive services specifically designed to help them keep their jobs. Some do have contact with Workforce Solutions staff post job placement, but this seemed to be an exception rather than the rule.

Limitations

As with any evaluation study, certain factors may impact the interpretation of the data. This research and demonstration project is no exception and we identify these here. Foremost, this study is descriptive in nature and therefore conclusions about the causes for outcomes or other casual relationships between data cannot be determined. We did not directly compare services between the Cohorts nor did we model whether certain services predicted outcomes. Readers are cautioned about making cause-effect inferences from the results reported here.

The evaluation design assumed that both Cohorts were homeless. Cohort 1 is a population that meets the federal definition of homelessness and is reported to HUD as such. However, classifying an individual as homeless in the other 19 Workforce Solutions offices may not be as rigorous. This fact could have implications for the number of truly homeless individuals in Cohort 2.

Information about pre and post housing status was limited to Cohort 1. This was primarily due to the fact that the Workforce Solutions career offices do not collect data about housing status. Such data collection is not required by either the TWC or the U.S. DOL. Thus observations about the homeless job seekers in Cohort 2 and their permanent housing outcomes cannot be made. This is a significant short coming in the delivery of employment services to homeless people.

The data did not include information about all of the barriers to employment faced by the job seekers in both Cohorts. There was limited data about disability for Cohort 1; no information about the types of disability that we know can impact employment outcomes; no disability information about Cohort 2. For example, previous studies suggest differential improvements for certain behavioral health disorders (McGurk et al. 2003; Pickett-Schenk et al. 2002; Gonzalez and Rosenheck 2002; Zuvekas and Hill 2000) and that receipt of public entitlements because of

disability can inhibit employment outcomes (Resnick et al. 2003). The study is also limited because we did not have disability data on Cohort 2.

Identification of ex-offender status was limited to a subset of career office customers. Previous incarceration can have consequences for vocational outcomes (Cooke 2005; McGuire and Rosenheck 2004). Counting only participants in Project RIO may inadvertently have resulted in an undercount of ex-offenders in either Cohort. This is a barrier to employment that might have negative consequences for the employment outcomes of either Cohort. Thus caution must be exercised in interpreting the results of this study as this factor might account for some of the differences in the outcomes for these two Cohorts of homeless job seekers.

In matching homeless job seekers using services in the County's Workforce Solution offices with the HMIS, we assumed that job seekers who did not appear in HMIS were not active clients in any homeless assistance services. There is the potential however that even though the HMIS is intended to be the countywide database for all homeless services, that customers in Cohort 2 may receive supportive services from other agencies not participating in the Harris County Continuum of Care. Evaluators did not have access to any other database such as that operated by Harris County Hospital District or the Mental Health/Mental Retardation Authority that might indicate that Cohort 2 customers received additional services. Therefore it is possible that participants in Cohort 2 actually received additional services that might contribute to their vocational success.

Discussion

As an exploratory study with a preliminary investigation of how homeless people are served in the mainstream workforce system, the descriptions and findings help tell the story of what happens when that system attempts a pilot project targeting homeless job seekers.. First and foremost, the project demonstrates that homeless people are not work shirkers. Of the 358 customers in Cohort 1, 44.4% entered employment in the first quarter after exit; in Cohort 2, 53.8% entered employment in the first quarter after exit. These rates are greater than the reported 36% for participants in the federal Job Training for the Homeless Demonstration (Trutko et al. 1998). Homeless job seekers in both Cohorts of this study not only expressed the desire to work but sought services to do so, entered employment and sustained their job earnings substantially more than their unemployed peers.

While some reports in the literature offer lessons in program or service design or point out the importance of interagency partnerships to serve homeless customers in the career office environment (Henderson-Frakes 2004), to the best of our knowledge, there have been no previous efforts to match data from the workforce and homeless assistance systems. This research and demonstration project is among the few pioneering, but growing number of efforts to address the employment needs of homeless people.

There is also very little data in the workforce or homeless literature regarding the earnings of homeless people. Zuvekas and Hill (2000) noted that while a surprisingly large number of homeless people work, few homeless persons are able to generate significant earnings from employment alone. But these authors do not provide adequate detail about the income earned by people in their study. The federal poverty rate for a single person in 2007 was \$10,210 or \$2,552.50 per quarter. This study contributes information about the specific earnings of homeless

job seekers. We found that Cohort 2 earnings before and after using the career office was greater than this poverty measure, whereas prior to entry Cohort 1 hovered just below the poverty level and rose above it at exit. Burt and colleagues (1999) found in their survey of homeless people that homeless and formerly homeless clients were significantly below the poverty level. Lubell and colleagues (2003) observed that even among non-disabled, non-elderly adults in HUD assisted housing programs earnings for most of the employed do not exceed the federal poverty level.

There appears to be two subpopulations identified by the data in this study. One group is composed of people with less work experience and who earned on average less than \$2,600 in any one of the three quarters prior to entering the Midtown career office. Cohort 2 was distinctly different having more employment and earning more than twice that of Cohort 1 in any one of the three quarters before going to one of the other 19 career offices in the County. Given this apparent difference between the two Cohorts, we cannot conclude that the combined workforce and homeless assistance services at SEARCH is either superior or inferior to the impacts of the services Cohort 2 received from the Workforce Solutions offices alone. We cannot determine why certain job seekers went to certain career offices. We speculate that perhaps Midtown's association with SEARCH, a provider of comprehensive homeless assistance services, might draw more people with greater needs and less vocational strength to its doors. Such gravitation to Midtown was not instigated by Midtown staff in their marketing or outreach activities. However, staff did report that occasionally SEARCH street outreach staff may bring homeless people to Midtown for employment services. However, this appears to be the exception.

Homeless job seekers in both Cohorts used services and increased their pre-enrollment income after exiting the program. The services used by both Cohorts may have contributed to their vocational success. Cohort 1 used 18.9 concrete job support services per customer on average compared to zero use on average by Cohort 2. This suggests that the Midtown Cohort has distinct needs that are greater than their counterparts receiving services at other career offices. Based on their vocational performance prior to entry (as compared to Cohort 2) and that about 1/3 of Cohort 1 had one or more disabilities, we suspect these services were not only necessary but were essential to achieve their vocational goals.

In this report we described the variety of services provided in the mainstream workforce system through the career offices to homeless people. The identification of people as homeless is a fairly well defined practice at SEARCH and is a requirement of HUD whereas the Workforce Solutions career office system does not require the identification of housing status nor does that system apply the HUD definition of homelessness uniformly nor rigorously. Nonetheless, nearly 2,200 homeless people were served by the Gulf Coast Workforce Investment Board during the 18 month study period. Because it is not clear how many of these customers received WIA training services, this study cannot counter the assertion that certain provisions of WIA may hinder the ability of the homeless population to receive appropriate job training services (United States General Accounting Office 2000). The braiding of employment services funding streams by HGAC seems to limit the possible negative consequences of WIA provisions or the limited amount of WIA training slots because other funding streams are also available to support training services.

About 700 homeless people who sought and received career office services also received Continuum of Care services in this study. The fact that nearly 1500 of the homeless job seekers in Cohort 2 were not enrolled in the HMIS suggests that these homeless people are possibly not

counted in the local Continuum of Care system of homeless services. It would appear that a significant number of homeless people looking for work may also be eligible and might benefit from homeless assistance services provided by the Continuum of Care in Harris County. This might be an area for further collaboration between the workforce and homeless assistance systems in the County. In addition we learned that there are differences in definitions, data collection methods, and performance measures between the workforce and homeless systems. For example, ex-offender status under the workforce systems' Project RIO is a narrow population specifically to target funds for people recently released from state prison. In the homeless assistance system, people with criminal justice backgrounds are more likely to have histories with local jails than state prisons. The McKinney Act governing HUD's homeless programs specifically excludes certain individuals discharged from correctional institutions into homelessness.⁷

Conclusion

The research and demonstration project at SEARCH shows that homeless individuals want to work and if provided vocational assistance will work. In comparing homeless job seekers who received Workforce Solutions services with a group of homeless job seekers who received both Workforce Solutions career office services and homeless assistance services we found differences in employment experiences and income history. To compare outcomes, these pre-existing differences between the Cohorts have to be controlled statistically. The result was no statistical differences between the Cohorts in terms of their overall post exit employment and post-exit income. However, it does not account for why homeless people with less employment and earnings tended to go to the research and demonstration project where as homeless job seekers with greater employment and earnings sought services from other career offices. In the results of this study we observed a trend for post exit income in which it remained relatively stable for both Cohorts (slight increase for Cohort 2). This may or may not be due to program services. However, it might be appropriate to consider interventions after exit that are aimed at sustaining this stability, considering strategies to help workers secure advancement or better jobs from this stable platform or conduct further inquiry regarding the success of these workers and ways to build upon their job retention.

It is noteworthy that at Midtown and SEARCH over 90% of the customers entered permanent or transitional housing as a destination at exit. Obviously in addition to earning income, these homeless job seekers and workers need a roof over their heads in order to end their homelessness. It is unfortunate that we lacked data to report the housing status of the 1430 customers in Cohort 2.

The Workforce Solutions Midtown office combined with the job bank and resource center services provided at SEARCH appears to fill a gap in the workforce service delivery system for a sub-population of homeless job seekers who sought services at SEARCH rather than from other career offices in Harris County. Further research is needed regarding the description of this population and how it differs from other Workforce Solutions office customers. It seems that the combined services at Midtown was helpful to the customers who went there for employment

⁷ US Code, Title 42, Section 11302. Stated in Cornell University Legal Information Institute Home Page.
<http://www4.law.cornell.edu/uscode/42/11302.html>.

assistance as evidenced in the reports of customers as well as in their post exit employment trajectory.

Program planners may use the information from this report to explore strategies to better serve this population and to guide next steps for improving the outcomes of homeless people. For example, exploring the use of supported employment strategies to improve employment over the 9 months after exiting the Workforce Solutions office might improve their job retention and earnings profile. Or considering the staff skill sets at the Midtown office might inform training for other career office personnel who might serve a more disadvantaged homeless population and who might improve upon their identification of homeless job seekers.

Appendix I. Services at Workforce Solutions Offices in the Gulf Coast Workforce Investment Area

Basic Educational Skills/ABE	Occupational/Vocational Training
Bonding Assistance	ONET Assessment
Career Guidance Services	Other
Case Management	Other Activity Contact
Community Service	Other Federal Training
Comprehensive Objective Assessment	Other State or Local Training
Concurrent Participation	Planned Gap In Service
Counseling	Referral to Educational Services
Determine Good Cause	Referred to FCJL Job
Employability Development Plan	Referred to Federal Job
GED	Resume/Application/Interview Preparation
High School-CHOICES	Short-Term Prevocational Services
Job Browse Contact	Subsidized Employment
Job Development	Subsidized Employment - Other Funds
Job Posting Match Contact	TABE-Math
Job Readiness/Pre-Employment Skills	TABE-Reading
Job Search Assistance	Training - Non-TWC
	Training Provider Info (ETP Performance Info)
Job Search Basic	Transition Assistance Program (TAP)-Enrolled
Job Search Workshop	Unsubsidized Employment/Employment Entry
Job Seeker Browse Contact	WIA Training
Job Seeker Match Contact	Work Experience
Job Skills/Training	Workfare
Labor Market Information	WOTC Eligibility
Needs Related Payments	

Appendix II. SEARCH Homeless Assistance Services

Resource Center

Adult Basic Education
Bathing Facilities
Bus Fare
Case/Care Management
Clothing
Comprehensive Job Assistance Centers
Contraception
Dental Referrals
Eye Care Referrals
Food Stamp Applications
Furniture
Health Care
Health Care Referrals
HIV Testing
Holiday Gifts/Toys
Housing Search Assistance
Identification Cards
Information and Referral
Laundry Facilities
Lawyer Referral Services
Local Bus Services
Medical Public Assistance Programs
Medical Social Work
Mental Health Care and Counseling
Psychiatrist Referrals
Psychologist Referrals
Sack Lunches/Dinners
Social Security Disability Applications
Soup Kitchens
Substance Abuse Counseling
Substance Abuse Screening
Telephone Facilities
Temporary Mailing Address
Veteran/Military Health Insurance

Job Bank

Bedding/Linen
Bus Fare
Case/Care Management Referrals
Clothing
Community Voicemail
Dental Referrals
Drug/Alcohol Testing
Eye Care Referrals
Food Pantries
Food Vouchers
Holiday Gifts/Toys
Housing Search Assistance
Information and Referral
Job Development
Job Readiness
Job Search Resource Centers
Job Search/Placement
Job Training
Kitchenware
Lawyer Referral Services
Life Skills Education
Personal/Grooming Supplies
Physician Referrals
Sack Lunches/Dinners
Soup Kitchens
Tools/Equipment
Vocational Assessment

Appendix III. Key Informant Questions: *Workforce Solutions Midtown Office Customers* Workforce Solutions Midtown Office Evaluation

Introduction:

Thank you for volunteering to talk with me. My name is _____ and I work for an organization called Advocates for Human Potential. We were asked to talk to customers of the Workforce Solutions Midtown at SEARCH to find out a few things.

- First to learn about how the Workforce Solutions Midtown office helped you.
- Second, to learn about whether services here are different from the services at other Workforce Solutions offices and, if so, in what way.
- To explore with you the types of services that are most helpful and those that really didn't help.
- And finally, to better understand what you have gained from participation in SEARCH's Workforce Solutions office (i.e., what have been the results for you so far).

Our discussion today is confidential. Anything that you say will not be attributed to your name. We will report your answers, but we will not identify you in our report. If we need to use names in our report, we will make up fictitious or false names. I want you to feel comfortable to speak your mind. So, I am asking that what ever we say here stays here. I mean, this discussion is confidential so I am asking you that you do not talk with other people outside of this room about what each of us says during the meeting. Is this ok with you? Do you have any questions? Let's begin.

1. In what ways is employment important to you? Why work? Are you presently working?
2. How did you get your job? Have you ever used any other Workforce Solutions offices?
3. How did you hear about the Workforce Solutions at SEARCH?
4. What was it like for you when you came here for the first time (were there any signs or signals that made you think "hey, they are really going to be able to help me here.")? [*Probe for signs of welcoming*]. Why did you come here rather than go to other Workforce Solutions offices? Was there anything that discouraged you from going to other Workforce Solutions offices? Was there anything in particular that encouraged you to go to the Workforce Solutions office?
5. What specific services here at SEARCH were helpful to you in getting or keeping a job? [*Probe: of these, which were the most helpful?*] What services were not so helpful [*Probe for least helpful or actually hurtful*]? Were there services missing that you needed in order to get or keep a job?
6. Is the location of this Workforce Solutions important to you? How so? Does it matter that it is located in the same building where you can take a shower, get a meal, do your laundry or get other services you need? How is the combination of job search and homeless support services more or less helpful in finding or keeping work?

7. Were there certain ways the staff behaved that you think were especially helpful to you? How is staff behavior different (or the same) from other places where you have gone for help? Did the staff make you feel comfortable about disclosing your homelessness? Disability? Did staff speak to employers on your behalf about your special needs? Is this important to you?
8. Did the Workforce Solutions staff counsel you about the impact taking a job would have on your benefits (such as Food stamps, Social Security benefits, health insurance) that you receive?
9. What difference has participating in SEARCH made in your lives? [*Probe for specific outcomes of participating in SEARCH services—i.e., identifying, securing and retaining work, increased income, increased housing stability, other unanticipated outcomes?*]
10. How satisfied are you with the services you receive from the Midtown Workforce Solutions at SEARCH?
11. If you were given an opportunity to talk to the director of the Workforce Solutions, what advice would you give him or her about helping homeless individuals find and keep work? [*Probe for what an ideal career office would offer including service mix, staff characteristics, length of time services available etc.*]

Appendix IV. Key Informant Questions: *Workforce Solutions Midtown Staff* Workforce Solutions Midtown Office Evaluation

Introduction:

Thank you for volunteering to talk with me. My name is _____ and I work for an organization called Advocates for Human Potential. We were asked to talk to the staff of the Midtown Workforce Solutions at SEARCH about the Office, the services it provides and how it works with the HUD supportive services to understand how it helps homeless customers get and keep a job. Specifically, we are interested a few things:

- First to learn about how the Midtown Workforce Solutions helps customers.
- Second, to learn about whether services here are different from the services at other Workforce Solutions offices and, if so, in what way.
- To explore with you the types of services that you think help customers succeed in getting and keeping a job as well as those that really don't help.
- And finally, to better understand what you do in SEARCH's Workforce Solutions program to effectively serve this population.

Our discussion today is confidential. Anything that you say will not be attributed to your name. We will report your answers, but we will not identify you in our report. If we need to use names in our report, we will make up fictitious or false names. I want you to feel comfortable to speak your mind. So, I am asking that what ever we say here stays here. I mean, this discussion is confidential so I am asking you that you do not talk with other people outside of this room about what each of us says during the meeting. Is this ok with you? Do you have any questions? Let's begin.

1. What specific services are provided here at the Workforce Solutions? What supportive services are available at SEARCH for Workforce Solutions customers who are homeless? How are these the same or different? How do you make your decision about who gets what services? From your experiences with homeless job seeking customers, what services are missing that you think are needed by the population?
2. Describe how people come to be Workforce Solutions customers? Why might customers come to SEARCH rather than other Workforce Solutions offices? What do you do to engage customers? Do they seem to feel welcome from your view? If so, what is it that you do to make them feel welcome? What do you think discourages homeless job seekers from going to a Workforce Solutions?
3. Is the location of this Workforce Solutions important to homeless customers? How so? Does it matter that it is located in the same building where they can take a shower, get a meal, do laundry or get other services they need? How is the combination of job search and homeless support services more or less helpful in finding or keeping work?
4. What do you think are the critical skills or competencies a Workforce Solutions staff person needs to have in order to effectively serve homeless job seekers? Were there

certain ways you behaved that you think were especially helpful to your customers? How is staff behavior different (or the same) from other places where clients go for help? What is the best way to ask a customer about their homelessness? Disability?

5. In what ways do you think you are prepared to help job seekers who are homeless? Any special training, if so describe? Has SEARCH or the Workforce Solutions or HGAC provided you with specialized training to serve homeless job seekers? If they would, what kind of training do you think might help you do your job better? (request copies of resumes with updated information about job tenure at SEARCH)
6. From your perspective, what do you do differently to help homeless customers from staff working at another (regular) Workforce Solutions office? What practices that you do could be taught to staff working at another (regular) Workforce Solutions office so that they could better serve homeless customers?
7. What is the nature and extent of you employer contact? Do you speak to employers on behalf of customers special needs? Is this important to your customers?
8. Do the Workforce Solutions staff counsel customers about the impact taking a job would have on benefits (such as Food stamps, Social Security benefits, health insurance) that you receive? To what extent is this an issue for your customers?
9. What do you consider as success for your customers? How effective do you think your services are in getting homeless job seekers jobs and helping them keep jobs? If so, why so; if not, why not? [*Probe for specific outcomes of SEARCH services—i.e., identifying, securing and retaining work, increased income, increased housing stability, other unanticipated outcomes?*]
10. How satisfied are you with the services you provide to customers? How satisfied do you think they would say they are with the services they receive from the Midtown Workforce Solutions at SEARCH?
11. If you were given an opportunity to talk to the director of the Workforce Solutions offices about expanding services to homeless people, what advice would you give him or her about helping homeless individuals find and keep work? [*Probe for what an ideal career center would offer including service mix, staff characteristics, length of time services available etc.*]

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