

**WtW VOUCHER PROGRAM  
REGIONAL WORKSHOP – WASHINGTON, DC  
WORKSHOP SUMMARY**

**Location:** HUD District of Columbia Field Office  
820 First Street, NE, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Washington, DC 20002

**Contact/Title:** Belinda Miller, Public Housing Revitalization Specialist

**Date of Workshop:** June 4, 2003

**TA Provider(s):** Sheila Murphy, Samia Byrd, Shannon Cantrell, and Annabelle Oehler

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**Workshop folder with Participant List, Bios, and Agenda attached.  
Workshop resource materials also attached.**

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**PARTICIPATION**

- Attendance at the workshop exceeded expectations, with a total of 64 participants. See attached participant list. The following provides a summary breakdown of workshop participation:
  - 20 WtW PHAs from eight states participated. States represented included: MD, VA, PA, FL, CT, MA, MI, and NJ.
  - Representatives from the DC Field Office and HUD headquarters also participated.
  - Four of the WtW voucher program's eight state agencies participated, including Virginia Housing Development Agency (VHDA), Michigan State Housing Development Agency (MSHDA), Connecticut Department of Social Services (CT DSS), and the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (MA DHCD). In addition, all of VHDA's contracting agencies were represented.
  - Six of the eight WtW TA Providers under Nelrod's contract participated.
  - Three WtW/FSS participants attended.
  - Five outside speakers presented to the group, including Grant Collins from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Michelle Jones from The Finance Project/Welfare Information Network; Barbara Sard from the Center on Budget and

Policy Priorities, Terry Flood from Jubilee Jobs, and Garry Mendez from One Economy Corporation.

## **SUMMARY OF WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES**

- The workshop closely followed the attached agenda. The following subheadings provide a brief summary of each session.

### **Opening/Welcome Session**

- David Reeves, DC Field Office Director, welcomed participants, stressing the importance of the program and the work that WtW Coordinators do to better serve low-income families and promote self-sufficiency. Kathryn Greenspan from HUD's Supportive Services and Grants Programs Division also welcomed participants and talked about the importance that the current administration places on WtW/FSS and other self-sufficiency programs.

### **TANF: State and Local Issues and Impact on WtW Vouchers**

- The TANF session focused on the status and key provisions of the proposed reauthorization of TANF. Michele Jones of the Finance Project/Welfare Information Network presented an overview of changes made as a result of the 1996 Welfare Reform, discussed outcomes of welfare reform and the current context, and informed participants on ways to stay informed about welfare reform.
- Grant Collins from DHHS presented the Administration's plan for the reauthorization of TANF. Mr. Collins did do a thorough job of explaining the proposed provisions. Mr. Collins also stayed after his session to meet and interact with participants, and listen to the morning session and lunch presentation.
- Participants raised concerns that the proposed reauthorization provisions do not take into consideration the challenges welfare families are facing at the local level in finding employment and accessing services due to the downturn in the economy. This issue was debated and discussed throughout the day.

### **Learning from FSS**

- One of the highlights of the workshop was the emotional and uplifting presentation by two WtW/FSS participants. Each presenter talked about where she is in life, where she came from, and how FSS helped her to achieve self-sufficiency. These two success stories reinforced to participants the importance of the work they do.
- Following the testimonials, workshop participants divided into four working groups. Each group was given a specific question and tasked with the job of identifying tips/solutions related to the question provided. One member of each group summarized the group's discussion to all participants in plenary session.

- Attached is a write-up for the WtW voucher program website. The write-up contains the format for this session so that sites that did not attend can try this activity at home. It also contains a summary of the ideas generated in each working group discussion.

### **Working Lunch: Intersection of Housing and Welfare**

- Barbara Sard, from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, gave a thoughtful and detailed academic presentation on what recent studies suggest regarding the importance of housing assistance in supporting welfare families in achieving self-sufficiency.
- This presentation gave program administrators the rare opportunity to step back from the details of daily operations to think about the “big picture”. It reinforced the importance of the program; the significant value of the housing voucher to families, partners, and the community; and the need to use the positive research results to better promote the program to stakeholders.

### **Motivating Families to Achieve Self-Sufficiency**

- Terry Flood, Executive Director of Jubilee Jobs, spoke to participants about how her organization, a non-profit employment agency, approaches the difficult task of connecting unemployed individuals to employment opportunities. Ms. Flood stressed that people really do want to work, despite the barriers and obstacles. She presented her organization’s tried and tested step-by-step process for connecting applicants with marketplace jobs. In 20 years, Jubilee Jobs has helped to fill more than 12,000 entry-level positions in the Washington, DC area. Unique features of its program are its fast process and guarantee that families that fully participate will land a job.
- Following the presentation, Valerie Jackson of Quadel facilitated a discussion on how to work with unemployed participants and encourage them to take the necessary steps to become self-sufficient.

### **On-Line Resources for Your Program: The Beehive**

- Garry Mendez, Senior Web Designer of One Economy Corporation, introduced participants to his organization and the website ([www.thebeehive.org](http://www.thebeehive.org)) it has developed to service low-income families.
- One Economy Corporation seeks to maximize the potential of technology to connect low-income people to the economic mainstream. It does this by bring computers into homes, creating digital communities, and maintaining [www.thebeehive.org](http://www.thebeehive.org). The Beehive is a family-first, self-help website that is designed to provide low-income families with easy-access to critical information they need to achieve self-sufficiency. The Beehive’s wealth of content is organized into six broad categories: money, health, school, jobs, family, and lifestyle.

- With limited resources a barrier for many sites, The Beehive is an excellent way for agencies of any size to connect WtW families to important, valuable, and useful information about topics of concern to them.
- After the presentation, the discussion focused around the prospects of creating digital communities.

### **Wrap Up: Next Steps for Your WtW Program**

- Participants commented that they would like more opportunities to network with each other, learn about each other's programs, and engage in small-group discussions. While participants enjoyed the opportunities to do this at the workshop, the full agenda and many topics covered limited discussion time.
- Some participants commented that they enjoyed the opportunity to learn about "big picture" topics, such as the intersection of housing and welfare and TANF reauthorization.
- Participants were encouraged to continue the important exercise of strategic planning – taking a look at where they have been, where their program is, and where they would like their program to be in the future. By thinking about these important topics and writing down goals and action steps, WtW agencies will be much more likely to make the needed improvements to their programs and demonstrate success.

### **ISSUES, CONCERNS OR QUESTIONS RAISED BY PARTICIPANTS**

- Many sites expressed concern that the economic downturn has made it more difficult for families to find jobs. At the same time, many federal, state, and local funds supporting self-sufficiency programs have been cut. This is making it difficult for families to access needed services such as childcare. It has also meant that some WtW sites do not have sufficient resources or commitments from partners to assist WtW families. Availability of childcare and transportation outside of regular business hours was repeatedly mentioned as a problem, particularly for individuals working in entry-level, service industry jobs.
- Many WtW sites are still struggling to actively and effectively engage the local TANF agency as a real, working partner. Sites believe that many local TANF agencies are not supporting the program in the manner envisioned by HUD when the program was designed. The DHHS – HUD partnership that was at the center of the program, in many cases, has failed to trickle down to the state and local levels. Many participants commented that improving relations with the local TANF agency is an ongoing challenge. To address this challenge, Barbara Sard stressed the importance of educating the local TANF agency about the mounting evidence that strongly supports the idea that housing is a critical factor in moving families off the welfare rolls.
- VHDA inquired as to how HIPAA requirements will affect information sharing between WtW sites and TANF agencies. Sites are concerned that TANF agencies will begin to limit PHA access to shared client information due to HIPAA. This has already happened in a few

sites across the county. TA Providers agreed to obtain additional information on this issue and report back to the sites.

- Sites continue to inquire about what their options are regarding changing program requirements, specifically WtW family obligations. Kathryn Greenspan clarified that WtW PHAs could modify family obligations; however, more stringent obligations or new obligations could only be applied to new families entering the program and not to existing participants that agreed to participate in the program under a different (less strict) set of obligations. Relaxing family obligations is permissible.
- Manassas Housing raised a concern regarding the prevalence of depression among unemployed, low-income persons and the lack of resources and expertise to handle/address the needs of individuals where depression may be the underlying problem.

#### **INFORMATION FROM THE WORKSHOP THAT COULD BE SHARED WITH OTHER SITES**

- Workshop Agenda (*electronic copy to be emailed for posting to WtW website*)
- Participant List (*electronic copy to be emailed for posting to WtW website*)
- Useful Websites Handout (*electronic copy to be emailed for posting to WtW website*)
- Welfare Information Network Brochure (hard copy only)
- Welfare Information Network – Resources for Welfare Decisions (hard copy only)
- PowerPoint Presentation on Welfare Reform, Michelle Ganow Jones, The Finance Project/Welfare Information Network (*electronic copy to be emailed for posting to WtW website*)
- Fast Facts on Welfare Policy Handout, The Urban Institute (hard copy only)
- Assessing the New Federalism Handout, The Urban Institute (*LINK to [http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/900619\\_FastFacts.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/900619_FastFacts.pdf)*)
- Achieving Compromise on Welfare Reform Reauthorization, The Brookings Institution Policy Brief (*LINK to <http://www.brookings.edu/es/wrb/publications/pb/pb25.pdf>*)
- Side By Side Comparison of Work Provisions in Recent TANF Reauthorization Proposals, Center for Law and Social Policy (*LINK to at <http://www.cbpp.org/tanfseries.htm>*)
- FSS Working Session – Summary of Solutions, Tips, and Ideas Discussed (*electronic copy to be emailed for posting to WtW website*)

- FSS Handouts prepared by Lori Goldman, Department of Urban Studies and Planning, M.I.T. (Hard copy only; electronic version already posted to WtW website)
- PowerPoint Presentation on Housing and Welfare Reform, Barbara Sard, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (Hard copy only; electronic version has been requested but not yet received)
- Housing Strategies to Strengthen Welfare Policy and Support Working Families, The Brookings Institution (Hard copy only; electronic version already posted to WtW website)
- The Achievers, a Compilation of Success Stories from Jubilee Jobs (Hard copy only)
- Jubilee Jobs Website (*LINK TO [www.jubileejobs.org](http://www.jubileejobs.org)*)
- PowerPoint presentation by Garry Mendez of One Economy Corporation on The Beehive (*electronic version to be emailed for posting to the WtW website. Also LINK TO [www.thebeehive.org](http://www.thebeehive.org)*)
- Evaluation of the WtW voucher programs of Everett and Snohomish Counties (Hard copy only; electronic version already posted to WtW website)
- Information on Montgomery County Housing Authority's Homeownership Program (Hard copy only)
- Copy of Portability FAQs (Hard copy only; electronic version already posted to WtW website)
- Copy of HUD 50058 FSS/WtW Addendum (Hard copy only; electronic version already posted to WtW website)