
Jobs-Plus

Lessons from the Evaluation: The Community Support for Work Component

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Why Community Support for Work?

Growing appreciation of “social capital” to individual and community well-being

Types

- **Supportive (bonding) social capital:**
Mutual exchange, copying, help for “getting by”— e.g., lending money, sharing food or clothing; recreational activities and amusements
- **Bridging (instrumental) social capital:**
Access to assistance for “getting ahead”

Jobs-Plus research found...

Supportive social networks were well represented at the sites

- Friendship and exchange networks, but in small groupings
- Majority surveyed said they could “rely on someone for help”
- But also considerable distrust of neighbors (“I stick to myself”)

Supportive networks extended outside the developments (families and friends)

Bridging social networks were weaker

- Residents sometimes shared information about jobs, education, and training, but limited – especially on good jobs

Intention was to strengthen “bridging” or instrumental social capital through CSW

Infuse resident internal networks with *information* about job openings and how Jobs-Plus could help

- Get residents to “spread the word” among each other
- Part of saturation strategy

Foster mutual aid among residents to support work

- Get residents to help each other in tangible ways, such as: watch children after school; carpooling; waiting for a repair-person while neighbor is at work; etc.

Connect to external networks

- E.g., with business associations, church groups, others – to tap into networks with better information about job opportunities

Making CSW “real”

Confusion at the sites about exactly to do

Difficult to build mutual aid networks

Confusion between “community building” and CSW

Decision was made to focus the effort more narrowly, in two main ways:

1. Getting collaborative partners to modify policies and practices to be supportive of resident employment
2. Building a trained, and well-supervised cadre of residents to publicize Jobs-Plus services and real employment opportunities to residents through direct engagement with their neighbors.

Changing partner institutions

Some examples

- Evening and weekend hours for community centers at the housing authority for education activities
- Evening and weekend hours for the Jobs-Plus program itself
- Getting the housing managers to promote Jobs-Plus participation and make referrals to the program
- Getting bus routes/schedules changed

Role of community coaches

Publicize JP activities, rent incentives, and jobs

- Knocking on doors and distributing flyers
 - Best when *discussed the content* with residents
- Talking with residents in informal encounters in the community, in the courtyards, on porches, stores where residents hang out
- A strong, visible, pro-active presence
- Helping with targeted campaigns (e.g., EITC)

Role of community coaches *(continued)*

Staging community events

- Picnics, basketball tournaments, health fairs, job fairs

Securing and supporting on-site services

- In LA program, arranged for GED and ELA classes
- Provided child care for participants during class

Serve as eyes and ears of Jobs-Plus

- Relay information on problems neighbors are having that could undercut their work efforts – e.g., with food, or medical problems, or with their children

Selecting the coaches

Some sites had limited pool from which to identify good candidates

- Employed residents were too busy
- Many residents had drug problems, were ill-educated, or otherwise weren't good role models or appropriate "faces" of the community
- High turnover
- Elderly /retired persons and disabled sometimes proved appropriate; the position offered them an opportunity to be involved in community

Managing the coaches

- When tried as a *resident-led* component, the focus sometimes switched to conflicts with the PHA having nothing to do with employment
- Coaches had to be supervised and managed by program staff
- Having staff responsible increased the likelihood that the component would be treated seriously
- Compensation for coaches was essential

Importance of training

A learning curve to becoming a good coach

- Ensuring they provided accurate information about the program and related services and opportunities
- Supplying them with information about real job openings
- Preparing them for situations where residents may be irritated by their overtures
- Ensuring their cultural sensitivity in multi-ethnic communities
- Ensuring their safety in all parts of the development

Challenges

- Some residents resisted sharing personal information: don't want people talking about them or “knowing their business”
- Some residents wanted to “keep to themselves” to “avoid trouble” with neighbors and not be associated with the development
- Coaches sometimes encountered political conflicts with the resident council; needed to be managed to avoid suspicion, resentment, turf battles
- Maintaining a sense of coaches' autonomy from the housing authority was important for building trust

Summary

- Clearly specify coaches roles and responsibilities from the outset
- Select the right residents for the job
- Train them and compensate them
- Make the program staff ultimately responsible for the performance of the outreach workers
- Consider other institutional accommodations the program can make to support work
- Build liaisons with housing managers and other collaborative partners to support work

The concept of “membership”

- Emphasizing “membership” – i.e., enrollment – in Jobs-Plus is a useful way of building a sense of belonging to the program
- But as a **saturation** initiative, Jobs-Plus aims to “touch everyone,” including those who never join
- A robust **community support for work component** is critical to making that happen
 - by spreading information about work-related opportunities
 - By strengthening a norms supportive of work