

GAO

Report to the Chairman, Subcommittee
on Human Resources and
Intergovernmental Relations, Committee
on Government Reform and Oversight,
House of Representatives

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EMPLOYMENT TRAINING

Successful Projects Share Common Strategy



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**Health, Education, and
Human Services Division**

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The Honorable Christopher Shays
Chairman, Subcommittee on Human Resources
and Intergovernmental Relations
Committee on Government Reform and Oversight
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The strength of international competition has highlighted the importance to the U.S. economy of a skilled labor force to maintain a high standard of living. In fiscal year 1995, the federal government appropriated about \$20 billion for about 163 employment training programs,¹ yet large numbers of individuals remain unprepared for employment. Federally funded employment training programs are designed to equip individuals with the skills they need to obtain high-quality jobs. However, congressional and public confidence in federal employment training efforts has eroded in the face of concern that the myriad federally funded employment training programs are characterized by conflicting requirements, overlapping populations, and questionable outcomes. As a result, legislative changes have been proposed to address these concerns by consolidating a large number of federal programs and creating a limited number of block grants to states.

Regardless of program structure, considerable uncertainty remains as to how to make employment training initiatives more effective in helping disadvantaged adults acquire and maintain permanent employment. In light of this uncertainty, you asked us to identify the strategies used by employment training projects considered successful in helping economically disadvantaged adults.

To identify successful employment training projects, we obtained input from state employment training officials and research groups, and we researched employment training literature. In developing our list of projects, we established the criteria for successful projects as those having outstanding results measured by performance indicators such as completion rates, job placement and retention rates, and placement wages. From among about 120 employment training projects identified, we winnowed down the list on the basis of the strength of the justification

¹Multiple Employment Training Programs: Major Overhaul Needed to Reduce Costs, Streamline the Bureaucracy, and Improve Results (GAO/T-HEHS-95-53, Jan. 10, 1995).

supporting the nomination and other factors, including the requirement that projects maintain data on their services and outcomes. From the resulting list, we selected six projects to visit that provided a variety of geographic locations, client populations, program sizes, and funding sources. Table 1 shows the projects we visited and the nomination source and selection characteristics. We did our work between March 1995 and March 1996 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. (Further information on our scope and methodology is in app. I.)

Table 1: Projects Visited, Nomination Source, and Selection Characteristics

Project	Nomination source	Location	Selection characteristics		
			Training approach	Primary funding sources	Client focus
Arapahoe County Employment and Training, Aurora, Colorado	Colorado Governor's Job Training Office	Suburban	Training broker approach	Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) and Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS)	JTPA-eligible and Aid to Families With Dependent Children/ JOBS clients
Center for Employment Training (CET), Reno, Nevada	Nevada State Job Training Office	Urban/rural mix	Training focused in three service-related occupations	JTPA and Pell grants	Hispanic, non-English-speaking farm workers
Encore!, Port Charlotte, Florida	National Center for Research in Vocational Education 1993 Exemplary Vocational Education Award	Rural	Part of larger comprehensive on-site vocational education program	Perkins Act	Single parents, displaced homemakers, and single pregnant women
Focus: HOPE, Detroit, Michigan	Congressional testimony	Urban	Multilevel training in machining	State economic development grant	Inner-city minority
Support and Training Results in Valuable Employment (STRIVE), New York, New York	New York State Job Training Partnership Council	Urban	Training focused on attitude rather than skills	Private	Inner-city minority
The Private Industry Council (TPIC), Portland, Oregon	SRI's study of JTPA best practices	Mix of urban, suburban, rural	Training broker approach	JTPA	JTPA-eligible

Results in Brief

The six successful projects we visited differ in size; funding sources; and participant, or client, characteristics but share a common strategy designed to enable their graduates to attain self-sufficiency. Although each project may implement this strategy differently, the strategy has four key features to help ensure that participants are successful in obtaining and maintaining employment. Three of the projects had placement rates above 90 percent—two of these placed virtually all those who completed their training. The other three projects placed two-thirds or more of those who completed their training.

The first key feature of this common strategy is a focus on ensuring that participants are committed to training and getting a job. Project officials evaluate participants' readiness upon entering the projects and nurture participants' commitment throughout the course of their involvement. For example, at Focus: HOPE in Detroit, all participants—even those who receive a cash subsidy—are required to pay a \$10 weekly enrollment fee to solidify their commitment to the project's machinist training.

The second feature is removing barriers that could limit clients' ability to finish training and get and keep a job. All projects identify each client's potential needs and then provide, or arrange for, services to address those needs. For example, Encore! in Port Charlotte, Florida, serves many women suffering from low self-esteem, including displaced homemakers and survivors of domestic abuse. Encore!'s 6-week workshop focuses on building self-esteem so that these women are ready to enter occupational training or go directly into a job.

Improving participants' employability skills as part of their training curriculum is the third feature of the strategy common to all six projects. Employers want workers who exhibit attributes such as dependability, promptness, ability to work effectively in groups, and ability to resolve conflicts appropriately. For example, as part of their curriculum, participants in both Focus: HOPE and Encore! are required to clock in each day using a time card and are given sanctions when they violate time and attendance rules.

The fourth feature is linking occupational skills training with the local labor market. This linkage allows the project to monitor the local labor market and make adjustments in course offerings to meet employer demand. For example, the Center for Employment Training (CET) in Reno, Nevada, eliminated an electronics course offering because the local labor market did not absorb its supply of graduates. Also, Focus: HOPE, a

machinist training program, trains participants on less sophisticated machinery as well as on state-of-the-art equipment to reflect the range of skills sought by local employers.

Background

Employment training projects that target economically disadvantaged adults can receive funding from a wide variety of sources. A large number of job training projects are federally funded; states fund some projects, as well. Other job training projects are funded privately. Major sources of federal employment training funds include the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program, and the Food Stamp Employment and Training program.² Job training assistance may also draw resources from higher education, such as Pell grants or vocational education funding under the Perkins Act. Even when a job training project receives most of its direct funding from one federal or state agency, its clients may receive support services from other sources. For example, a project participant may have training paid for by JTPA but child care services paid for with JOBS funds.³

Evaluations of employment training efforts have focused either on a single funding stream or, less frequently, on individual training sites. Both types of study are complicated by a large number of intervening factors. Because differences in client populations and local economic conditions partially determine the impact of job training, no uniform standards establish what should be expected from any job training program or project. As a result, research efforts have largely focused on determining whether job training is effective in increasing employment and wages above the level participants could be expected to achieve without training. Some of these studies looked at the effect of large-scale federal initiatives operating across many sites nationwide.⁴ A few researchers looked at smaller-scale

²For a discussion of the broad range of federal training programs, see GAO/T-HEHS-95-53, Jan. 10, 1995.

³For a further discussion of the relationship between JOBS and JTPA, see *JOBS and JTPA: Tracking Spending, Outcomes, and Program Performance* (GAO/HEHS-94-177, July 15, 1994); *Job Training Partnership Act: Actions Needed to Improve Participant Support Services* (GAO/HRD-92-124, June 12, 1992); and *Welfare to Work: Measuring Outcomes for JOBS Participants* (GAO/HEHS-95-86, Apr. 17, 1995).

⁴For example, see *Job Training Partnership Act: Long-Term Earnings and Employment Outcomes* (GAO/HEHS-96-40, Mar. 4, 1996) and *Job Training Partnership Act: Services and Outcomes for Participants With Differing Needs* (GAO/HRD-89-52, June 9, 1989). See also Larry L. Orr and others, *The National JTPA Study: Impacts, Benefits, and Costs of Title II-A* (Bethesda, Md.: Abt Associates, Inc., Mar. 1994); Abt Associates, Inc., *Evaluation of the Food Stamp Employment Program* (Bethesda, Md.: Abt Associates, Inc., June 1990); and Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., *International Trade and Worker Dislocation: Evaluation of the Trade Adjustment Assistance Program* (Princeton, N.J.: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., Apr. 1993).

efforts, either at one particular site or at several sites.⁵ In addition, other studies examined the effectiveness of providing or subsidizing certain support services for a specific clientele who may not be in job training.⁶

Although all these studies provide insight into job training initiatives, little systematic research has been done on the reasons training projects succeed or fail, especially at the individual project level. Speculation about project success, either at one site or across projects, has generally been at a theoretical or conceptual level and has been limited to one or a few factors rather than a comprehensive approach. Nonetheless, a few case studies of selected training projects have pointed to several factors that may influence the quality of training or the success in job placement at specific training centers. For example, in 1991 the Department of Labor studied 15 randomly selected JTPA sites and examined factors that influenced the quality of training.⁷ The researchers concluded that quality training would generally include (1) basic skills training, preferably integrated closely with occupational training; (2) individual case management by project employees; (3) training for participants in what is expected in the working world; (4) high-quality classroom instruction; and (5) assurance that the jobs for which the participants are being trained are available in the local labor market. Similarly, a study of successful JTPA sites by SRI International, which also used case studies, concluded that links to the local labor market are important in facilitating job placement.⁸ In our report on JTPA training for dislocated workers, we identified links to the local labor market, an individualized approach to services, and personal support and follow-up as common themes across eight exemplary projects.⁹ Studies of vocational education programs have found

⁵For example, see Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, GAIN: Two-Year Impacts in Six Counties—California's Greater Avenues for Independence Program (New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, May 1993).

⁶For example, see Child Care: Child Care Subsidies Increase Likelihood That Low-Income Mothers Will Work (GAO/HEHS-95-20, Dec. 30, 1994). Also see Mark C. Berger and Dan A. Black, "Child Care Subsidies, Quality of Care, and the Labor Supply of Low-Income, Single Mothers," Review of Economics and Statistics, 74(4) (Nov. 1992), pp. 635-42.

⁷U.S. Department of Labor, Improving the Quality of Training Under JTPA, Research and Evaluation Report Series 91-A (Washington, D.C.: 1991).

⁸Katherine P. Dickinson and others, JTPA Best Practices in Assessment, Case Management, and Providing Appropriate Services (Menlo Park, Calif.: SRI International and Social Policy Research Associates, June 1994). See also Welfare to Work: Most AFDC Training Programs Not Emphasizing Job Placement (GAO/HEHS-95-113, May 19, 1995).

⁹Dislocated Workers: Exemplary Local Projects Under the Job Training Partnership Act (GAO/HRD-87-70BR, Apr. 8, 1987).

such overlapping themes as school climate, administration, and leadership, to be important to success.¹⁰

While we relied partially on these and other studies to guide our initial case study protocol, our study differs from most previous efforts in several respects. First, we focused specifically on services to economically disadvantaged adults; we excluded services to dislocated workers and youth. Second, while previous studies focused on a single funding stream, we expanded our focus to include any successful project regardless of funding source; of the six projects we selected, one received no JTPA funding, one received nearly all its funding from JTPA, and the others supplemented JTPA funding with funds from other sources. Third, because we assumed that good leadership and management would be essential to any project's success, we focused on tangible components, or features, of the program or service delivery, rather than on organizational structure or dynamics. Finally, instead of narrowing our approach to a single project phase, such as training or placement, or a single service delivery method, such as the case management method, we employed a comprehensive approach to allow us to identify commonalities across the successful projects we examined.

Figure 1 shows the locations of the projects we visited. The six job training projects all focus on enabling their economically disadvantaged participants to obtain employment with benefits that would allow them to become self-sufficient; however, the projects vary considerably in the participants they serve and in the specific services they provide to meet those participants' needs.

¹⁰See, for example, George Wardlow and others, Institutional Factors Underlying Excellence in Vocational Education (St. Paul: University of Minnesota, 1990), or a discussion of literature in George Wardlow and Gordon Swanson, Institutional-Level Factors and Excellence in Vocational Education: A Review of the Literature (Berkeley: National Center for Research in Vocational Education, University of California, 1991).

Figure 1: Location of Projects Visited



The Arapahoe County Employment and Training Division (Arapahoe) administers JTPA in Colorado's Arapahoe and Douglas Counties; it also administers the JOBS program in Arapahoe County. Located in Aurora, Colorado, a suburb of Denver, Arapahoe's job training programs and services are intended to increase employment and earnings for economically disadvantaged adults within these counties and reduce welfare dependency. During 1994, Arapahoe served 541 disadvantaged adults, with a job placement rate of about 69 percent for those completing occupational skills training. The project uses a case management approach, with assessment and follow-up performed in-house and basic skills and job-specific training provided by area contractors. (See app. II for a detailed description of this project.)

Reno's CET, one of more than 30 centers in the nationwide CET network, is a community-based, nonprofit organization providing job training to disadvantaged adults, primarily Hispanic migrant farmworkers. Participants pay tuition for their training and may receive federal, state, or local financial aid. The Reno CET provides on-site training in three specific training areas: building maintenance, automated office skills, and shipping and receiving. It also provides remedial education and English language instruction. In 1994, the Reno location served 94 participants and achieved a 92-percent job placement rate for project completers. (See app. III for a detailed description of this project.)

Encore!, located in Port Charlotte, Florida, prepares single parents; displaced homemakers; and single, pregnant women for high-wage occupations in order to help them become self-sufficient. This project is largely funded by a federal grant under the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act of 1990 and is strongly linked to the Charlotte Vocational Technical Center (Vo-Tech). Encore!'s primary components are a 6-week prevocational workshop and a year-round support system for participants during their vocational training. The workshop is intended to prepare participants for skills training. About 99 percent of all Encore! participants complete their vocational training at Vo-Tech. In the 1993-94 school year, 194 Encore! participants were enrolled at Vo-Tech. For this same year, the Vo-Tech campuswide placement rate was 95 percent. (See app. IV for a detailed description of this project.)

Focus: HOPE, a civil and human rights organization in Detroit, was founded in 1968 to resolve the effects of discrimination. Its machinist training program, started in 1981, is intended to break down discrimination in machinist trades and high-tech manufacturing industries and to provide disadvantaged adults with marketable skills. Focus: HOPE has three on-site training levels—FAST TRACK, the Machinist Training Institute (MTI), and the Center for Advanced Technologies (CAT). It serves inner-city adults and relies on federal and state grants as well as on private contributions. For the 1993-94 year, there were 185 participants in MTI, and 75 percent completed the program. Of these, 99 percent were placed. (See app. V for a detailed description of this project.)

Support and Training Results in Valuable Employment (STRIVE) is a primarily privately funded employment training and placement project for inner-city adults in New York City who have experienced difficulty securing and maintaining employment. STRIVE's founders believe gainful

employment is the most critical element to individuals and families living in disenfranchised neighborhoods of New York City who hope to achieve self-sufficiency. STRIVE Central—one of 10 community-based organizations in New York’s STRIVE Employment Group—is located in East Harlem and prepares participants for the work place through a strict, demanding 3-week attitudinal training workshop. STRIVE Central provides no occupational training; however, STRIVE provides a long-term commitment of at least 2 years to help graduates maintain and upgrade their employment. During 1994, STRIVE Central trained 415 adults and placed 77 percent of these project graduates. (See app. VI for a detailed description of this project.)

The Private Industry Council (TPIC) is a private, nonprofit organization providing employment training services to low-income residents in the city of Portland, Oregon, and the counties of Washington and Multnomah. The federal government provides 85 percent of TPIC’s funding through JTPA. TPIC’s mission is to promote individual self-sufficiency and a skilled workforce by eliminating barriers to productive employment, and the project delivers most services for disadvantaged adults from three neighborhood centers. During the 1994 program year, TPIC served a total of 682 disadvantaged adults. Of those completing occupational skills training, about 77 percent were placed. (See app. VII for a detailed description of this project.)

Key Features of Job Training Strategy Shared by Successful Projects

Although the common strategy may be implemented differently, each project incorporates four key features into its strategy: (1) ensuring that participants are committed to training and getting a job; (2) removing barriers, such as lack of child care, that might limit participants’ ability to get and keep a job; (3) improving participants’ employability skills, such as getting to a job regularly and on time, working well with others while there, and dressing and behaving appropriately; and (4) linking occupational skills training with the local labor market.

Projects Ensure Client Commitment to Training and Getting a Job

Each of the projects tries to secure participant commitment before enrollment and continues to encourage that commitment throughout training. Staff at several projects believe the voluntary nature of their projects is an important factor in fostering strong client commitment. Just walking through the door, however, does not mean that a participant is committed to the program. Further measures to encourage, develop, and require this commitment are essential. All of the projects we visited use

some of these measures, such as (1) making sure participants know what to expect, so they are making an informed choice when they enter; (2) creating opportunities for participants to screen themselves out if they are not fully committed; and (3) requiring participants to actively demonstrate the seriousness of their commitment.

The initial step the projects take to ensure client commitment is to reveal the project's expectations to potential participants before enrollment so that they can make an informed choice about entering the program. Through orientation sessions, assessment workshops, and one-on-one interviews with project staff, participants receive detailed information about project expectations. Project officials say they do this to minimize any misunderstandings that could lead to participant attrition. Officials at both STRIVE and Arapahoe told us they do not want to spend scarce dollars on individuals who are not committed to completing their programs and moving toward full-time employment; they believe it is important to target their efforts to those most willing to take full advantage of the project's help.

For example, at STRIVE's preprogram orientation session, staff members give potential participants a realistic preview of the project. STRIVE staff explain their strict requirements for staying in the project—attending every day, on time; displaying an attitude open to change and able to take criticism; and completing all homework assignments. At the end of the session, STRIVE staff tell potential participants to take the weekend to think about whether they are serious about obtaining employment, and if so, to return on Monday to begin training. STRIVE staff told us that typically 10 percent of those who attend the orientation do not return on Monday.

Several of the other projects we visited also create opportunities for participants to screen themselves out of the project if they are not fully committed to it. Both CET and Focus: HOPE allow potential participants to try out their training at no charge to ensure the project is suitable for them. Focus: HOPE reserves the right to reject potential participants on the basis of their attitude, but it does not routinely do this. Instead, staff will provisionally accept the participant into one of the training programs but put that participant on notice that his or her attitude will be monitored.

All six projects require participants to actively demonstrate the seriousness of their commitment to both training and employment. For example, all projects require participants to sign an agreement of

commitment outlining the participants' responsibilities while in training, and all projects monitor attendance throughout participants' enrollment. In addition, some project officials believe that requiring participants to contribute to training is important to encouraging commitment. For example, STRIVE project staff told us that their policy of providing participants with one daily subway token is designed to emphasize the partnership between STRIVE and the client by demonstrating STRIVE's support to get the client to training, but also requiring a contribution from him or her for the trip home. Similarly, Focus: HOPE requires participants—even those receiving cash subsidies—to pay a small weekly fee for their training, typically \$10 a week. A Focus: HOPE administrator explained that project officials believe students are more committed when they are “paying customers,” and this small payment discourages potential participants who are not seriously committed to training.

Projects Tailor Their Approach to Remove Barriers to Training and Employment

A number of employment training studies emphasize removing employment barriers as a key to successful outcomes.¹¹ As indicated by their client assessments, the projects we visited define a barrier as anything that precludes an individual from participating in and completing training, as well as anything that could potentially inhibit his or her ability to obtain and maintain a job. For example, if a client lacks appropriate basic skills, then providing basic skills training can allow him or her to build those skills and enter occupational training. Similarly, if a client does not have adequate transportation, he or she will not be able to get to the training. Because all of the projects we visited have attendance requirements, a lack of adequate child care would likely affect the ability of a client who is a parent to successfully complete training. Moreover, a client who is living in a domestic abuse situation may find it difficult to focus on learning a new skill or search for a job.

All six projects we visited use a comprehensive assessment process to identify the particular barriers each client faces. This assessment can take many forms, including orientation sessions, workshops, one-on-one interviews, interactions with project staff, or a combination of these. For example, at TPIC's assessment workshop, participants complete a five-page barrier/needs checklist on a wide variety of issues, including food,

¹¹For example, see Job Corps: High Costs and Mixed Results Raise Questions About Program's Effectiveness (GAO/HEHS-95-180, June 30, 1995); U.S. Department of Labor, Improving the Quality of Training Under JTPA; U.S. Department of Labor, What's Working (and What's Not), A Summary of Research on the Economic Impact of Employment and Training Programs, Jan. 1995; GAO/HRD-92-124, June 12, 1992; and Gary Orfield and Helene Slessarev, Job Training Under the New Federalism, ch. 13 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

housing, clothing, transportation, financial matters, health, and social/support issues. At the end of this workshop, participants must develop a personal statement and a self-sufficiency plan that they and the case manager use as a road map to address barriers throughout training. Encore! and Arapahoe have similar processes for identifying and addressing barriers participants face. Rather than relying on a formal workshop or orientation process, CET identifies participants' needs through one-on-one interviews with project staff when a client enters the project. Throughout the training period, instructors, the job developer, and other project staff work to provide support services and address clients' ongoing needs.

All of the projects arrange for clients to get the services they need to address barriers, but—because of the wide range of individual participant needs—none of them provides all possible services on-site. For example, although all six projects recognize the importance of basic skills training,¹² they arrange for this training in different ways. Arapahoe contracts out for basic skills training; CET, Encore!, and Focus: HOPE provide this service on-site; and TPIC and STRIVE refer clients to community resources. Only Focus: HOPE provides on-site child care; however, the other five projects help clients obtain financial assistance to pay for child care or refer them to other resources.¹³ Because some of the projects we visited attract many clients who have similar needs, these projects provide certain services on-site to better tailor their services to that specific population. For example, because it serves Hispanic migrant farmworkers with limited English proficiency, CET provides an on-site English-as-a-second-language program. Likewise, because a major barrier for many of Encore!'s clients is low self-esteem resulting from mental abuse, physical abuse, or both, Encore! designed its 6-week workshop to build self-esteem and address the barriers these women face so that they are then ready to enter occupational training.

In addition to services provided during training, most of the projects followed up with clients after they completed training to ensure that barriers did not reappear or that new ones did not arise that would affect clients' ability to maintain employment. STRIVE and CET follow up on a regular basis after job placement to monitor participants' progress and

¹²The importance of basic skills training for JTPA-eligible clients is discussed in U.S. Department of Labor, Improving the Quality of Training Under JTPA.

¹³Researchers have stressed the importance of obtaining affordable, quality child care to facilitate employment. For example, see GAO/HRD-92-124, June 12, 1992; GAO/HEHS-95-20, Dec. 30, 1994; and Berger and Black, "Child Care Subsidies, Quality of Care, and the Labor Supply of Low-Income, Single Mothers."

determine whether additional assistance is needed to ensure job retention. For example, STRIVE has a commitment to contact its participants on a quarterly basis for 2 years following program completion. During these contacts, STRIVE personnel assess progress and suggest ways that participants can continue to progress in their job. For 6 months, CET's job developer makes monthly calls to employers who have hired CET graduates to troubleshoot any problems that may have arisen and to monitor progress. The job developer also follows up with graduates for 2 years after program completion.

Projects Improve Employability Skills Essential for Employment

Research confirms the necessity for employability skills, especially for individuals without work experience.¹⁴ For example, the Secretary of Labor's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills' 1991 report, *What Work Requires of Schools*, which included discussions and meetings with employers, unions, employees, and supervisors, verified that skills such as taking responsibility, self-management, and working well with others are required to enter employment. Because so many of these projects' participants have not had successful work experiences, they often do not have the basic knowledge others might take for granted about how to function in the workplace. They need to learn what behaviors are important and how to demonstrate them successfully. These behaviors include getting to work regularly and on time; dressing appropriately; working well with others; accepting constructive feedback; resolving conflicts appropriately; and, in general, being a reliable, responsible employee.

Each project we visited coaches participants in employability skills through on-site workshops or one-on-one sessions. For example, CET provides a human development program that addresses such issues as life skills, communication strategies, and developing good work habits. Similarly, Arapahoe helps each client develop employment readiness competencies, such as interpersonal relations, a work ethic, demonstrating a positive attitude and behavior, and appropriate dress, either through a workshop or one-on-one with client case managers. TPIC starts working on employability skills right away when clients attend the required assessment workshop. This workshop covers employer expectations, self-defeating behaviors, giving and receiving feedback on one's work, communication and listening skills, decision-making, work

¹⁴For example, see U.S. Department of Labor, *The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, What Work Requires of Schools* (Washington, D.C.: 1991); GAO/HEHS-95-180, June 30, 1995; and John Burghardt and Anne Gordon, *More Jobs and Higher Pay: How an Integrated Program Compares With Traditional Programs* (New York: Rockefeller Foundation, 1990).

attitudes, time management, handling conflict on the job, and dealing with difficult people. Some of the projects we visited also develop employability skills within the context of the occupational skills training, with specific rules about punctuality, attendance, and, in some cases, appropriate clothing consistent with the occupation for which clients are training.

STRIVE concentrates almost exclusively on employability skills and, in particular, attitudinal training. This project has a very low tolerance for behaviors such as being even a few minutes late for class, not completing homework assignments, not dressing appropriately for the business world, and not exhibiting an appropriate attitude. We observed staff dismissing clients from the program for a violation of any of these elements, telling them they may enroll in another offering of the program when they are ready to change their behavior. Project staff work hard to rid clients of their “victim mentality”—that is, believing that things are beyond their control—and instill in them a responsibility for themselves, as well as make them understand the consequences of their actions in the work place. For example, we observed one client who exhibited inappropriate behavior in class by consistently rolling her eyes and tuning out the instructor. The instructor called her attention to this behavior, but the client denied it. When this client argued with the instructor about her behavior, he removed her from class to counsel her, but she persisted in arguing with him. Within minutes, she was dismissed from the project. Another example of getting clients to think about consequences at STRIVE is through dress-down day. STRIVE has a dress-down day to simulate such situations in the work place and to get a sense of what its clients consider appropriate dressing down. On one such occasion, a client came to class wearing a T-shirt with a marijuana leaf pattern on the front of it. The project instructor called the class’ attention to this client’s manner of dress to explain the importance of the image one creates with dress and the message sent to an employer with an inappropriate outfit. During the lunch break, the client bought a more appropriate T-shirt.

Projects Link Occupational Skills Training to the Local Labor Market

Five of the six projects we visited provide occupational training,¹⁵ using information from the local labor market to guide their selection of training options for participants. These projects focus on occupations that the local labor market will support. Project staff strive to ensure that the training they provide will lead to self-sufficiency—jobs with good earnings

¹⁵The sixth site, STRIVE, does not offer occupational training but uses its connections with local employers to get clients into the workforce after short-term attitudinal training. Then it offers continuing assistance to clients for up to 2 years after course completion.

potential as well as benefits. In addition, all but one of the six projects use their links to local employers to assist clients with job placement. While their approaches to occupational training and job placement differ, the common thread among the projects is their ability to interpret the needs of local employers and provide them with workers who fit their requirements.

All five of the projects that provide occupational training are selective in the training options they offer clients, focusing on occupational areas that are in demand locally. For example, CET and Focus: HOPE have chosen to limit their training to one or a few very specific occupational areas project staff know the local labor market can support. Focus: HOPE takes advantage of the strong automotive manufacturing base in the Detroit area by offering training in a single occupation serving the automotive industry—machining. With this single occupational choice, Focus: HOPE concentrates primarily on meeting the needs of the automotive industry and the local firms that supply automotive parts. Participants are instructed by skilled craftspeople—many senior instructors at Focus: HOPE are retirees who are passing on the knowledge they acquired during their careers. The machines used in training are carefully chosen to represent those that are available in local machine shops—both state-of-the-art and older, less technically sophisticated equipment. Job developers sometimes visit potential work sites, paying close attention to the equipment in use. This information is then used to ensure a good match between program participant and employer.

CET offers three occupational training areas—automated office skills, building maintenance, and shipping and receiving—on the basis of the needs of the local labor market. CET previously offered training in electronics but eliminated this training because the local electronics industry did not absorb the continual supply of CET graduates. Because Reno has a considerable number of apartment buildings and hotels, CET replaced the electronics program with a building maintenance program. CET uses local industry connections to keep its curricula current and to help ensure that its clients meet employers' needs. For example, one CET instructor told us he takes his classes on field trips to area businesses to help keep his knowledge current and to give program participants a firsthand look at the business world.

While offering a wide range of training options, Vo-Tech, which trains Encore! participants, is linked to the local labor market in part by its craft advisory committees. These committees involve 160 businesses in

determining course offerings and curricula. Vo-Tech recently discontinued its bank teller program shortly after a series of local bank mergers decreased demand for this skill. It began offering an electronics program when that industry started to expand in the Port Charlotte area. Vo-Tech also annually surveys local employers on its graduates' skills and abilities, using the feedback to make changes to its programs. When feedback from local employers in one occupation indicated that Vo-Tech graduates were unable to pass state licensing exams, the school terminated the instructors and hired new ones.

All of the projects we visited assist clients in their job search. Five of the six projects had job developers or placement personnel who work to understand the needs of local employers and provide them with workers who fit their requirements. For example, at Focus: HOPE the job developers may visit local employers to discuss their skills needs, since virtually all graduates of Focus: HOPE are hired into machinist jobs locally. The placement staff working with Encore! graduates noted that there are more positions to fill than Vo-Tech graduates. They believe that, because of their close ties with the community and the relevance of their training program, they have established a reputation of producing well-trained graduates. This reputation leads employers to trust their referrals.

Summary

While the six successful employment training projects we visited differ in size, funding sources, and client characteristics, they share a common strategy to prepare clients for self-sufficiency. This common strategy—resulting in placement rates of over 90 percent for three of the projects we visited—incorporates four key features that include ensuring commitment to training and getting a job, removing barriers that might limit a client's ability to finish training and get and keep a job, improving employability skills, and linking occupational skills training with the local labor market. Although the projects implement them differently, together these features help ensure that clients are ready, willing, and able to participate in and benefit from training and employment assistance and move toward self-sufficiency.

Agency Comments

The Department of Labor commented that our report substantiates findings from its studies of exemplary practices in job training programs serving disadvantaged adults and dislocated workers. Labor also said that

this information would be useful to practitioners in the employment training community as the community continues to improve its programs.

Labor had three suggestions for improving the usefulness of the report to the employment training community. The first suggestion was to identify a contact person at each of our case study projects. We have included this information in the appendixes. Second, Labor suggested we list all of the projects that were nominated but not included in our case studies. We agree this would be potentially helpful to other projects and plan to provide such a list to Labor for it to disseminate as appropriate.

Last, Labor noted that the leveraging of community resources, along with the use of community supportive services to enhance the overall program investment, is also an important feature of projects in general and should be highlighted as such. While we agree that some of the projects we visited used community resources extensively and that this practice enhanced their ability to serve disadvantaged adults in their programs, not all the projects used this approach. For this reason, we did not include it as a part of the common strategy. Labor's comments are printed in appendix VIII.

We are sending copies of this report to the Secretary of Labor; the Director, Office of Management and Budget; relevant congressional committees; and other interested parties.

If you or your staff have any questions concerning this report, please call me at (202) 512-7014 or Sigurd R. Nilsen at (202) 512-7003. GAO contacts and staff acknowledgments are listed in appendix IX.

Sincerely yours,



Carlotta C. Joyner
Director, Education and
Employment Issues

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Abbreviations

CAT	Center for Advanced Technologies
CET	Center for Employment Training
JOBS	Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training
JTPA	Job Training Partnership Act
MTI	Machinist Training Institute
STRIVE	Support and Training Results in Valuable Employment
TPIC	The Private Industry Council
Vo-Tech	Charlotte Vocational Technical Center

Scope and Methodology

We designed our study to identify factors and strategies associated with successful employment training projects for disadvantaged adults. To do so, we reviewed the current literature and visited training projects nominated as exemplary, conducted extensive interviews, and reviewed training processes. We applied a standardized process to identify common strategies across projects. We did our work between March 1995 and March 1996 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Project Selection Strategy

To identify projects to review, we studied the literature and recent employment training award nominations for projects deemed successful. We also requested nominations of exemplary employment training projects from each of the 50 states' and the District of Columbia's workforce development councils. In seeking nominations, we defined exemplary projects as those with outstanding results measured by performance indicators such as participant completion rates, job placement and retention rates, and placement wages. Because no nationwide standard exists with which to judge a project's success, we did not establish a baseline standard for placement rate, completion rate, or other measure to qualify as an acceptable nomination. Instead, we asked the nominator to provide a rationale for the specific nomination—in other words, why the project was considered successful.

The nomination process identified about 120 successful projects, including 82 submissions from 32 states and the District of Columbia, and about 38 projects identified in the literature or as recipients of national training awards. Finalists were chosen for further consideration on the basis of how closely they satisfied key selection criteria. These criteria included focusing on serving disadvantaged adults, having project service and outcome data available, and having strong justification supporting the nomination. We contacted project finalists to collect additional information on client demographics, funding sources and amounts, services provided, and outcomes obtained. We selected the projects judgmentally to provide a mixture of (1) geographic locations, (2) urban and rural locations, (3) project sizes, (4) targeted populations, and (5) funding sources.

Data Collection and Analysis

We did our fieldwork using a systematic standardized case study methodology. To collect the data, teams of at least three people spent 2 to 5 days at each nominated site. During these project visits, we interviewed

participants, project officials, training providers, and local employers. Additionally, we toured facilities, observed project operations, and reviewed a sample of participant records.

To guide our interviews and observations, we employed a detailed topic outline. This outline was derived from concepts contained in the literature and included ways these concepts might be operationalized in the field. To ascertain relevant concepts to be investigated in the field, we reviewed numerous publications examining successful job training practices. We focused our review on the employment training literature that explored the reasons particular projects or organizations were viewed as successful, rather than concentrating on empirical research that measured changes in earnings or employment. Using the theories and observations that emerged from this literature, we developed a list of concepts relating to project operations and structure that included easy access to services, tailoring of services to client needs, and strong linkages to the labor market. Applying these concepts to practices, we developed a list of the ways in which they might be operationalized in the field. When we were examining, for example, the concept of easy access to services, we reviewed the projects' outreach and recruiting strategies, and we looked for clear points of entry into the project, pathways between programs within the projects, and a streamlined intake process. For tailoring of project services, we focused on the types of services the project provided, how the services were delivered, and how the various services were integrated into the rest of the project.

As part of the structured methodology, we conducted extensive team debriefings daily during data collection to record and discuss the observations of the day and to perform quality control of our data collection effort. At regular intervals during the data collection phase, the entire work group met to perform a cross-case analysis of the obtained data. During this analysis, concepts were assigned alphanumeric values on the basis of a team rating of that element's presence or absence at a given project. We also used this method to evaluate the criticality of that element to site operation. Through this cross-case analysis, concepts occasionally emerged that warranted further field testing. Items in our interview guide were augmented with the newly surfaced concepts and the presence of these constructs was tested at the remaining projects. For example, the issue of client readiness/commitment was one of those new concepts that emerged early in our data collection. At subsequent projects, when we focused on participant commitment, we examined the structure of their orientation and other intake and assessment processes as well as

the nature of the periodic interactions between participant and project staff.

At the end of data collection and scoring, we reviewed the ratings across the six projects and agreed on the key features essential for project success. Findings presented in this report represent those elements considered essential for the projects' success at all six project sites.

Some limitations exist in this type of case study methodology. Case studies can provide insights into how a practice works in a specific context, but findings from a case study cannot necessarily be extended to training programs generally. Furthermore, because participation in each of the projects we visited was voluntary, we did not observe the strategies employed under a system in which participation would be mandatory.¹⁶ The numerical data we present—for example, job placement rates—were collected directly from the projects, and we made no attempt to verify their accuracy except where data were available from existing federal databases. In addition, we did not gather evidence to confirm or refute the validity of the nomination.

¹⁶See *Welfare to Work: State Programs Have Tested Some of the Proposed Reforms* (GAO/PEMD-95-26, July 14, 1995).

Arapahoe County Employment and Training Division, Aurora, Colorado

The Arapahoe County Employment and Training Division (Arapahoe) administers the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) in Arapahoe and Douglas Counties in Colorado. Arapahoe has been involved with employment training for about 20 years since the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act transferred federal funds and decision-making authority to the local level. Job training programs and services sponsored by the Arapahoe/Douglas Private Industry Council, which includes Arapahoe, are intended to increase employment, increase earnings, and reduce welfare dependency within these counties.

Arapahoe uses various resources to develop its participants' potential to achieve self-sufficiency. These include (1) employment and training resources, such as the Aurora Job Service and the Colorado Vocational Rehabilitation Services; (2) educational resources, such as Arapahoe Community College and Aurora Public Schools; and (3) community resources, such as the Aurora Mental Health Center, Aurora Food Stamp Office, and Aurora Housing Authority. Under a contract with the Arapahoe County Department of Social Services, Arapahoe administers the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program for that county and the Food Stamp Employment and Training Program. Further, Arapahoe leverages federal funds, using grants from local contributors to enhance its resources. For example, state and local governments must match federal JOBS funds—the federal government provides 50 percent of the funding, and state and local governments provide 30 and 20 percent, respectively.

Participant Characteristics

During the 1994 program year, Arapahoe served 541 adults. About 80 percent of these participants were dually enrolled in JTPA and JOBS. A project official explained that about 90 percent of the JOBS clients are eligible for JTPA and are, consequently, enrolled in both programs. JTPA participants must meet income eligibility guidelines established by federal regulations as well as residency and age requirements. The criteria for JOBS referrals give priority to people who have been on Aid to Families With Dependent Children for 3 of the last 5 years; those under 24 years old without a high school or general equivalency diploma or a work history; and people whose youngest child is at least 16 years old.

About half of the 541 clients were new and the other half were carried over from the previous year. Approximately 78 percent of Arapahoe participants in 1994 were receiving public assistance, and the majority were women (85 percent). Fifty-two percent of participants were white, 32 percent were African American, 11 percent were Hispanic, 2 percent

were Native American, and 3 percent were Asian American. A project official estimated that more than half of Arapahoe's clients need basic skills remediation in order to benefit from occupational skills training.

Project Structure

Arapahoe primarily functions as a training broker using a case management model. Assessment (18 hours) is done on-site and workshops (35 hours) include a job search skills workshop and a motivational workshop. All prospective participants attend an orientation session to learn about services available; Arapahoe staff emphasize that participation in planned activities is required once a person chooses to enter the project and is accepted. At an intermission, attendees are free to leave if they feel the program is not right for them or if they are unwilling to make a commitment to training and employment.

Case managers work with each participant to determine which training is best and to identify and remove barriers to self-sufficiency. Support services are tailored to individual needs and may include allowances for transportation, child care, and clothing. Case managers may also refer clients to other community organizations for support services. As a result of preliminary assessments, such as a training readiness survey and interviews, Arapahoe assigns a case manager to each participant and enrolls participants in a 3-day assessment workshop. This workshop includes such testing as the Career Assessment Inventory and the Holland Self-Directed Search. After the client completes the assessment workshop and an Individual Service Strategy/Employment Plan, case managers refer participants for basic skills remediation or begin working with them on a training plan.

Arapahoe contracts with area schools to provide basic and occupational skills training. For example, Arapahoe's two contractors for basic skills training operate on a cost-reimbursable basis and also report on student attendance and course progress. Clients study basic skills at their own pace but are required to attend class for 20 hours each week. Arapahoe also provides clients with vouchers for occupational skills training in areas where there is the strongest likelihood of employment and with contractors who have demonstrated performance in training and job placement. The vouchers pay for training expenses—beyond basic skills training—not to exceed \$2,500 over a 24-month period.

Case managers are required to keep in contact with clients at a minimum of twice monthly so that assessment is ongoing and clients have access to

referrals for counseling and support services, including tutoring. Career counseling is a vital part of Arapahoe's training model because clients enter the program from diverse backgrounds and receive training in differing fields of their choice at different area training facilities. If participants are unsure about a career, case managers provide them with some job shadowing experiences. Case managers encourage clients to obtain some form of credential, such as an associate's degree or a technical certificate. Arapahoe staff also maintain links with local employers to ensure the type of training provided will help clients achieve self-sufficiency.

Project Outcomes

Arapahoe measures its performance by enrollment statistics, job placement rates, follow-up employment rates, and follow-up earnings. For program year 1994, Arapahoe's placement benchmark was about 48 percent, and 57 percent of all adults who left the program (either JTPA-eligible or dually enrolled in JTPA and JOBS) found employment. About 69 percent of all participants who completed occupational training were placed. These job placement rates are calculated on the basis of the number of clients who obtain unsubsidized employment of 20 or more hours a week when they leave the program. For all adults who left the program in 1994, the average placement hourly wage was \$7.09.

For more information on the Arapahoe County Employment and Training Division, contact Elroy Kelzenberg, Deputy Director, 11059 East Bethany Drive, Suite 201, Aurora, Colorado 80014, or call (303) 752-5820.

Center for Employment Training, Reno, Nevada

The Reno, Nevada, Center for Employment Training (CET), established in 1987, is a community-based, nonprofit organization providing job training to disadvantaged adults. The Reno CET is one of over 30 centers nationwide, with the corporate headquarters in San Jose, California. Its mission is based on the philosophy of self-determination, and it seeks to promote the development and education of low-income people by providing them with marketable skills training and supportive services that contribute to economic self-sufficiency. The corporate office provides accounting and administrative support and sets broad policy for the corporation as a whole.

Because the training offered in a particular skill expands and contracts with the job market for that skill, CET maintains the flexibility to readily increase training slots for skills in high demand or to phase out or decrease training activity for skills whose demand is less than expected. Each center is locally managed and chooses the skills training that it will offer. The Reno CET focuses on three specific training areas that are in demand in the local labor market: automated office skills, building maintenance (carpentry, electrical, and plumbing), and shipping and receiving.

Local CETs are funded through tuition charges to participants. During the admissions process, CET staff evaluate applicants to determine whether they are eligible for subsidized training under one of CET's federal, state, or local funding sources. Participants may receive financial assistance from sources such as Pell grants, JTPA state funds, the JTPA Farm Worker Program (Title IV), and grants from the city of Reno.

Participant Characteristics

During program year 1994, the Reno CET trained 94 participants. A project official said that most of CET's participants are minority, functionally illiterate, welfare recipients. The majority of CET clients in Reno are Hispanic (80 percent), have reading and math skills below the eighth grade level (80 percent), and have limited English proficiency (82 percent). Participants range in age from 21 to 55 years. Roughly half are male. The majority (60 percent) of participants have, at some time, been migrant farmworkers.

Project Structure

In addition to providing on-site training skills, the Reno CET also provides remedial education, English language instruction, and citizenship classes. Its curriculum includes job search techniques and employability and life

skills. All participants are ensured help in finding employment, but they must commit to coming to training each day, on time, and demonstrate that they can relate well to their instructors and fellow students. A staff training team meets regularly to discuss participants' progress in developing job skills.

CET staff administer the Employability Competency System test to all prospective participants to assess reading and math skills. Tests are intended to identify participants' strengths and weaknesses rather than to disqualify participants. CET staff also review applications to assess an applicant's reading comprehension and spelling. They work with participants to develop an individualized instruction and service plan that clarifies participants' vocational goals and remediation needs as well as required supportive services. In addition, staff help participants gain access to local community-based organizations for social services that help overcome potential barriers to training and employment.

CET teaches basic and vocational skills simultaneously. For example, participants in the building maintenance program learn math in the context of rulers and measurement. Training, which simulates the work environment with industry standards, is organized into different levels of competency. Participants must pass a test for each level before progressing to the next. Because the competency levels are generally independent and self-paced, participants may begin training at almost any time. Depending on an individual's skill choice, needs, and abilities, training can generally be completed in about 6 months.

Good work habits—such as punctuality, attendance, reliability, and job responsibility—are emphasized throughout training. Participants are not referred to a job unless they have the proper habits and attitudes to ensure success in their work setting. CET's job developer gives participants employment assistance and advises them on curriculum choices, drawing on knowledge of what prospective employers expect from CET graduates. The job developer also teaches job search techniques and instructs participants on how to set goals, complete job applications, develop resumes, list references, and interview for employment. In addition, the job developer periodically follows up on participants for a period of 1 month to 2 years after program completion. CET offers lifetime placement assistance unless the individual has consistently quit jobs or had an unacceptable attendance record.

Project Outcomes

The ultimate CET goal for each participant is permanent, unsubsidized job placement with good benefits. The Reno CET goal is to place 90 percent of graduates in full-time, career-level employment. For program year 1994, the placement rate was 92 percent for those who finished training. Graduates who obtain any full-time job are considered successful placements even when the job does not require the skill in which the graduates were trained.

For more information on the Center for Employment Training in Reno, contact Marcel Schaerer, Division Director, 520 Evans Avenue, Reno, Nevada 89512, or call (702) 348-8668.

Encore!, Port Charlotte, Florida

Encore! prepares single parents, displaced homemakers, and single pregnant women for high-wage occupations in order to help them become self-sufficient. This project, started in 1986, serves many people who would otherwise be dependent on welfare or employed in low-wage jobs. The Charlotte Vocational Technical Center (Vo-Tech) administers Encore! Vo-Tech's mission is to offer quality vocational education to Charlotte County residents and to help students obtain gainful employment. Together, Encore! and Vo-Tech seek to motivate participants to reach their highest potential by removing barriers and preparing participants for the competitive world of work.

A federal grant under the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act of 1990 provides Encore! funds for child care, transportation, tuition, books, and uniforms for qualified students training for high-wage, nontraditional occupations, such as women studying auto technology. Community organizations provide scholarships to support students for training not covered by this federal grant, and participants may apply for other financial assistance, such as Pell grants. Vo-Tech provides Encore! facilities (a portable building in which the program is housed), utilities, and supplies. While the Perkins grant covers salary and staff development costs for the project coordinator, Vo-Tech provides the project a part-time work-study student aide as well as the expertise of Vo-Tech faculty and staff.

The local community also supports Encore! The Charlotte County Medical Society Alliance has "adopted" Encore! and raises money for the project through such functions as dinners and golf tournaments. Community members also donate clothing suitable for school, job interviews, or the work place, which is distributed to participants at no charge through Carol's Closet, located within the Encore! project. The Charlotte County Habitat for Humanity program pays particular attention to the housing needs of Encore! participants. Additionally, the Charlotte County Board of Women Realtors' nonprofit DREAM HOUSE program is designed to help Encore! participants achieve home ownership by helping them renovate and purchase older homes.

Participant Characteristics

Encore! participants are generally economically disadvantaged, lack marketable job skills, have low self-esteem, and have few employability skills. Because Encore! serves single parents, displaced homemakers, and single pregnant women, most participants are female. In the 1993-94 school year, 93 percent of the 194 Encore! participants enrolled at Vo-Tech

were female. The majority of participants (84 percent) were white. Most participants—93 percent—had either a high school or general equivalency diploma. Eighty-six percent had children under the age of 18.

Project Structure

Encore!'s primary components are a 6-week prevocational workshop (48 hours) and a year-round support system for participants during their vocational training. The workshop, which is held twice a year, includes assessment, career exploration, self-esteem building, goal setting, and budgeting; it is intended to prepare participants for skills training so that they can make the commitment needed to succeed in training and employment. The Encore! project coordinator works with participants to identify and address any barriers that may impede their skills training and job placement.

Encore! participants receive vocational assessment and counseling from both the project coordinator and Vo-Tech staff. On the basis of this assessment, participants develop an Individualized Career Plan and may work to improve their basic skills through Vo-Tech's self-paced remedial program or begin one of the certificate programs Vo-Tech offers. Most Encore! participants enter skills training at Vo-Tech and maintain regular contact with the project coordinator. Vo-Tech offers a wide range of programs, including business (general office, clerical, secretarial, accounting, and data); construction (air/heat/refrigeration, drafting, electrical, and carpentry); health (dental assisting, patient care assisting, and practical nursing); and service (auto technology, child care, cosmetology, culinary arts, electronics, nail technology, and ornamental horticulture). Each program has a craft advisory board linking the needs of the local labor market to the program curriculum.

For participants enrolled at Vo-Tech, the Encore! project coordinator monitors progress through a system of employability skills points. Participants lose points for absenteeism, tardiness, and other negative behavior. When a participant's points near a designated threshold level, the project coordinator provides supportive counseling to the participant. Vo-Tech also requires each student to attend employability skills workshops that address job search skills, resume writing, interview strategies, and getting along on the job. Other workshops, which students may attend voluntarily, address time management, stress management, maintaining a professional image, group dynamics, and the changing world of work.

The major priority of Encore! and Vo-Tech is to help all participants obtain gainful employment. Vo-Tech emphasizes employability skills, such as job-seeking and job-keeping strategies, to foster this goal. Encore! participants also participate in videotaped mock interviews and obtain help in preparing a professional resume. Encore! encourages participants to register with Job Service of Florida, which has stationed a job specialist at Vo-Tech. Vo-Tech's instructional program, which is competency-based, has a strong reputation with area employers; consequently, this reputation also helps Encore! participants obtain employment.

Vo-Tech conducts job placement follow-up with graduates and nongraduates in accordance with strict guidelines from the Florida Department of Education. The survey is conducted through a statewide computer search, mail, and telephone inquiry. Data are assembled by program area, bound together, and made available to faculty for analysis. Through Vo-Tech, the Encore! project coordinator also contacts participants at 1- and 2-year intervals. The project coordinator said that while most participants are generally still employed when contacted, they may have moved on to another job.

Project Outcomes

About 99 percent of all Encore! participants complete their vocational training at Vo-Tech. While Encore! does not track the job placement performance of its participants separately, for the 1993-94 school year, the Vo-Tech campuswide placement rate was 95 percent. Vo-Tech defines successful placements as obtaining a job, entering military service, or continuing schooling.

For more information on Encore!, contact Carol Watters, Program Coordinator, 18300 Toledo Blade Boulevard, Port Charlotte, Florida 33948, or call (941) 629-6819.

Focus: HOPE, Detroit, Michigan

Focus: HOPE, founded in 1968, is a metropolitan Detroit civil and human rights organization established to resolve the effects of discrimination and build an integrated society. It serves the community through several programs, including its machinist training programs, an on-site Center for Children, Food for Seniors, and a Food Prescription Program (a commodity supplemental food program operating through the U.S. Department of Agriculture). Focus: HOPE also provides employment opportunities at its incorporated, for-profit companies, which have been developed as a part of the Focus: HOPE network.

The Focus: HOPE complex is spread across 30 acres and 12 separate buildings. In addition to a paid staff of about 750, the network has a roster of about 46,000 volunteers; about a fourth of these volunteers provide services during any given week. The organization relies on individual donations and contributions from corporations, foundations, and trust funds. It also receives grants from the Departments of Labor, Defense, and Commerce, as well as surplus machinery used in training from the federal and state governments. In 1994, the primary funding source for the Machinist Training Institute (MTI) was state economic development/job training funds. Participants may receive needs-based grants to cover tuition from a variety of sources, including Pell grants and JTPA, the city of Detroit, and machinist trade associations.

Since opening in 1981, Focus: HOPE's MTI has prepared participants for careers in manufacturing. Its training effort is intended to break down discrimination in machinist trades and high-tech manufacturing industries, and to provide disadvantaged individuals with marketable skills. MTI, qualified as an institution of higher education, simulates the work place; its curriculum integrates academics and hands-on experience. In addition to MTI, Focus: HOPE has two other levels of training: FAST TRACK and the Center for Advanced Technologies (CAT). FAST TRACK prepares participants for MTI, and MTI graduates may move on to the CAT program. CAT, a fairly new program, will have its first graduates in May 1996. These three levels of programming could, in theory, support a participant from an eighth-grade skills level to a master's degree in manufacturing engineering.

Participant Characteristics

Focus: HOPE's training programs serve inner-city adults who want to participate and have the basic skills required to succeed in machinist training. During the 1993-94 program year, approximately 63 percent of the participants in FAST TRACK were male and 92 percent were African

American; their ages ranged from 17 to 23. Participants in MTI were also primarily African American males, but were generally older (26 or 27 years old). Project officials noted that many MTI participants have a history of low-skill, low-wage jobs, often in the fast food industry; others are young adults just entering the labor market with no work history. Because CAT participants have attended MTI, their characteristics are similar to those of MTI participants.

Project Structure

Focus: HOPE's training programs emphasize development of manufacturing-related skills. Depending on an applicant's skill level, an applicant may be placed in one of Focus: HOPE's three progressive training levels: FAST TRACK, MTI, or CAT. These different levels allow participants to experience machining, become familiar with the expectations of the program, and decide whether they are willing to make a commitment to training. The different levels of training also permit Focus: HOPE staff to assess participants' potential for success in more advanced on-site training. At the completion of each level, Focus: HOPE's placement personnel actively help participants through the job search process. For example, MTI job development staff visit machine shops to discover job openings, discuss employer skills needs, and obtain feedback on graduate performance. Prospective FAST TRACK and MTI participants are assessed using the Test of Adult Basic Education and the Bennett Mechanical Comprehension Test. Applicants must also pass a physical examination, including a drug screen. The admission process also includes interviews with financial aid personnel and appropriate program managers. These interviews serve to assess applicants' motivation and likelihood of sustaining a full-time learning experience. Barriers to successful training are also addressed. If the applicant is accepted for training, supportive services, including academic, personal, and financial aid counseling, are available. Additionally, staff refer participants to other Focus: HOPE services or other community resources as needed.

FAST TRACK, which begins a new class every 2 weeks, was initiated in 1989 because Focus: HOPE had difficulty recruiting participants with adequate basic skills for machinist training. FAST TRACK provides instruction in math, reading, and computer literacy and addresses the general readiness of high school graduates for meaningful employment and postsecondary education. FAST TRACK participants must have basic skills at the eighth-grade level; over an intensive 7-week course, they may improve basic skills to a 9th- or 10th-grade level.

FAST TRACK was designed not only to boost participants' academic skills but also to improve employability skills. Participants are rated in four categories—attendance, cooperation, interpersonal skills, and work performance. While FAST TRACK graduates are assured entry into the first level of MTI, project officials told us that graduates are often able to obtain employment simply because of improved basic and employability skills. On average, two-thirds who enter FAST TRACK complete its curriculum.

MTI participants must have at least a 9th-grade reading level and a 10th-grade math level. Participants spend about half their time in the classroom and the other half on the shop floor. MTI is divided into three tiers. First, a 5-week (176 hours) “vestibule” program provides instruction in communication and technical skills. An additional 26-week basic machining program allows participants to work from blueprints to produce a finished product. Finally, a 26-week advanced machining program provides selected participants more instruction. These participants also learn by working for pay on actual production contracts.

Focus: HOPE's latest training effort, CAT, aims to produce engineers who can operate more effectively in an agile manufacturing environment and integrates hands-on training with academic studies in a production setting. CAT is a national demonstration project, and its curriculum was developed in conjunction with educational and industry partners. Currently, CAT's participants are selected from MTI's advanced machining graduates. In CAT, one of the partner universities can confer an associate's degree after 3 years, a bachelor's degree after 4-1/2 years, and a master's degree after 6 years.

Project Outcomes

Focus: HOPE defines successful participants as those who obtain and hold steady employment that includes benefits. For the 1993-94 year, of 185 participants in MTI, 139 (75 percent) completed the program. Of these graduates, 137 (99 percent) were placed in employment at an average hourly wage of \$9.50.

For more information on Focus: HOPE, contact Kenneth Kudek, Assistant Director, 1355 Oakman Boulevard, Detroit, Michigan 48238, or call (313) 494-4170.

STRIVE Central, New York City

STRIVE—the acronym for Support and Training Results in Valuable Employment—provides participants tools to navigate the current job market. This employment training and placement project, started in 1985, is for inner-city adults in New York City who have experienced difficulty securing and maintaining employment. STRIVE staff, many of whom have lived the client experience and are project graduates themselves, work to prepare, train, place, and support participants in obtaining unsubsidized entry-level jobs.

STRIVE Central is one of 10 community-based organizations in New York's STRIVE Employment Group; the STRIVE model has also been replicated in Pittsburgh, Chicago, and Boston. The STRIVE network is primarily privately funded, predominately through a grant from the Clark Foundation that requires a two-for-one dollar match from other sources, such as local employers. Services are free to both employers and participants, and STRIVE officials noted that 90 percent of STRIVE's resources are allocated to direct services. STRIVE Central, the initial STRIVE site, is located in the basement of an inner-city housing project in East Harlem and is readily accessible to members of that community; STRIVE Central has also opened a satellite location in West Harlem.

STRIVE was founded in response to chronically high unemployment rates in East Harlem, the Greater Harlem community, and other disenfranchised neighborhoods of New York City. Social problems including homelessness, substance abuse, crime, and teen pregnancies affect these communities. STRIVE's founders believed gainful employment is the most critical element to individuals and families hoping to obtain self-sufficiency and empowerment. STRIVE's mission is to demonstrate the impact attitudinal training and postplacement support have on the long-term employment of inner-city adults.

Participant Characteristics

STRIVE serves inner-city adults, aged 18 to 40, who are unemployed and want to work. The project targets services to people whose difficulty obtaining employment stems primarily from poor attitudes and inappropriate behaviors. While STRIVE has no income eligibility requirements, it often serves the most needy—those on public assistance, single parents, former substance abusers, ex-offenders, victims of abuse, and high school dropouts. STRIVE encourages participants to shed the victim mentality, become self-sufficient, and acquire a solid work ethic.

In 1994, STRIVE Central trained 415 individuals. During 1994, STRIVE served similar numbers of women (208) and men (207); however, project officials stated this was an aberration because STRIVE has historically served more women than men. Most participants were African American (71 percent), and 16 percent were Hispanic. Thirty-four percent of participants received public assistance and 33 percent were single parents. Most of the 1994 participants were high school graduates (64 percent) or had obtained a general equivalency diploma (18 percent); the rest were high school dropouts.

Project Structure

STRIVE's training focuses on the behaviors needed for successful employment—such as punctuality, the spirit of cooperation, and the ability to take constructive criticism, and the attitudes that sometimes impede these behaviors—rather than skills such as typing, word processing, and data entry. STRIVE prepares participants for the work place through a strict, demanding 3-week workshop (120 hours) that emphasizes attitudinal training. Each workshop begins with a “group interaction” session for prospective participants. This 3-hour orientation session helps applicants determine whether they are willing to undergo STRIVE's training and also allows trainers an opportunity to assess the attitudes and abilities of applicants. For example, trainers call attention to late arrivals by questioning the reasons for lateness before the whole group. This could prove to be embarrassing for tardy applicants—their ability to stay in the program depends on handling that embarrassment in a professional manner.

Because of the attitudinal issues discussed, and the “no nonsense” manner in which the issues are dealt with, some of the applicants decide that STRIVE is not for them and do not return for the training workshop. Consequently, while STRIVE generally accepts anyone interested in the program, participants screen themselves out as a result of the orientation session; participants may also leave at any time during the 3-week workshop, and some are asked to leave if STRIVE staff believe that they are not sufficiently committed to the program or willing to make changes in their lives.

During the intake and application process, STRIVE staff may also make referrals on the basis of their identification of participants' barriers to successful employment. For example, applicants may be referred to STRIVE partners that serve teens only or referred directly to community services for such problems as mental health needs, substance abuse, or day care

needs. If the applicant does not seem to have attitude problems but simply needs assistance in finding employment, the applicant may be referred directly to STRIVE's job developers, who know about employment opportunities through regular contact with area employers.

In addition to attitudinal training, STRIVE emphasizes job placement and postplacement support. STRIVE's job development staff help participants find employment that offers benefits, skills development, and opportunities for advancement; however, all graduates must successfully apply for and obtain their own positions. No job is viewed as "dead end," because participants often need jobs that can provide the beginning of a work history as well as a pathway for advancement. After placement, STRIVE staff continue to work with clients to upgrade their employment.

STRIVE provides a long-term commitment to program graduates because graduates often lack such support. Postplacement support includes assistance with personal and work problems in addition to future education and career planning. Project staff make individual contacts with graduates on a quarterly basis for 2 years as well as regular contacts with employers who hire graduates in order to obtain feedback on training requirements and/or offer further training assistance. Moreover, STRIVE graduates can request lifetime services.

Project Outcomes

STRIVE defines successful participants as those who obtain and hold steady employment. STRIVE's operational standards are to place, in unsubsidized employment, at least 80 percent of the individuals who complete the intensive 3-week training, and for 75 to 80 percent of those placed to retain employment for at least 2 years. From May 1985 through December 1994, the East Harlem site has helped 2,424 individuals secure employment. According to project officials, nearly 80 percent of those individuals have maintained employment. In 1994, STRIVE Central trained 415 persons, 318 (77 percent) of whom were placed.

For more information on STRIVE, contact Lorenzo Harrison, Deputy Director, 1820 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10029, or call (212) 360-1100.

The Private Industry Council, Portland, Oregon

The Private Industry Council (TPIC) is a private, nonprofit organization providing employment and training services to low-income residents in Portland, Oregon, as well as Washington and Multnomah Counties. The federal government provides 85 percent of TPIC's funding through JTPA. TPIC is also a subcontractor for the JOBS program and dually enrolls participants in both JTPA and JOBS. TPIC's mission is to promote individual self-sufficiency and a skilled workforce by eliminating barriers to productive employment.

TPIC delivers most services for disadvantaged adults from three neighborhood service centers—Northeast Employment and Training Center, Southeast Employment and Training Center, and East County Employment and Training Center. These centers, through case management, provide comprehensive services that remove barriers to long-term employment and self-sufficiency. According to TPIC officials, the three centers target certain populations: The Northeast Center targets African American males and welfare recipients, the Southeast Center targets the homeless population and refugees, and the East County Center primarily serves a Hispanic population and has bilingual English- and Spanish-speaking staff. TPIC also administers a program that serves older workers, the Tri-County Employment and Training Program, as well as programs serving youth.

TPIC's coordinated approach to case management is intended to provide clients with the basic and vocational skills necessary to obtain and keep employment. TPIC's training system links all entities involved in either preparing adults for the workforce or providing supplemental services that are necessary for a person to become self-sufficient. These entities include businesses, government agencies, community colleges and school districts, and community-based organizations.

Participant Characteristics

TPIC targets the JTPA-eligible population—people with barriers to employment such as ex-offenders, the long-term unemployed, and high school dropouts. TPIC officials explained that these harder-to-serve clients generally have multiple barriers to employment and are more expensive to train. During program year 1994, TPIC's JTPA program for disadvantaged adults primarily served women (63 percent). Sixty-one percent of participants were white, 17 percent were African American, 16 percent were Hispanic, 3 percent were Native American, and 3 percent were Asian American. Twenty-nine percent of participants were welfare recipients and 21 percent were high school dropouts.

Project Structure

TPIC provides case management and on-site assessment (36 hours) and links clients with vocational training opportunities. The three neighborhood centers follow a similar approach to program delivery. Each holds a mandatory orientation session, generally twice a month, during which case managers explain the services provided, the types of training available, and the links to training. At the orientation, TPIC staff explain that they maintain a businesslike environment that demands qualities such as timeliness and drug-free participation. Case managers work with individuals to assess their ability to benefit from services. Clients must commit to standards such as attending class every scheduled day, arriving on time, following basic rules for good grooming, and abiding by the guidelines for smoking outside the building. Clients subsequently screen themselves out of training if they are not willing to abide by these standards. When appropriate, case managers make referrals to other community resources for assistance with barriers to employment.

Through the assessment process, which takes 3 weeks, staff help participants examine their capabilities, needs, and vocational potential. This objective assessment includes a review of a participant's family situation, interests, and aptitudes. Additionally, assessment includes employability skills and contains a basic work place curriculum that focuses on skills such as problem solving and conflict resolution. Clients are also required to develop a self-sufficiency plan and a specific job goal. They must research labor market information and conduct interviews to gather information on careers in which they are interested. The Southeast Center, for example, requires two interviews: one with a person who does the job the participant is interested in and another with a school that provides training for that job.

Following assessment, case managers assist participants by connecting them to training that includes English as a Second Language, basic skills, vocational skills, on-the-job training, competency training, work experience, and internships. None of the TPIC sites offers on-site basic skills or occupational skills training. A project official estimated that more than half of TPIC participants need some basic skills training, which may be obtained at a local community college or elsewhere in the community at no cost, before they can benefit from occupational skills training.

For skills training, TPIC refers participants to its contracted skills training and provides tuition assistance—generally no more than \$2,500 for each participant. A project official noted that clients often come to TPIC with an idea of what skills they want; during the assessment process, the case

manager and job developer work with these desires but also steer clients to where opportunities may be or try to broaden their scope. TPIC participants have access to all job opportunities listed through the state employment office, and job developers also help participants find employment. Participants may be involved in a “job club,” which further motivates them and provides job search assistance. TPIC also provides retention services—following up with both the participants and the employers.

Project Outcomes

TPIC defines successful participants as those who obtain self-sufficiency; for this, TPIC has set a specific, minimum starting wage goal of \$7 an hour. All TPIC programs rely on outcome-based measures to determine program performance. Outcomes for the adult training employment programs include the number of clients served and placement, retention, and starting salary rates. During the 1994 program year, TPIC’s JTPA program for disadvantaged adults served 90 percent of the participants it had planned to serve—a total of 682. Of the 355 participants who left during the program year, about 68 percent found employment; however, of those completing occupational skills training, about 77 percent were placed.

For more information on The Private Industry Council, contact Maureen Thompson, Vice President, 720 South West Washington, Suite 250, Portland, Oregon 97205, or call (503) 241-4600.

Comments From the Department of Labor

U.S. Department of Labor

Assistant Secretary for
Employment and Training
Washington, D.C. 20210



APR 5 1996

Ms. Carlotta C. Joyner
Director, Education and Employment Issues
Health, Education, and Human Services Division
U.S. General Accounting Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Ms. Joyner:

I am writing in response to your recent draft report, entitled Employment and Training: Well-Regarded Projects Share Common Strategy. We appreciate the opportunity to respond to this report. We are gratified with its conclusions which substantiate to a great extent those results found in previous studies that we have undertaken which focused on exemplary practices in several job training programs serving disadvantaged adults as well as dislocated workers. We believe this will be useful information to the training and employment community as we continue to improve our programs.

To strengthen the utility of this effort we would suggest that the report identify a contact at each program that would be available to discuss their practices with interested program operators. Also, listing the other sites that were nominated but not included in the study is another means of connecting practitioners with proven success examples.

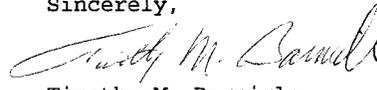
There appear to be other common strategies which were not highlighted in this report, such as the leveraging of funds and the use of community supportive services to enhance the overall program investment, which we believe should be better communicated to the readers. Although participant costs apparently were not included in the scope of this study, it also would be useful to know to what extent leveraging or resource matching takes place in quality programs, and might be a contributing factor to their success. We are very interested in any data--even gross estimates or ranges--that reflect the level of these program investments, and what difficulties GAO encountered which may have led to your decision to exclude cost comparisons.

Appendix VIII
Comments From the Department of Labor

Building upon the findings from our own research and those of others which are cited in the Department's publication, What's Working, we continue to look for models of effective programs to replicate on a larger scale within the employment and training community.

Please let us know if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,



Timothy M. Barnicle

GAO Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

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