

Transitional Jobs Programs Build Stronger Communities

Transitional Jobs (TJ) programs are a key to building stronger communities because by design, they open doors to employment for community members who are struggling to get past barriers to permanent, lasting employment. Transitional Jobs is a workforce strategy that transitions participants rapidly and successfully into the labor market by creating the experiences necessary to ensure an employer views the TJ worker as the preferred hire from the community.

What are Transitional Jobs?

Transitional Jobs (TJ) is a practical workforce strategy that *uses time-limited, wage-paying jobs that combine real work, skill development, and supportive services*, to transition participants rapidly and successfully into the labor market. TJ programs are operating in hundreds of communities and cities in 30 states across the country. These TJ programs are engaging individuals who due to their age, low education, limited work experience, criminal records, receipt of welfare, or racial discrimination, are not afforded full opportunity to engage in the workforce. These individuals become full participants in our communities through the added value of work.

TJ placements are typically in public or nonprofit organizations, although there are a growing number of for-profit and government Transitional Jobs placements. Workers **earn a wage** of between \$5.15 and \$8.00 per hour and work between 20 and 35 hours per week. TJ work assignments are time-limited, typically lasting two to six months, but sometimes lasting as long as

12 months. During their transitional job, workers pay taxes on their earnings and earn Social Security credit.

As participants achieve a level of workplace success, they receive assistance in obtaining unsubsidized employment and subsequent help with job retention and career path planning. TJ programs establish the worker, through experiential work, as a low-risk hire to employers. Some TJ programs also foster financial literacy and other GED, English for Speakers of Other Languages, parenting or fatherhood classes, as well as provide a bridge to vocational skills training.

TJ is particularly effective serving:

- Persons with criminal records;
- Youth exiting from foster care and juvenile justice systems;
- Current, potential, and former TANF recipients; and
- Persons experiencing homelessness.

Do Transitional Jobs work for persons with criminal records?

TJ is a rapidly developing and expanding strategy intended to improve communities through better outcomes for persons reentering the community from a correctional institution. More than 10 states, the majority of which have the largest reentering populations in the nation, have supported TJ programs to serve individuals with criminal histories. These TJ programs are being supported financially or otherwise by state-level corrections departments.

An unfortunate reality in our country is that a majority of those reentering the community with criminal histories are persons of color –

particularly African American and Latino. An estimated 12.6 percent of all black males in their late twenties are in prisons or jails, compared to 3.6 percent of Hispanic males and 1.7 percent of white males.¹ In reentering their communities from prisons or jails, these individuals are often confronted by employer policies that disproportionately keep persons of color with criminal histories unemployed. In fact, researchers have found that individuals with criminal histories who are white receive more job offers than those who are not. Research also shows that employers discriminate particularly against black men and those with weak employment records.² Such discrimination contributes substantially to employment and earnings gaps between white and black young men.

Transitional Jobs programs address this barrier by successfully employing persons with criminal histories and improving their employment records, thereby, working to change an employer's perception. Well over 50 percent of workers, and more typically, over 65 percent, go on to unsubsidized employment after leaving TJ programs. These permanent placements pay well above minimum wage, with wages averaging \$8.00 to \$10.90 per hour. Job retention by TJ participants also consistently exceeds retention from other job referral and placement programs because TJ participants have learned how to be successful employees through real work experience.

Can Transitional Jobs programs connect youth to work?

The number of TJ programs in the country who work with youth exiting out of foster care and juvenile justice systems is growing. Emerging programs are adopting TJ to work with youth who are facing greater obstacles to work due to their deep poverty, gang affiliations, and child welfare and juvenile justice experiences that far too often have not prepared them to succeed in the workplace.

The unemployment rate for people ages 16 to 25 is more than six times higher than for the overall market: 26.0 percent versus 4.2

percent.³ Many youth have little or no work experience and few opportunities for summer jobs or internships. Particularly young people expected to live independently in the community as they exit foster care and juvenile justice systems are often unprepared for the workplace and face many barriers to employment including incomplete education, lack of work experience and references, unclear career direction, unstable housing, and overwhelming personal and family circumstances.

Youth TJ programs mainly operate social enterprises or work crew based models under close supervision to complete needed and unaddressed community service projects such as low-income housing rehabilitation, building maintenance, or trail and park improvement. Some TJ programs serve youth in scattered site work assignments in public or nonprofit community service agencies or schools. These programs are often coupled with other programs providing basic education, GED or ESL classes, counseling, and peer-to-peer interactions. Following completion of the transitional job, participants receive supportive services to further schooling or to gain permanent employment.

Youth Transitional Jobs programs produce significant returns to youth and to the community. A fourteen-month study of youth community service projects found the following:⁴

- Every dollar invested in youth results in more than two dollars returned to the economy in the form of wages and reduced benefits.
- 80 percent of young people in youth corps and YouthBuild programs move into jobs, school, or both upon program completion.
- The aging workforce requires that we engage the potential future workforce fully – failure to integrate our youth into the workforce will adversely impact our economic capacity and productivity.

Can TANF goals be met through Transitional Jobs programs?

TANF, the nation's welfare program, has goals to move adults into the workforce and requires states to ensure significant percentages of TANF recipients are working as they receive benefits. Many TJ programs serve persons receiving TANF who often face significant barriers to employment, including low levels of education, substance abuse, domestic violence, depression, and little work experience.

TJ programs serving TANF recipients include case management to work with participants on individual issues and help the participant move into the workplace to gain experience. As participants work in their transitional job, they are also complying with state TANF work requirements. These TJ programs typically are scattered worksite models or social enterprises. TJ worksite placements for TANF recipients are often with nonprofit, governmental, or for-profit employers and include work in clerical, maintenance, food service, shipping or receiving, healthcare, retail, and other service industry sectors.

In just three of the dozens of TANF programs in our communities, well over 25,000 persons receiving TANF have become workers:

- *Community Jobs*, the state of Washington's Transitional Jobs program, has served over 11,026 individuals since 1998.
- *Georgia Goodworks*, Georgia's Transitional Jobs program, has served over 4,230 individuals since its implementation in 2000.

- *Transitional Work Corporation* in Philadelphia, PA serves over 1,500 people annually. This TJ program has served over 13,472 people since it began in September 1998.

Aggregated data indicates that between 72 and 92 percent of TJ participants receiving TANF who complete the TJ program are successful in becoming employed.

TJ programs work. The results are obvious: TJ programs effectively engage persons who are excluded from the workforce to change perceptions and experiences that serve as barriers to employment, and to strengthen our communities and provide many community members with the opportunity to become self-sufficient through work.

For more information about the Transitional Jobs strategy, please visit our website at www.transitionaljobs.net.

¹ U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. *Prison Statistics*. Retrieved September 20, 2006, from <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/prisons.htm>

² Holzer, H.J. (2002, June). *Perceived criminality, criminal background checks, and the racial hiring practices of employers*. Washington DC: Georgetown Public Policy Institute, Georgetown University.

³ Bernstein, J. & Houston, E. (2000). *Crime and work*. Economic Policy Institute. Retrieved September 20, 2006, from

http://www.epi.org/content.cfm/books_crimeandwork#intro

⁴ Jastrzab, J., Masker, J., Blomquist, J., & Orr, L. (1996). *Evaluation of national and community service programs, impact of service: Final report on the American conservation and youth service corps*. Cambridge, MA: Abt Associates, Inc.

The National Transitional Jobs Network (NTJN) is a coalition of more than 200 Transitional Jobs (TJ) programs, policy organizations, and sponsoring organizations. TJ is a workforce strategy designed to overcome employment obstacles by using time-limited, wage-paying jobs and combining real work, skill development, and supportive services to transition participants successfully into the labor market. The Network works to influence a number of audiences to ensure that policies will account for the hard-to-employ, that the public understands the need to invest in these services, that programs are able to effectively serve as many individuals as possible, and that best practices and technical assistance are widely shared and implemented throughout the network. The NTJN is made possible through the generous support of The Joyce Foundation, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, and Network members.

The mission of the National Transitional Jobs Network is to support and expand the size, type, and number of Transitional Jobs programs nationwide and to support the quality of the service model.

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