

case study: TANF Diversion Program Design



THE CLIENT

County of San Diego, California
Health and Human Services Agency (HHS)

THE PROJECT

“Ready, Set, Work!” (RSW!) TANF Upfront Diversion Pilot Project

THE CHALLENGE

HHS sought a better way for the county to help its citizens find or maintain employment and avoid on-going, long-term dependence on TANF assistance, known as CalWORKs. The goals were to improve the county’s Work Participation Rate (WPR) and to reduce the CalWORKs caseload by offering eligible clients short-term assistance in order to deal with a specific crisis situation or an episode of need. The CalWORKs Diversion program that was in existence provided emergency cash assistance for things like car repairs or rental security deposit, but proved inadequate as evidenced by an extremely low take-up rate.

THE PCG APPROACH

Public Consulting Group (PCG) worked side-by-side with HHS to design Ready, Set, Work! (RSW!), a new and innovative “up-front diversion” program based on several identified national best practices from other TANF agencies’. Along with offering intense job search and employment services to CalWORKs-eligible clients who are deemed the most “work-ready” based on discrete criteria, this new pilot program provides child care, transportation, and other work supports to participants. The program design requires higher effort and participation, but in return, participants receive higher cash payments than CalWORKs upon the completion of performance benchmarks.

THE RESULTS

PCG helped San Diego County maneuver through both federal and state regulatory processes to receive acceptance by the federal Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and to gain a state waiver. The PCG/HSA team was successful in arguing to ACF the case for providing child care and other work supports as “non-assistance” for unemployed participants searching for work. The six-month pilot was executed in two regions of the county, the Northeast and North Inland Family Resource Centers (FRCs), during the winter of 2010. As a result of the positive outcomes demonstrated during the pilot, the county implemented RSW! county-wide effective May 1, 2011.

ASSESSMENT AND OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS - FIRST QUARTER

Findings for the first quarter, from 11/01/2010 to 01/31/2011, of the RSW! program indicate that

- Work-ready participants prefer the work supports and intensive job search activities provided by RSW! as an alternative to dependence on public assistance
- A significant number of participants became employed within the first three months of the program

These findings are significant given the high unemployment rates experienced in San Diego during the months of November 2010, December 2010, and January 2011 (10.4%, 10.6%, and 10.1% respectively). The following data illustrates these findings:

- 96% (77 of 80) of CalWORKs applicants who were offered the opportunity to participate in RSW! did so in lieu of receiving CalWORKs assistance
- 39% (30 of 77) of RSW! participants gained employment within the first three months of the program
- 229% (22 of 77) of RSW! participants gained full time employment within the first three months of the program
- 17% (13 of 77) of RSW! participants were discontinued due to unsuccessful completion of benchmark activities within the first three months of the program
- 100% (77 of 77) of RSW! participants were diverted from the CalWORKs program during the first three months of the program