



# CONTRA COSTA CONTINUUM OF CARE QUARTERLY MEETING MINUTES

*The Contra Costa Continuum of Care provides a forum for communication and coordination about the implementation of the County's Strategic Plan to prevent and end homelessness, and for orchestrating a vision on ending homelessness in the County, educating the community on homeless issues, and advocating on federal, state, and local policy issues affecting people who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness.*

**Date, Time:** Friday, April 20, 2018, 10:00am – 12:00pm

**Location:** San Pablo Library, 13751 San Pablo Avenue, San Pablo

## 1. Welcome and Introductions

- Call to order by Jaime Jenett, H3

## 2. Employment and Homelessness: Best Practices in Employing People Experiencing Homelessness

- Panel discussion moderated by Erica McWhorter, HomeBase
- Panelists:
  - Antoine J. Wilson, Equal Employment Opportunity Officer, Risk Management, Contra Costa County
  - Barbara Vargen-Kotchevar, Personnel Services Supervisor, Human Resources Department, Contra Costa County
  - Lila Blanchard, Career Advisor, Rubicon Programs
  - Maureen Nelson, Administrator, America's Job Center of California of Contra Costa County, (formerly known as the One-Stop Career Centers).
  - Michelle Wade, Program Manager, Job Training and Placement Program, Opportunity Junction

**Moderator Question:** *As many know, one of the most powerful strategies used to support persons exiting homelessness to achieve stability and self-sufficiency is through connection to meaningful employment. Please take a moment to introduce yourself and, in your own words, provide a quick overview of your role at the organization you represent, and the programs and types of employment opportunities participants are offered through your organization. Are your programs' opportunities geared toward any particular populations? (e.g. Single adults, youth between ages 18-24, persons with disabilities, etc.)*

- **Michelle Wade, Program Manager, Job Training and Placement Program, Opportunity Junction**
  - Job Training and Placement, seven-month program, first 3 months computer and office skills, then 4 months paid internship, hire our trainees, work with business partners in the area to get on-the-job training (e.g., City of Pittsburg, Chamber of Commerce), chance to use the skills before starting a job
  - Career Development program – help with interviewing, resumes, job placement



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- Roadmap program – designed for youth 18-24 to help navigate through college, for youth who have had problems getting through college, help with things financial aid can't, provide counseling
- Tech center open to the community in the evening, classes on computers, typing, ESL; access to internet
- Focus: those who are experiencing poverty
- **Maureen Nelson, America's Job Center of California of Contra Costa County, (formerly known as the One-Stop Career Centers)**
  - Self-directed job search with access to services (computers, fax machines, assessments, etc.), skills workshops, job search, resume, coaching, career club (group coaching), credentials
  - Case-managed job search and access to federal job training funds; occupational training (state's eligible training list); encourage training in a strategic sector (health care, energy, information and communication technologies, etc.) that have a pathway out of poverty
  - WIOA program, senior program (subsidized employment), youth program, veterans (EDD is collocated), grants for CoCo SOARS (Probation training funds), Disability Employment Accelerator
  - Some programs have a subsidized employment component
    - CalWORKS – working in career centers or out in the community to get work experience
    - Youth, seniors
    - Unpaid internships through adult schools working for credit
    - Partnerships with agencies such as Opportunity Junction, Rubicon
    - Referrals to other agencies
    - English learners, those without GED, other populations of focus
  - San Pablo, Concord, and Brentwood locations
- **Lila Blanchard, Career Advisor, Rubicon Programs**
  - Offices in Alameda (Oakland, Hayward) and Contra Costa (Antioch, Richmond)
  - OneR – assist with assets, income, wellness, and connections
    - Long-term planning, visioning 2-4 years out
    - Assess people when they drop in – Alignment process, meet several times to discuss offerings, tours of facility
    - Workforce liaisons in the community build relationships with employers, County, unions
    - Empowerment plan
  - Elevate program – reentry after incarceration
  - Families Advancing Together – parenting and support for families experiencing economic challenges
- **Barbara Vargen-Kotchevar, Personnel Services Supervisor, Human Resources Department, Contra Costa County**
  - Manage recruitments for the county
  - Receptionist, two computers in front to help apply for jobs



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- Consultants running recruitment are accessible by phone and email
- **Antoine J. Wilson, Equal Employment Opportunity Officer, Risk Management, Contra Costa County**
  - Partnering with HR and spreading the word by visiting different locations
  - Focused on hiring individuals reentering society
  - Looking to diversify our workforce
  - Program to develop certain job classifications for those who are developmentally disabled (e.g., in the library); don't go through the usual process
    - Certify disability from Department of Rehabilitation
    - Access to questions in advance of interview
    - Once hired, provided a job coach as long as needed
  - Clean Slate Project: individuals with a record with County, Public Defenders office will work to dismiss or reduce the conviction; referrals to other counties to clear records out of jurisdiction

**Moderator Question:** *One aspect that can be challenging is to coordinate and streamline participant access to employment programs. Can you describe, step by step, from program entry to placement in employment opportunity, the process by which supportive staff guide persons experiencing homelessness through your program(s)?*

- **Michelle (Opportunity Junction):** one barrier is homeless without access to shelter; first step is to get connected to partners like SHELTER, Inc. to get into shelter; provide intensive case management; connect to low-income housing; funding to provide temporary assistance; on-site therapist to work through trauma
- **Maureen (America's Job Center):** focus on training and employment; rely on partners who specialize in homelessness, our goal is to connect them; rely a lot on the CORE Teams to connect people; refer to orientation to learn about training programs and job placement assistance; get an information packet; orient to job markets; case managers and employment liaisons provide assistance; site coordinator provides assistance to those who qualify for internship program; online training also available (Metrics); offer supportive services; help with transportation, clothing, tools, union dues, books
- **Lila (Rubicon):** implemented process that is the first stop for anyone to meet with an ambassador (who has recently completed the program), person is relatable, helps them feel comfortable, and connects them to case managers; two-week foundations workshop; more than a job mindset, it's a career mindset; additional workshops available (e.g., Connecting Your Career Dots – career assessment; financial services; networking); developing Empowerment Plan (setting goals for self)
- **Barbara (County HR):** receptionist helps complete applications, puts them in contact with the analyst doing the recruitment; list emailed out weekly; provide study guides to prepare; using self-scheduling for exams to address transportation limitations; doing interviewing online (Skype, phone), more flexible of people's lives and schedules; looking at vendors being able to offer exams online
- **Antoine (County EEO):** collaborating with local CBOs to offer workshops, explaining how to apply for county jobs, giving tips, helping them fill out applications, answer questions,



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give feedback, what to expect after submission; should respond to rejections spelling out what you've done to meet the minimum qualifications; rely on CBOs to help us get the word out to individuals; working with service providers on what they should do; trying to be an employer who can erase barriers (even invisible ones)

**Moderator Question:** *In homeless services, housing is considered a priority that must be addressed with as few barrier to entry as possible, including not limiting access due to behavioral health concerns or perceived readiness. Are there any program requirements for participation, job search assistance, or placement in paid positions? What efforts do your programs, as well as those you partner with, make to ensure there are as few barriers to entry as possible for participants?*

- **Antoine (County EEO):** trying to remove barriers of being required to show up on a particular day at a certain time; trying to address those with records (Clean Slate Project); work with populations directly to explain which classifications don't require a background check (have opportunity to move around once you get your foot in the door with the county); trying to reduce the timeframe that it takes a county to hire by informing applicants about the timeline and what to do in the meantime
- **Barbara (County HR):** changing laws about conviction history made people think they shouldn't bother applying; however, while Life-Scan is required, the actual job may not require it, in which case HR won't share the Life-Scan results; encourage people to not give up if they get a rejection (you have a week to cure); look at County website every Monday (usually posted then); look at job descriptions and be ready in advance of when a job is posted; typing certificates should be completed in advance; apply for anything you meet the minimum qualifications for (good interview experience even if you don't get the job)
- **Lila (Rubicon):** work on barriers like timeliness, transportation, interview attire, legal services (impact of convictions); if housing is an issue, allow people to prioritize between shelter and employment; incarceration; domestic violence; use motivational interviewing to find out where they're headed
- **Maureen (America's Job Center):** establishing eligibility under dislocated workers or adults programs; need SS card and state ID, and selective services card for adult males; new WIOA legislation has focused on knocking down barriers such as proving right to work (SS card can say not authorized to work); doing more than referrals—providing direct linkages, warm handoffs, with follow-up; welcoming space; offer drop-in services with five-minute registration; staff trainings on how to serve people walking in; working on improving accessibility (e.g., website, printed materials); child care; expungements; connections to behavioral health services; pipeline to County positions through Career Resources internship programs
- **Michelle (Opportunity Junction):** help our participants address transportation, child care, access to shelter as barriers, not just temporarily, but permanently—have a life skills class to help participants understand how to address; create a barrier report (list of barriers the individual is working through) and make sure they have the resources and are in contact with the people who can help them, but also critical thinking skills to



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problem solve; Homeless Court is an excellent resource to write off debts; on-site closet for interview clothing; Food Bank deliveries on Fridays; hot meals served daily

**Moderator Question:** *Another challenge many homeless services providers face is supporting applicants through the employment process. What advice you would give to those seeking to support homeless or formerly homeless clients with employment searches?*

- **Michelle (Opportunity Junction):** build strong, trusting relationships with business partners in your area; don't stop, keep applying, you'll get a job
- **Maureen (America's Job Center):** soft skills are important, work on those (see Metrics learning online); do volunteer work to close the resume gap, build your network, get a letter of recommendation, get new skills; have a LinkedIn profile (take a digital literacy workshop to do personal branding); keep talking to people, do informational interviews at a place you'd like to work; read everything you can about the desired field to build expertise; stay around positive people
- **Lila (Rubicon):** keep in mind the variety of backgrounds that people experiencing homelessness might have in terms of education and interests; match the high level of services and coaching, and opportunities where folks can get back to work quickly; work with employers where you can have honest dialogue about your clients; know when you should speak truth to power, when something inappropriate is happening; know what kind of address to put down on an application; don't volunteer information about their homelessness
- **Barbara (County HR):** critical thinking skills and customer service are huge; prepare for situational questions during interviews; Word and Excel are important skills
- **Antoine (County EEO):** don't give up, even if you don't hear from the County for a couple of weeks; you can reach out to the County to get application status; have clients review job description prior to interview, connect the dots to their experience; research the department, find out what they do, who they serve, what their mission is, and infuse into the interview

**Moderator Question:** *As indicated by the title of this discussion, providing connections to employment and housing often go hand in hand when assisting those exiting homelessness to achieve self-sufficiency and housing stability. How linked is a person's housing situation to their employment search? To what extent has housing been a barrier for employment or job search support? Have you coordinated efforts with the homeless response system or other systems?*

- **Michelle (Opportunity Junction):** often get referrals from Shepherd's Gate (transitional housing for women)—great at taking our referrals, and sending women our way, so that they can get the skills they need during their year-long stay
- **Maureen (America's Job Center):** one client was working with AB109 (SHELTER, Inc.) looking to get class A/B driver's license, but had driving record issues, so partnered with Contra Costa Reentry Network, Bay Area Legal Aid lawyer wrote a letter, training school accepted the letter for training purposes, then assisted to get laborer position, helped with transportation costs in first month, tools, clothes, union fees; someone else living



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in shelter was connected to St. Vincent de Paul and then a union job; another person was connected to CORE team, got food, socks, resources, and then got a job at Tesla

- **Lila (Rubicon):** there's a strong connection between housing and employment; the cost of housing is a factor in the immediate and long-term employment plan (i.e., whether they choose to stay in the Bay Area due to high costs of housing); help folks to be creative with all the programs out there to help with down payments, move-in costs; Rubicon works with people for three years to help break the cycle of poverty; advocate for extended stay in a shelter
- **Antoine (County EEO):** we've had success reaching out to CBOs; for example, STAND! referred several of their clients to the county for jobs; partnered with Men and Women of Purpose; work with Monument IMPACT to find their clients jobs; keep us in mind if you want us to come out to your organization to help your clients find jobs

### Questions from the Audience:

- **One barrier we're finding is daycare; our clients can find jobs, but as single parents, can't find daycare for their kids. What resources and supports are there for daycare services?**
  - **Maureen (America's Job Center):** Contra Costa Child Care Services is a place to start
  - **Lila (Rubicon):** if they're signed up with CalWORKS, there can be creative ways to obtain childcare
- **What's the age range to qualify for senior services?**
  - **Maureen (America's Job Center):** 55 and over; do a phone screen to identify most in need characteristics (veterans, homeless, disabilities), very low income; subsidized employment for two years up to 20 hours per week; it's a national program; ask for the Assets program in Alameda
- **What about substance abuse/use, drug testing?**
  - **Lila (Rubicon):** we were having NA classes at our site; do consistently work with folks in recovery, send them to employment opportunities; a big part of our wellness program is support groups and counseling
  - **Michelle (Opportunity Junction):** want participants to have at least one year clean and sober, but have an on-site therapist to help maintain sobriety as well; referrals; have employers who don't test for drugs, and know where to send candidates who are using; important to have strong relationships with the employers so they're prepared and know what clients are going through
  - **Barbara (County HR):** medical marijuana is treated like alcohol (can't use at work); don't do drug testing except for certain driving or Sheriff's Office classifications
  - **Maureen (America's Job Center):** there's a program in the Health Services department (vocational services to help people coming out of drug rehab)
- **One of the barriers is people who are anxious about getting a low-wage job for fear of losing their benefits. How to address?**



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- **Lila (Rubicon):** that's a part of the conversation with the client; assist with information about how much they can earn without losing benefits
- **Maureen (America's Job Center):** some programs have five-year safety net, but it's complicated
- **Michelle (Opportunity Junction):** we have a recent alumni who experienced this situation, but the key was determining how much she could earn and keep her benefits. Once we determined that amount, we were able to find her a part time job that allowed her to work and continue to receive her social security benefits.
- **Do you charge for your services? What is the difference between your programs and AppleOne?**
  - None of the programs charge for the services
  - **Michelle (Opportunity Junction):** we have contacts there, talk about our candidates, advocate for them, get them in the door
  - **Lila (Rubicon):** we're advocating for folks to move into permanent, full-time work; when that's not possible, we partner with staffing agencies looking for temporary-to-permanent positions; we do some of the same outreach that staffing agencies do, but highlight that we have longer-term relationships with our clients; also, we have different hiring incentives (e.g., transitional employment, tax breaks)
  - **Barbara (County HR):** the County has a contract with AppleOne, and once they have experience and are known, we'll hire them
  - **Maureen (America's Job Center):** we invite staffing agencies to do recruitment at our locations
- **Some of the big challenges are with undocumented families, for whom there are very limited resources. What kind of services do you offer for families who are undocumented?**
  - **Lila (Rubicon):** our center is open to the public, have computer lab and men's and women's groups available to everyone; serve as a VITA site (taxes done for free); but, it's a huge need, and unfortunately we need I-9 documentation to enroll; however, East Bay Sanctuary is one organization that can help
  - **Michelle (Opportunity Junction):** we offer similar services (computer classes and access); International Institute of the Bay Area can help undocumented individuals
- **Any resources for clients with language barriers?**
  - **Michelle (Opportunity Junction):** bi-lingual staff on-site
  - **Maureen (America's Job Center):** EHSD has a contract with Language Line to get translation support by phone (150 languages) or video (35 languages); have Spanish speakers in centers
  - **Lila (Rubicon):** if we can't serve in-house, we provide a warm referral (e.g., La Raza, La Familia)
- **Closing Thoughts**
  - **Antoine (County EEO):** the County wants to work with you
  - **Barbara (County HR):** thank you for having us



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- **Lila (Rubicon):** we start a new cohort every three weeks
- **Maureen (America's Job Center):** the AJCCs are going through a big transition; we will be contracting out career services beginning July 1 led by Rubicon and in partnership with a consortium; locations will shift (closing three of four centers, but more places will be available at access sites beginning in July)
- **Michelle (Opportunity Junction):** this was a great opportunity; it takes us all to tackle these issues, and we need to continue to partner