**Day 1**

**Moving Beyond Work First: Creating Better Employment Opportunities for Public Benefit Recipients**

Goals: Energize state advocates, organizations and teams to start identifying positive opportunities to make changes to public benefit programs

-Creation of meaningful job opportunities with living wages. So many of the working poor without as many barriers to employment are still unable to find sustainable employment.

-Education & training to better assist recipients (SNAP E&T, WIOA). Concerns about program limits, unsubsidized wages, connecting people to jobs for the longer term

1. **Public Benefit Work Programs:  Emerging Opportunities and Challenges**

Moderator:  Dan Lesser, Shriver Center (IL)

Panelists:

SNAP:  Stacy Dean, CBPP

Federal Rental Assistance:  Barbara Sard, CBPP

TANF:  Liz Schott, CBPP

* Question: In the context of work programs, what is the one thing you are most excited about? Worried about?
  + Stacy Dean: Excitement: We’re TALKING about work programs and SNAP. USDA working to energize conversation about job training, creation of SNAP E&T office, SNAP E&T pilots for up to 10 states. Worrisome: by the end of 2015, we will lose a minimum 1 million people from SNAP due to federal 3-month time limits, majority childless workers.
  + Barbara Sard: Excitement: FY 2015 appropriations bill may expand family self-sufficiency program to hundreds of thousands of households. New HUD secretary also excited about FSS program, opportunity to garner excitement to local level with agency partnerships. Two ongoing evidence-based studies in housing policy and work outcomes. Worrisome: Deregulatory options of few agencies (Moving to Work Demonstration); 39 current agencies in existence. Risks from Ryan Opportunity Grant proposal
  + Liz Schott: Worrisome: Above policy proposals (ie. Ryan) and possible state movements towards such policies (work requirements, block granting, time limits for ABAWDS, deconstructing the safety net) across various programs, not just TANF. Excited: We’re talking about work and same goals across advocates; how to find success within political arena
* Question: ABAWDs at risk of being removed via federal time limits. Quality vs. quantity, how do you make the tradeoff between effective program supports for families with children and protecting ABAWDs?
  + Stacy Dean: Many states have sanction-oriented programs that aren’t well designed; efforts to offer job fairs to ABAWDs with a 10-20% success rate. Not enough conversation to formulate programs addressing both A
* Question: What other federal developments/policies should people expect in next 2 years?
  + Stacy Dean: Farm Bill every 5 years. New chairpersons state SNAP needs restructuring “from top to bottom” to address waste, work requirements, etc. Senate and House expected to make deeper cuts to SNAP, Medicaid, EITC. Block grants are not expected to happen under this administration. Flexibility is bigger concern for programs.
  + Barbara Sard: Two other developments: 1) Federal gov’t putting new money ($24 million, possible extra $15 mil) for coordinators and peacemakers (not directly work-related services). 2) Proposed revamped regulations to Section 3 of housing programs – requirement to make sure that public housing households and other low-income households in neighborhoods get job training from federal programs.
  + Liz Schott: “Possible” that TANF is reauthorized this year with areas of improvement. Repurposing TANF Contingency Fund to direct to subsidized employment and work-related activities. Might be improvements to WPR. Loss of flexibility due to reauthorization in some states, interfering with priorities.
* Q: (TANF) Concerns about any work programs’ assessments and evaluations of barriers to employment, content of work-related activities…when concerns are raised, you’re depicted as anti-work. How do we frame these concerns effectively?
  + LS: Despite all the rhetoric, it has not been about effective work programs and investing into work activities and performing meaningful assessments and working with people with barriers.
  + SD: Experience with Farm Bill – forced Dems and Repubs from both aisles to the table. “We want to talk about work, but this is what work MEANS to us.” Talking about what it takes to support and engage these populations effectively—not about driving down caseloads but about finding positive outcomes. Being honest about what their true purpose is within the conversation.
  + BS: We’ve had the same experience in Housing: Possible incorporation of pro-work policies into housing policies. “Evolution” of political staff when learning more about program policies. The only savings is if you succeed in increasing persons’ earnings.
* BS and LS: States need to be aware of establishing TRUE living wages, not just enough earnings to get off TANF and other benefits. Also need to address the varying degrees of barriers to employment. HOW to spend money within programs between differing populations.
* Comment: Important to understand work training opportunities across all programs to advocate. Documenting the lack of work placements to show to legislatures as evidence. FNS report showing relation between SNAP benefits & jobs—tying pieces together to show to advocates.
* Comment: All of these comments are applied differently state by state. Other than working on accessibility, also work on those persons and households not on TANF and other programs.You all know your caseloads, but examine percentage of children affected by TANF. Pay attention to how your state is spending TANF funds.
* Question: Where are the business voices in these discussions? Are they successfully being engaged within states with advocates?

1. **Looking Beyond Public Benefit Work Programs:  Potential Leverage Points for Change**

Moderator:  Indi Dutta-Gupta, GLCPI

Panelists:

David Socolow, CLASP

Judy Mortrude, CLASP

Jessica Fraser, Indiana Institute for Working Families

* Question: What are the biggest opportunities for WIOA, particularly for those with strongest barriers to employment?
  + David: There is no money in WIOA! The targeting in the law has much stronger language creating incentives and removing excuses from workforce development system to use public funding for those with largest barriers to gain success. It’s important that performance measurements now have an adjustment for pre-and-post-program years. Don’t worry about taking on people with bigger challenges: you will not be penalized for it. Workforce orientation of the law originally had work-first approach so little funding was focused on training opportunities. Opportunities to strengthen career pathways, subsidized employment models can have heavier emphasis to provide some money to encourage employers to bring participants into open jobs
* Q: What are career pathways?
  + Judy: They are sector-based pathways built with inputs with employers, improve credentials that have value in that region to strengthen workers and families. Alignment of workforce development, human services, education. Capacity to move between (on and off) pathway depending on situation; can enter from wherever they currently are. Providers create program and make it ready to serve populations. Workforce development piece works as navigators—intrusive advisor with relationships with instructors and participants to help with re-entry into pathways and into workforce.
* Q: Most effective ways to make career pathways work within public benefit programming?
  + Judy: Getting right partners to the table. Financial investment to entice partners and businesses.
* Q: Discuss effort with “Skills to Compete” effort?
  + Jessica: Skills to Compete Indiana (2010)—skill training and advancement was big part of gaining economic self-sufficiency, expand reach beyond their organization and garner partners. Progress made in messaging of needs beyond one focus (adult education).
* Q: Tell us about Minnesota’s involvement in social service agencies?
  + Judy: Started this work 4-5 years ago to produce better education and employment outcomes for low-income communities AND to impact systems in a sustained way to learn and build better partnerships. Addressing a “common customer” together (investments, data analytics, aligning partners, responsibility for deliverables). Ran into issue of education cap limits in training programs which led to reforms for postsecondary education and adult education. Trying to find a place for each agency to play a part in the overarching mission.
* Q: Can you tell us about opportunities with WIOA and TANF/human services partnerships?
  + David: Always potential risks with TANF. With respect with mandatory partnership with TANF, Governor can opt out of requirement. There is opportunity to do a combined plan in which they’ll put together overall sharing of resources and coordination and co-enrollment among multiple programs. With more incentives, TANF agencies can bring people to the table to target benefits and training to those with biggest barriers. If you start at MOU level, it could become a fight about resources—start one step back with combined plan drafting to engage potential opportunities.
* Q: How can you practically begin multiple conversations about workforce development, human services?
  + Jessica: Workforce side gets the opportunities (and wants the $); social services agencies depend on administration.
* Q: How employers can be brought to have constructive conversation about those with most limited skills?
  + Judy: Address what their current skill needs are (sector-based research, National Skills Coalition). Then talk about cliff effect—if they had experiences where really good employee could lose job due to public benefits, how the programs work and how they connect to workers. We have great initiatives but only taking those who are the most ready (what happens when you run out of cream!).
* Q: Community college system is primary avenue for post-secondary education and skill training—what’s going on within this system?
  + David: Getting post-secondary instruction involved is crucial as source of support to get training. What post-secondary education describes as short-term training, workforce development field calls long-term training. On the federal level there have been 4 rounds of Tact capacity-building grants to consortia of community colleges to view itself as core of workforce development programs—focus on career pathways, gaining certifications and credentials versus 2-year degrees. Accelerated learning, contextualized learning; partnerships with employers for internships and apprenticeships.
  + Judy: Disconnect between “high-skilled” and “low-skilled” abilities; how to build the ladder down to those adults with lowest abilities. Competency-based diploma programs with contextualized learning for those who had poor education backgrounds/experiences. Concurrent development education with skills training.
* Q: What are some of the challenges with colleges working with these populations effectively?
  + Judy: Postsecondary credential is not just higher education—includes things that don’t have academic awards. Differentiated pathways for those with different assets, time and resources. You want to engage higher education but they are difficult to engage. Colleges may see this as a subset of their larger priorities. There is a growing awareness for this work beyond enrollment. They need to be serving their communities beyond enrolling students. Continuing education sides of community colleges are the R&D sections of these institutions.
* Q: How to improve access to people needing public benefits? What, beyond current plans, should people be thinking about that could work within states?
  + David: 1. SNAP regulations, 2. State-side of financial aid. Depending on the state, there are various resources for state financial aid that needs to be aligned with workforce development, to be excluded from SNAP. Both federal and state financial aid can be treated differently for needs-testing—make sure it is directly applied to educational costs first.
* Q: What do we know about programs with integrated education skills-based training?
  + Judy: Contextualized foundational skill-building in the context of occupational training. Have conversations about this kind of training and implementing this training for people no matter where they are starting in educational levels. Know what kind of training services you’re advocating for, avoid building separate and unequal systems to move people into careers where they can strive—“real” training experiences for these populations like other workers.
* Q: Low-income parents who aren’t on TANF but need skill training—Are there child care opportunities?
* Data analytics capacity determine needs, barriers to employment among certain populations
* Pay for performance models?
  + WIOA dollars can be used for such models. You can buy credit-based training modules from colleges. Pay-for-performance structures are tricky to set up and are “crushed under their own weight”.
* Q: Final words of wisdom/guidance?
  + David: Unified planning opportunity – governors are required to bring all types of partners to the table to adapt goals and vision. Advocates can play huge role in this process.
  + Jessica: Never underestimate how little your state agency heads do NOT know.
  + Judy: Who is the population in their systems? Go back to understand who these people are and who needs these resources.

1. **Child Care after CCDBG Reauthorization**

* Parents can’t work if they don’t have child care. Stable quality child care matters for low-income children and their development.
* Legislation has huge emphasis on health, safety and quality: need to improve in this. Minimum training requirements for CC providers receiving subsidies, criminal background checks. Non-licensed CC providers also must meet requirements
* Fundamentally change how subsidies deliver CC to families. Law requires that children earn subsidies for up to a year and would keep them regardless of changes made by parents’ employment. Supports stability for parents and continuity of care for children
* Funding: Congress recognized costs and authorized funding increases by 16%. However, this is a small fraction of the costs states will incur making changes with new law.
* Risk of tradeoffs is significant—federal/state policy responsibilities, particularly with funding, continuity and subsidies.

1. **Moving Beyond Work First: Creating a Framework for Work Programs that Simultaneously Promote Opportunity and Maintain a Safety Net**

Moderator: Elizabeth Lower-Basch, CLASP

* “Undeserving poor” narrative
  + People are poor because of their own bad choices
  + Safety net only encourages “dependency,” further bad choices
  + Dog whistle politics
* Breaking through the stalemate—have been successful in carving out groups from “undeserving poor” group (ex: EITC); in some cases this has made it harder to advocate for other groups
* Common ground: work opportunities
  + Most people want to work but are limited by challenges (economic, low skills, logistical or personal barriers)
  + Work requirements only acceptable when designed so they promote economic security rather than hamper it
* Discussion

1. How would you use this framework to talk to an opposing group?
2. How would you use this framework to talk with allies who are disagreeing with you?
   * Work alone isn’t sufficient; it’s when you add in the benefits
   * Shouldn’t use food as leverage; is morally wrong. Basically what we’re saying to poor people is, “you’re going to go to bed without dinner” if you don’t do what we tell you to do.
   * Even when you get a job, doesn’t mean they’re not poor anymore …
   * It’s not just “no one who works deserves to be poor” among progressives even—it needs to be “no one deserves to be poor”
   * “Wages” vs. “work”
   * Talk about what mostly applies
   * Unstable workforce doesn’t do anybody any good; doesn’t get anyone permanently off public assistance
   * Might say we should definitely build program that gives people the training; make sure dollars are wisely spent; make investments
   * Do the opposite of what conservatives do to our programs; play offense rather than defense
   * Also difference between economic self-sufficiency and being off public assistance or working
   * Are they really an ally if they don’t understand self-sufficiency
   * First need to make sure everyone is starting from the same place—uniform message
   * Need to invest in primary needs which then lead to and make work more feasible
   * Struggled with subjectivity of who gets to promote work
   * Activities should be meaningful
   * States need incentives to get there
   * Grappled with context—restructuring of labor force; what kinds of jobs need to be produced; what kinds of job activities
   * Also questions about framework application in rural areas—not necessarily any jobs in rural areas; in that context, do unemployed individuals just deserve to have cash assistance to get by?
   * Also need to have focus on children—activities need to work for families; need to have some framework for support for families so children aren’t made worse off as a result
   * Need to be able to do both; not have to make a choice
   * General agreement on basic value statements; but when coalition is broadened, need to expand
   * Need to talk through negotiating points with opponents
   * Also need to get allies on right/same messaging path
   * Crafting defensive messages—ex: SNAP ID legislation; worked with retail merchants
   * Using common themes like child care—thinking about pivotal issues
   * Do we feel comfortable going down a path that assumes work in all public benefit programs—because then you’ll have to deal with victim-blaming system; trapping people because of rhetoric
   * What does economic security mean?
   * What about people with disabilities? What happens when things change?
   * Some optimists thought this framework could help with getting services and resources; others thought maybe should continue to protect this group because they can’t always work
   * Community frame—when couch things in “we” more successful than couching in “they”
   * Extend to beyond having good jobs—economy is strong; both sides like this
   * Mobility
   * Also discussed the need to explore/define “community” in this framework
   * If focus is on jobs, what happens when jobs aren’t there?
   * What is consequence to local community from bad policies—how do you fight bad policy without being anti-work
   * Work requirements vs. work supports
   * Start with common agreement that work support (training etc.) is necessary to move ahead 🡪 help/hamper; not a work support if it’s holding you back
   * May be role of government to fill in space between wages and sustainable level for families
   * Wouldn’t have to be limited to work; could be activities that are meaningful to individuals and to community; “work” could be too limiting
   * Not just policymakers; also conversation with public
   * Also where do employers fit into this? Where they’re lacking?
   * Living wage tax on employers
   * Turnover rate for employers can’t be good either
3. **Matching Needs and Opportunities: What We Know About What Works Best and for Whom**

Moderator: LaDonna Pavetti, CBPP

Panelists: Melissa Young (National Transitional Jobs Network), Ruthie Liberman (Crittenton Women’s Union), Jason Elchert (Ohio Association of Food Banks)

* Issues unique to public benefit work programs:
  + Diversity of recipients: have everything from people who have just lost their jobs to families with significant challenges that may never have been able to work steadily 🡪 one size doesn’t fit all
  + Mandatory participation: stakes are much higher for program failure
  + Benefit access issues: making sure work doesn’t necessarily result in reduction in benefits
  + Funding/service delivery system: at what level and with whom?
* Older studies are often misinterpreted (mixed models)
* “Mixed” models (job expectations plus other options)—Work First Riverside program; almost half in program were in education
* Subsidized and transitional employment programs—significantly more work; evidence is less strong around transition to non-subsidized employment; for long-term unemployed, didn’t make a difference
* Skills training (career pathways and short-term “sectoral” employment programs)
* Contextualized learning or GED “Bridge” programs
* Case management in context of substance abuse led to increase in employment
  + Program in NE that built life skills; almost doubled rate of people who were stably employed; importance of child care
* Common characteristics:
  + Focus on goal-setting and individual choice
  + Upfront investments pay off
  + Keen attention to current life circumstances—not just focusing on employment
  + Individualized and ongoing support
  + Greater financial investments in people
* Assessment: critical, but results often not used for making key decisions
  + Not just about how it is done; more about how/if it’s used to make decisions
* Addressing nonparticipation:
  + Substantial problem in work programs
  + Many face significant barriers like low skills, mental health, also because they get so little from the programs—benefits wouldn’t outweigh costs
  + Children shouldn’t be penalized for parents
* Benefits access issues:
  + Eligibility contingent on participating in work activities
  + “Minor” requirements end up being big deterrent/cause major issues
  + Compliance issues

**MY:**

* Subsidized jobs programs are happening already all over the country using different funding sources focused on different populations
* Embed subsidized employment into state funding programs
  + New WIOA
  + States take opportunities during leadership transitions in administrations to educate and implement
  + SNAP/ENT and expiration of waivers: opportunity for subsidized employment
  + Significantly reduces recidivism for previously-incarcerated individuals
* Have business case ready and make it easy for employers to participate in efforts; businesses can be allies in advocacy efforts
* Start small; expand overtime
* Have goals; population in mind in beginning; will dictate structure of programs
* Consider sustainability, blending, system compatibility
* Be mindful of benefit cliffs

**RL:**

* Service org; mission is to help low-income women become economically self-sufficient
* Mobility Mentoring—
* About silo-busting, long-term engagement with families, individualized services
* Broad focus; have metrics around savings, obtaining and maintaining jobs,
* Theory of change 🡪 bridge to self-sufficiency 🡪 need to achieve stability in five main areas
* In last six months of five-year pilot; to complete program families needed to have $10,000 in savings and be close to their mass index wage
* Mass Index Wage
* 5 Main Elements of Mobility Mentoring
* Bridge assessment—families first identify where they are and set short-term goals to get to next rung
* Whackamole between silos
* “Right” set of goals for participants
* Key elements of mentoring:

1. Bridge to Self-Sufficiency
2. Clear goal-setting and outcomes measurement
3. Incentives when linked to long-term goals helps disrupt time frame of payoff—use public recognition, gift cards, etc.—have built this into state contract
4. Coaching—very different from case management; staff undergoes 45 hour training

**JE:**

* OH Gov. Kasich helped craft 3-month SNAP time limit
* Partnered with Franklin Co.
* Mass assessments to determine whether exempt for work
* Created an assessment tool; but never had an actual data set on these folks—didn’t know who they were, what their skills were, etc.
* Part of responsibility was getting folks connected to job registration system, also maintaining job eligibility
* Placing at nonprofits etc. to volunteer 24 hours/month (or employment 20 hours/week) to earn eligibility; if not, are sanctioned
* What we are finding is we’re mostly cycling through the same people again and again
  + Transportation stipend is being taken to check cashing
* Opportunities for innovative programming dollars
* How to influence change while working with various legislative entities
  + Able-bodied adults without dependents’ funding at county level; partnered with that was $1.5 million to use with Columbus State
  + $30,000 in background checks and $200,000 total for participant costs
* Hard to get past just maintaining eligibility
* Out of 3,000 individuals: (and one individual has about two of those barriers)
* 34% had felony convictions—easy to say everyone’s “able-bodied,” but not true; expungements and judge’s notes only go so far
* 33% undiagnosed medical conditions
* 30% no high school diploma, no GED—and need 9th grade reading level to get into most programs at Columbus State; not even taking into consideration people who just got through high school
* 25% registered with Ohio Means Jobs
  + One ex: guy convinced was going to get a driving job; had gone through $5,000 training but no one had bothered to check that he was convicted of a vehicular homicide
    - Data is observation-based, have cross-checked with background checks,
* Have to be inclusive when we talk about work, because we are leaving a huge group of people behind
* Average length of unemployment is about 2.5 years—and most have never received unemployment compensation
* Temp agencies are rising above grocery stores, Walmarts, etc.; what’s happening is people are being cut loose before they’re eligible for employment

**Questions from audience:**

* Need to recognize role of trauma
* Transitional jobs

1. **Making Progress, Moving Forward: Examples from the Field**

Moderator: Ife Floyd, CBPP

Panelists: Jessica Webster (Legal Services Advocacy Expert, Minnesota), Bich Ha Pham (Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies, NYC), Ann Woloson (Maine Equal Justice Partners)

**JW:**

* Example of mom who was one credit away from getting a Finance degree
* Had to fill out 15-some page document
* Went through welfare reform 2.0 in Minnesota
* The crowd is growing smaller and smaller; appetite for justice and constitutional arguments is shrinking
* So focused on new kind of language on what’s good for the economy, jobs mismatch, skills to compete,
  + Results: had bipartisan support for people to be in ABE for up to four years; have now made it a right to be in education and training
  + This is a new thing in Minn; trying to get people in more training, not just post-secondary—also ESL, ABE,
  + This rebranding has gotten more buy-in

**BHP:**

* In 2008 decided to do welfare report; knew things were bad because data showed it
* Released report in spring of 2008; good timing; lots of media attention
* Decided to look to see what were some of specific problems/barriers and solutions; moved onto draft bills, lobbying to change provisions as a coalition
* Access to Assistance campaign—sent video to legislators; because of great recession there was heightened interest
* Coalitions
* During mayoral race, developed issues paper; DeBlasio won and was informed of these conditions
* Messaging decision: needed to be clear/consistent on welfare stance even though agency was being taken over by more friendly people

**AW:**

* What has happened in Maine in past two years: bad policy under cloak of welfare reform
* Just re-elected Governor so will probably see similar in next few coming years
* EBT card restrictions that would not allow liquor, cigarettes, etc. purchases
  + Not necessary/effective and reinforce public stereotypes
* Upfront work search initiative that would have been prereq for being eligible to TANF
  + Really undermined work on newly-legislated comprehensive assessment process
* We needed to change the narrative about fraud
* Had to reassure friends (Dems) who were scared to say they wouldn’t support these programs
* Strategy: picking up the phone and calling CBPP to get national and historical perspective; this let us be able to say, other states have tried this and it didn’t work etc.
* Also developed fact sheets and talking points for the media to use; helped with people who were on the fence
* Think about alternative pieces of legislation—how to push back
* Survey of 1,000 people in poverty in Maine: asked what were their concerns; will talk more about it tomorrow; but need to ask people in poverty what is important to them

**Questions from audience:**

* Re: NYC mayor: how do you shift to implementation?
* Meaningless measurement of WPR
* Another problem is when dealing with conservative agency, a lot of times won’t admit when they are having a hard time placing people in jobs
* BHP: Integrating workforce data into systems—one idea was to get rid of all programs and get everyone who wanted the same thing to go through same door—of course still barriers, concerns about welfare recipients getting the resources they need; but right now still second-class system. But I don’t think we’re heading there.