

**DEPARTMENT OF  
PUBLIC SOCIAL SERVICES**



**LOS ANGELES COUNTY  
COMMUNITY SERVICE PLAN**

**November 2002**

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# LOS ANGELES COUNTY

## DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SOCIAL SERVICES

### COMMUNITY SERVICE PLAN

#### Introduction

In November 1998, a workgroup of interested stakeholders including community advocates, union representatives, private industry councils, community colleges, volunteer groups, the education community and Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) staff was convened by DPSS to develop the Los Angeles County Community Service Plan. DPSS also spoke with California Work Opportunities and Responsibilities to Kids (CalWORKs) participants for their input.

What follows is the plan developed by DPSS with input from the organizations and individuals noted above.

#### Grant-Based/Grant-Based OJT Community Service

There were a number of alternatives that were considered in designing the Community Service program. One of the fundamental decisions was whether to make it grant-based or Grant-Based OJT.

Briefly, the grant-based approach can be broadly defined as an unpaid activity in which individuals are allowed to work for the CalWORKs grant they receive. In the Grant-Based OJT approach, the individual would receive his/her benefits in the form of a paycheck.

The majority of the Community Service Workgroup members felt that the Community Service program should take be Grant-Based OJT. Due to legal prohibitions, the Department had been precluded from pursuing a Grant-Based OJT (paid) plan. With the advent of new legislation, Los Angeles has amended its Community Service Plan to include both a Grant-Based Community Service (GBCS) and a voluntary, Grant-Based OJT Community Service (WBCS) component.

## **COMMUNITY SERVICE PLAN** (Continued)

### Potential Benefits of Grant-Based OJT Community Service Approach

Some of the potential benefits of the Grant-Based OJT Community Service program are:

- More formal work history. The Grant-Based OJT Community Service assignment may help build a more formal work history and may be viewed by participants, work sites and future employers as a real job. Participants will pay into Social Security, and, therefore, begin to build resources for their retirement.
- Increased self-esteem. The participant's welfare check will be converted into a paycheck. Therefore, he/she may derive an increased sense of accomplishment and self-worth because of the receipt of a paycheck instead of a welfare check.
- Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). The participant may be eligible to the Earned Income Tax Credit for the earnings received while in Grant-Based OJT Community Service.

### **Overview**

In California, the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program was replaced with the California Work Opportunities and Responsibilities to Kids (CalWORKs) program. The main focus of CalWORKs is to help welfare participants become employed and achieve family self-sufficiency. Los Angeles County has remained consistent with the intent of CalWORKs in the development of its Community Service plan.

Under CalWORKs, non-exempt single parents must work or participate in welfare-to-work activities for at least 32 hours per week. Adults in a two-parent household must work or participate for at least 35 hours each week. Both parents may contribute toward meeting the 35-hour requirement, if at least one parent participates for a minimum average of 20 hours per week.

With CalWORKs, time-limited cash assistance also became a reality. There are two time limits that affect CalWORKs participants:

#### 60-Month Time Limit

Effective January 1998, non-exempt adults receiving CalWORKs became subject to a 60-month lifetime limit to receive cash assistance. However, children eligible for CalWORKs can continue to receive cash assistance as long as they are eligible.

### 18/24-Month Time Limit

After being approved for cash assistance, non-exempt CalWORKs adults have an 18/24-month period during which they can receive welfare-to-work services to help find unsubsidized employment sufficient to meet the 32/35 hours per week participation requirement. Welfare-to-work services include job club, job search, skill and education assessments and the development of an individualized welfare-to-work (WtW) plan that identifies a strategy for becoming employed.

### Welfare-to-Work Plan

After the WtW plan has been developed, and the participant signs the plan, the 18/24-month time limit begins. During this period, the individual may participate in activities such as education, training or subsidized work experience. The time limit also begins if a participant refuses to sign the plan without good cause.

### Explanation of 18/24-Month Time Limit

CalWORKs participants who were receiving aid prior to April 1, 1998, are given a 24-month welfare-to-work time limit. CalWORKs participants who were approved on or after April 1, 1998, have an 18-month welfare-to-work time limit. However, the 18-month clock may be extended to 24-months under conditions described later in this Plan.

For CalWORKs participants who have been unable to secure unsubsidized employment within the 18/24-month time limit, sufficient to meet the 32/35 hours per week participation rate, Community Service is required for the adult to continue receiving cash assistance and other supportive services.

### **What is Community Service?**

In general, the CalWORKs program requires that a parent must either find unsubsidized employment or participate in education/training activities for a specified number of hours per week. After 18/24 months, the parent must meet his or her participation mandate either through unsubsidized employment, Community Service or a combination of the two. An individual may participate in Community Service activities until he/she has received aid for a total of 60 months.

### Community Service Parameters

CalWORKs legislation gave counties latitude to develop Community Service programs. In CalWORKs legislation, Community Service is vaguely defined. The following broad parameters are the primary criteria.

## **COMMUNITY SERVICE PLAN** (Continued)

Community Service must:

- Be performed in public or private nonprofit organizations;
- Meet unmet community needs;
- Not displace existing employees; and
- Lead to unsubsidized employment.

### **Mission of Community Service Program**

The basic mission of the program is to aid in the transition to work and provide those in Community Service with positive experiences and training that lead to unsubsidized employment sufficient to leave cash assistance and achieve economic self-sufficiency. Additionally, it will provide productive activities consistent with an individual's skills, needs, goals, and interests that build confidence and self-esteem, remove barriers to self-sufficiency and promote ownership in the community.

### **Individuals Required to Participate in Community Service**

All CalWORKs aided adults who have signed WtW plans and who have participated in the program for 18/24 months and are not exempt (have a child less than one year old, are incapacitated, etc.) are required to participate in Community Service. Non-exempt adults who choose not to participate or fail to participate without good cause will be sanctioned and their CalWORKs grant will be reduced. Only the child(ren) will continue to receive assistance. The adult will not be aided unless he/she complies and participates in Community Service. CalWORKs recipients who opt to participate in Community Service will be referred to as Community Service participants.

### Community Service Available during 18/24-Month Welfare-to-Work Period

Community Service may also be available to participants prior to the expiration of the welfare-to-work time clock if the participant and case manager determine this is the most appropriate assignment to help the participant achieve his/her employment goal.

### Individuals with Expired Welfare-to-Work Time Clocks who Return to Aid

Individuals who have received aid for a cumulative period of more than 18/24 months and return to aid after a break in aid of at least one month may be required to participate in Community Service to meet their participation.

## Activities Available to CalWORKs Recipients who are Meeting their Participation Requirement

Individuals who have reached their 18/24-month time limits and are meeting the 32/35 hours per week participation requirement through either unsubsidized employment or Community Service can participate in welfare-to-work activities beyond the 32/35 hours. These activities include:

- Job Search;
- Education;
- Training; and
- Job Retention Services.

## **Timeline and Projected Participant Numbers for Community Service**

In theory, the earliest CalWORKs participants who could have reached Community Service were those who were approved for aid and signed their welfare to work plans during the month of April 1998. These participants would have exhausted their 18-month time limits in October of 1999. However, CalWORKs was implemented in Los Angeles in April of 1998 and no participants were approved for aid and signed a WtW plan in that month. Therefore, November was the first month participants hit the welfare-to-work time limit.

Participants with a 24-month welfare-to-work time limit who were receiving aid prior to April 1998, reached Community Service in April 2000. The numbers in Community Service began very low and will grow cumulatively.

## Possible Extension of the 18-Month Time Limit

CalWORKs legislation allows counties to extend a participant's 18-month limit by up to six months if the county determines:

- The extension is likely to lead to unsubsidized employment; and
- The participant has complied with the provisions of his or her WtW plan.

Los Angeles County is individually reviewing all cases subject to the 18-month time limit for a possible extension. Participants who meet the criteria will be granted an extension.

## **Participants Entering Community Service**

While the primary focus of DPSS is to place participants into unsubsidized employment sufficient to leave assistance, some participants have been unsuccessful and others, although finding employment, have remained dependent upon continued cash assistance. Community Service participants are likely to fall into the following categories or combinations of categories:



## **COMMUNITY SERVICE PLAN** (Continued)

- Participants who are working part-time in unsubsidized employment less than the mandatory 32/35 hours per week;
- Participants who have fully cooperated with all requirements but have been unsuccessful in obtaining employment;
- Participants who have fully cooperated but have not been able to retain employment and may be cycling between employment and unemployment;
- Participants who have not always been compliant and who have exhausted the 18/24 months of services; and
- Self-Initiated Program (SIP) participants who have exhausted the 18/24 months attending school and who are not employed the required 32/35 hours per week.

Because of the variety of participants who will enter the program, each individual will receive a comprehensive assessment that will look for interests and skills, but also attempt to identify any previously undetected barriers or obstacles that may have prevented the participant from securing employment.

### **Work to be Performed**

Community Service is work performed by CalWORKs participants in the public or private nonprofit sector; the goal is to meet unmet community needs and perform work that would have gone undone by employees. Community Service slots will be available in a variety of governmental and nonprofit agencies.

### Unmet Community Needs

CalWORKs legislation requires that Community Service must be performed to meet unmet community needs. Unmet community needs can be defined as activities that would take place in a public or private nonprofit entity that aid in the betterment of society and/or community. Examples of possible unmet community needs are:

- Graffiti removal;
- Administrative or clerical work;
- Maintenance/grounds-keeping;
- Neighborhood beautification;
- Public health assistance;
- Health and social services; and

- School aides.

The intent is to find slots that build skills and enhance employability.

### **Design of Community Service Program**

Community Service Participants will participate in 32/35 hours of Community Service activities per week (unless fewer hours are allowed under State regulations). Activities such as education, training, etc., that are required for, or relevant to, the Community Service activity can be part of the assignment. Additionally, transportation, child care and ancillary work related expenses will be available to CalWORKs Community Service Participants.

Substance abuse, mental health and/or domestic violence services can also be counted toward meeting the individual's participation requirement if the services enable or support the Community Service assignment.

### **Time Frame**

The typical Community Service assignment will be nine months. If after nine months the participant has not been successful in finding unsubsidized employment, he/she will be re-evaluated, and if appropriate, re-assessed. In which placement can either be extended or the participant will be placed into another Community Service assignment.

### **Design of Grant-Based OJT Community Service**

#### **Grant-Based OJT Community Service**

DPSS will use a phase-in approach to the implementation of Grant-Based OJT Community Service in Los Angeles County.

Participants in the Grant-Based OJT Community Service program will have all or a portion of their CalWORKs grant diverted to an employer. The CalWORKs participant will receive their diverted grant as a paycheck. Participants will be required to pay any applicable federal or State payroll taxes.

## **COMMUNITY SERVICE PLAN** (Continued)

### Voluntary Consent Form

Participants who wish to participate in Grant-Based OJT Community Service as an alternative to unpaid Community Service will be required to sign a voluntary consent form. At the initial Community Service interview, GAIN Case Workers will discuss the participant's options which include unsubsidized employment, Grant-Based OJT Community Service or unpaid Community Service. The volunteer consent form, WtW 16, informing notice along with a locally produced script, will be utilized by the GAIN Case Workers to inform the participants of the advantages of unsubsidized employment and the fiscal impact on the participant's net income while participating in Grant-Based OJT Community Service. At this time, WtW 16 will be used to obtain the participant's written agreement to accept or decline participation in Grant-Based OJT Community Service. The form will be translated into the following languages: Spanish, Armenian, Cambodian, Chinese, Farsi, Korean, Russian and Vietnamese.

### Use of Intermediary Contractor

The payroll for Grant-Based OJT Community Service participants will be handled through an intermediary contractor who will act as employer of record for all participants in the program. DPSS will use the current inventory contractor for this function. The contractor will handle the earnings calculations as well as other related payroll functions (workers' compensation, etc.). The contractor will cover the employer cost for FICA and workers' compensation through its budgeted allocation for administrative expenses. The contractor will also ensure the timely distribution of checks to participants.

### Treatment of Earnings

In Grant-Based OJT Community Service, CalWORKs participants will opt to receive all or a portion of their grant as a paycheck. In determining eligibility, the paycheck will be processed as non-earned income. This will ensure that the current CalWORKs earned income disregards are not applied and no supplemental grant is issued.

CalWORKs participants in Grant-Based OJT Community Service will be required to report their earnings from the assignment on their CW 7.

### Food Stamps

With respect to the federal Food Stamp program, the wages will be treated as earned income and Food Stamp disregards will apply. This would mean a potential increase in a participant's Food Stamp allotment if earnings do not exceed the diverted grant amount.

## Community Service Participant Flow

Below is a brief outline of the Community Service Participant flow:

1. Notice and Re-evaluation - Participant receives a letter stating that the 18/24-month time limit is due to expire and that he/she has been scheduled to meet with the GAIN Services Worker (GSW). Within two months prior to Community Service work assignment, the participant will meet with the GSW, who will explain the Community Service program, review the case situation and determine whether a six-month extension will be granted for those who have hit the 18-month time limit. At this interview the GSW will explain to the participant in detail the option of participating in the voluntary Grant-Based OJT Community Service program. The GSW will review with the participant the differences in income between participating in Grant-Based (unpaid) Community Service, a regular job and Grant-Based OJT Community Service.
2. The participant will be informed that, in the Grant-Based OJT Community Service program, they will receive their grant as a paycheck and will pay into Social Security, Unemployment, and State Disability Insurance. The participant will be informed of their rights and responsibilities with respect to participating in Grant-Based OJT Community Service.
3. Reassessment - Prior to being enrolled into Community Service, each participant will be individually reassessed by a vocational assessor to evaluate any existing barriers and to determine his/her interests, aptitudes and goals. The result of the reassessment will be used to establish the participant's Community Service activity and a new plan for moving into unsubsidized employment.
4. Reassessment could also result in a clinical assessment for mental health or substance abuse problems, and if necessary, a referral for those services.
5. Assignment - The individualized plan developed with the vocational assessor will be used by the participant in conjunction with information from the CalWORKs office Community Service Liaison to determine the individual's work assignment and other activities. The individualized plan will establish an employment goal. At this time the CalWORKs participant may opt for either the Grant-Based or Grant-Based OJT component of Community Service.
6. Community Service - The participant will engage in 32/35 hours of Community Service activities (unless fewer hours are allowed under State law).
7. CalWORKs participants who opt to participate in the Grant-Based OJT Community Service program, will sign a voluntary consent form.

**COMMUNITY SERVICE PLAN** (Continued)

If after nine months a participant remains unsuccessful in finding unsubsidized employment sufficient to meet the 32/35 weekly participation requirement, the above process will be repeated until the participant’s time-clock expires and is no longer eligible for welfare-to-work services.

**Finding Organizations Interested in Providing Slots for Community Service Participants**

DPSS intends to use the current inventory of public and nonprofit agencies interested in providing training slots for CalWORKs participants. This inventory, currently maintained through a contractor, contains approximately 400 sites and about 1,800 slots. These slots are not currently Grant-Based OJT Community Service slots, but represent a potential source, as many have experience participating in the Grant-Based Community Service program.

It is felt that outreaching to this pool of prospective providers will provide sufficient slots to handle the initial placement needs of the program. To make use of this potential resource, a Community Service Employer Outreach packet has been developed to ask current providers if their organization is interested in providing slots for CalWORKs Community Service Participants.

Slots for Non-English/Non-Spanish-Speaking Community Service Participants

While modification of the existing inventory will suffice for English- and Spanish-speaking participants, particular attention must be paid to finding agencies that can accommodate the needs of the non-English/non-Spanish-speaking participants.

Because of this, an outreach focused on organizations that can provide slots for other monolingual populations has been undertaken. Specifically, the outreach looks for agencies that can accommodate participants speaking the following languages:

- S Armenian;
- S Cambodian;
- S Chinese;
- S Farsi;
- S Korean;
- S Russian; and
- S Vietnamese.
- S Availability of Slots as Program Grows

Undoubtedly, as CalWORKs continues to move ahead, the number of slots needed for Community Service will increase. As the program grows, the Community Service employers’ outreach material will be sent to more prospective employers.

The Department considered but rejected the alternative to having a large number of slots available at the inception of the program. Past experience with providers has shown that the number of slots available at any given point in time should not overly exceed the needs of the program. This tends to lead to frustration by the prospective employers if we cannot supply participants, and an unwillingness to make themselves available in the future. Based on this, instead of gathering a large number of slots at the beginning, new providers will be sought and added to the inventory as needed.

Individual CalWORKs participants can develop their own Community Service slots. However, the slot is subject to the same requirements noted in this plan.

## **Placement Requirements**

### Community Service Providers/Employers' Responsibilities

DPSS determined that the existing inventory could be used as an initial source for Community Service employers. To provide Community Service slots, employers will enter into a non-financial agreement.

### General Requirements

Employers will:

- S Provide a clearly defined description of duties for participants;
- S Interview prospective CalWORKs participants who are referred to them for Community Service;
- S Upon acceptance of the participant, provide a meaningful work experience;
- S Establish a file, containing records of the Community Service assignment;
- S Maintain General Liability Insurance;
- S Ensure that Community Service participants are not asked or required to participate in religious activities;
- S Ensure that Community Service participants are not asked or required to participate in political activities;
- S Report suspected or actual welfare fraud, elder abuse or child abuse;
- S Comply with Civil Rights laws;
- S Avoid disparate treatment of CalWORKs participants;

## **COMMUNITY SERVICE PLAN** (Continued)

- S Fully comply with anti-displacement provisions (partially noted below) in State law;
- S Avoid displacement or partial displacement of current employees including, but not limited to, a reduction in hours of non-overtime and overtime work, wages, or employment benefits;
- S Avoid the filling of positions which would otherwise be promotional opportunities for current employees, except when positions are to be filled through an open process in which recipients are provided equal opportunity to compete; and
- S Comply with other applicable laws.

### Guidelines for Placement

(Draft language for these guidelines was developed by Connect L.A. in conjunction with the Volunteer Centers of L.A. County)

#### Criteria

The agency has designated a staff person and a department/section responsible for directing the selection, placement, overall administration, and supervision of the Community Service participant.

#### Designated Staff Responsibilities

As necessary:

- S Schedule an interview;
- S Conduct a comprehensive interview to assess the participant's job skills, potential and attitude toward work;
- S Discuss available assignments within the agency;
- S Explore any barriers that may hamper a successful placement (e.g., distance, children's needs, schedules, etc.);
- S Orientate participants with policies of the agency;
- S Explain the mission of the agency;
- S Explain the organizational structure, department functions, etc.;
- S Conduct a tour of the facility; and
- S Introduce the participant to the department/section supervisor where assigned.

### Procedures and Rules of Agency

- S Give an overview of the job which the participant will perform;
- S Keep records of hours worked;
- S Report tardiness and/or absences to the GSW;
- S Discuss appropriate attire and behavior; and
- S Discuss lunch period and break schedules.

### Other Administrative Duties

- S Ensure that appropriate staff within the agency provide supervision and periodically confer with one another to follow the job performance of the participant;
- S Ensure that supervisors assess and periodically schedule performance reviews with the participant;
- S Have contact number for DPSS staff in the event that consultation is necessary to solve a participant's problem; and
- S Write letters of recommendation as appropriate.

### Participant Responsibilities

As necessary:

- S Facilitate and be available for an appointment interview;
- S Be available for the interview at the agreed upon time of appointment;
- S Be prepared to accept the assignment; and
- S Take medical tests and/or background checks required by the agency.

### DPSS Responsibilities - Oversight and Coordination

To aid in placing participants into agencies and positions for which they are suited, Community Service Liaisons have been designated. The Liaisons will gain knowledge of the Community Service providers in their areas. This knowledge will be used to aid GSWs in placing participants.

Additionally, Community Service Liaisons will have significantly reduced yardsticks to allow them to provide intensive case management services. This will include identifying sites, providing additional supportive services and interacting with participants and employers.



### **Monitoring Work Sites and Placements**

Sites that provide meaningful experiences to help prepare CalWORKs participants for unsubsidized employment are a key component in a successful Community Service program. With this in mind, strict monitoring of Community Service work sites will take place.

The monitoring will be conducted by DPSS and the inventory contractor and will include:

- S Site visits - Staff will visit sites to ensure that the environment is conducive to the needs of Community Service participants;
- S Survey - Staff will conduct periodic surveys of Community Service participants and of site supervisors;
- S Tracking - Staff will track job placements of Community Service participants; and
- S Monitor work sites and assess their willingness to hire participants over a period of time. Sites with the best records for placing their participants into unsubsidized employment will be given priority for future placement. Sites that over time show an unwillingness to hire participants or show an inability to provide job skills that will enable participants to obtain unsubsidized employment with other employers, will be dropped from the provider inventory.

### **Communication**

Good communication is essential to the successful implementation of the Community Service program. With this in mind, the following efforts will be undertaken in addition to the normal administration procedures:

- S DPSS will develop a pamphlet explaining the Community Service program. The pamphlet will be made available in the DPSS CalWORKs offices.
- S DPSS orientation and motivation presentation for new participants will be updated to include a brief overview of the Community Service program.
- S DPSS will conduct training of staff on the new program and its rules and requirements.

### **Resources**

Listed below are some of the resources that will be dedicated to assisting Community Service participants. Also included are brief descriptions of their roles:

- S GAIN Services Worker (GSW) - Primary contact for a Community Service participant. GSW responsibilities include evaluation of participant needs and provision of case management services.

- S Vocational Assessor - Conducts assessment of participant's skills, interests and aptitudes.
- S Community Service Liaison - DPSS employee who has knowledge of Community Service assignments available through providers in a particular area. Works with individual GSW to facilitate appropriate placement of participants. The Community Service Liaison will also evaluate participant developed Community Service slots.
- S Contractor - The contractor will maintain an inventory of the agencies that provide slots and conduct some of the monitoring to ensure that necessary requirements are met.
- S DPSS administrative staff - Will provide oversight to the program and monitor and track placements, sites, etc.