

**GRAND JURY REPORT:
VOCATIONAL TRAINING FOR DISPLACED WORKERS**

RESPONSE BY

**COUNTY OF VENTURA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT DIVISION
SEPTEMBER 8, 1998**

The Grand Jury Report focuses on two aspects of the Workforce Development enterprise relative to the re-employment of displaced workers: 1) the process for the referral of clients to vendors of classroom training and 2) the evaluation of performance and cost-effectiveness at such vendors. More specifically, the Report addresses concerns raised by residents regarding the quality of training they received at one facility, the Technology Development Center campus of the Ventura Unified School District's Continuing Education Program.

The Report concludes with 8 separate recommendations, 5 of which are addressed to the Workforce Development Division (WDD). Responses to each of those 5 recommendations are as follows:

Recommendation 1: "That WDD re-assess their methods for screening and testing before recommending career opportunities and schools for their clientele."

The Grand Jury Report only peripherally addresses WDD's client screening and testing methods. As previously indicated, the primary thrust of the Report is on the performance, and cost-effectiveness, of one vendor of WDD's classroom-based re-training services.

It is important to note that the screening and testing methods employed by WDD are for the most part mandated by the implementing regulations of the federal Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). The mandated assessment requires there be a balance between client interest in a particular occupational field with an objective determination of the client's ability to successfully complete training and obtain a training-related job. At a minimum, the assessment process considers the following variables:

work history
motivation, interests and aptitude
transportation and access to training site
child care and other financial needs
basic and occupational skills
financial resources during the training period

marketable skills
educational level
labor market considerations
family situation
attitude towards work

WDD does not mandate that a client attend a particular training site, but rather offers a choice of appropriate options, matching the client's need as determined by the objective assessment to the pre-approved training curricula provided by the several local vendors.

With reference to referral to training options, the objective assessment is used to develop an individual service strategy for each client. The substance of that service strategy is reviewed with each client in detail and bears each client's signature for concurrence. Should any client disagree with the recommended strategy, or believe that the recommendation fails to account for all relevant information, there is an open-door option for the client to raise those concerns at any point of the assessment, referral and training process. The client may request an informal review of the recommended service strategy or, if he or she believes appropriate, may file a grievance regarding the staff recommendation. The grievance process is disclosed to each client at the point of first orientation and enrollment and is mandated by law. This entire process has been reviewed on numerous occasions by State oversight agencies and has in every instance been approved.

The recommendations of the Grand Jury Report will support our continuing evaluation and re-evaluation of the process for assessing and developing service strategies for JTPA clients.

Recommendation 2: "That WDD collect accurate data on their clients after they have graduated from training and make appropriate adjustments for maximum efficiency and cost-effectiveness."

WDD concurs that the collection of accurate data on training outcomes is essential to the evaluation and refinement of the program services. Such data collection is in fact mandated by JTPA, which by law is a performance driven program, with national standards based on weekly earnings and job retention rates at 91 days following the completion of training. Outcomes are tracked for each individual client and for each vendor and their separate training programs. That data informs each referral decision; training programs that do not satisfy JTPA performance measures are removed from the list of eligible options.

Not only does WDD track vendor performance on the local level, WDD participates in a broader Southern California network (from Santa Barbara County through San Diego) for the certification of all vendors and programs eligible for referral through JTPA funds. That network assures the continual evaluation of vendors in the context of a broad and competitive market.

For further comment on the issues of cost-effectiveness and vendor evaluation, please reference our response to recommendation number 4 below.

Recommendation 3: "That WDD improve their attitude toward all clientele seeking assistance."

In our efforts to provide professional services in a customer-friendly environment, all WDD staff are required to attend Customer Service Training. The purpose of the training is to maintain an atmosphere of continuous improvement, with reference both to immediate customer satisfaction and to long-term success in the provision of re-training assistance.

The anecdotal evidence offered in the Report is difficult to analyze as it is presented lacking adequate context. While not intended to justify any perception of poor attitude in customer service, it is important to emphasize some points registered above with reference to client assessment. As noted, it is mandated by law that WDD balance client preference for service with an objective assessment to support decisions on enrollment and referral to training activities. The objective assessment has the purpose of both helping to guide clients most expeditiously back into employment, and to assure that financial resources are committed in a manner most likely to yield success.

This recommendation serves as a welcome reminder that customer service is paramount in the provision of training services for dislocated workers.

Recommendation 4: "That WDD evaluate the overall cost of training for their clientele, not just the duration of the training."

WDD concurs entirely. In every phase of the administrative vendor approval and individual client assessment and referral process the system is specifically designed to identify and document the complete projected cost of returning a client to the workforce.

JTPA legislation provides for clients who have a valid need to receive a variety of support services while enrolled in an approved training program. These might include, for example, payment of all child care expenses while in training, assistance with housing, food and other basic survival expenses, transportation assistance to and from the training site and even employment related tools and clothing required for the job.

The duration of training becomes a major concern when the above-mentioned peripheral expenses are included in the total package of assistance provided to a client. Shorter term training programs, such as those provided by some of the adult schools or private institutions, are more cost-effective than one and a half or two year training programs for clients with a need for substantial support. In addition, these shorter term training programs allow the client to obtain employment and become self-sufficient much sooner. Long term training, as cited in the Report as perhaps a more cost-effective option, may appear so, but

more commonly encumbers large amounts of support service and income maintenance resources. At the same time, the client is not back in the workforce earning an income.

The difficult policy questions in this arena are highlighted by recent welfare reform legislation. The new mandate is to return clients immediately to employment, and then to work with them after achieving employment toward improving their skills and earnings toward increasing self-sufficiency. Up until the recent adoption of reforms, the national welfare policy was to work with aid recipients over a long-term, providing financial assistance for a client's complete re-education or the remediation of major gaps in educational experience and achievement. Welfare reform has essentially eliminated this option in favor of short-term interventions and the immediate re-introduction to the workforce, generally without the benefit of any preliminary re-training.

While the basic JTPA design is to offer training leading to employment, none of the programs funded under JTPA have the intended purpose of funding a client's long-term re-training such as that offered by 2 year community college programs. In both welfare reform and JTPA, the policy pressures are to move toward shorter-term interventions intended to most rapidly return individuals to the workforce.

Recommendation 5: "That WDD re-evaluate TDC as providing adequate training at a reasonable cost."

It should be emphasized that all programs, including those offered by TDC, are already evaluated on an-ongoing basis. Further, each individual training program is evaluated separately. The process for certifying a vendor as eligible to receive JTPA referrals considers both the institution—its accreditation, its compliance with several federal and state rules and regulations—and the separate training programs or curricula leading to specific employment outcomes. The Grand Jury Report itself notes that, per its own research, TDC provides some programs that are extremely effective and some others that, at the very least, anecdotal evidence suggests are not so effective. As noted above, all of these programs are evaluated separately by WDD. Programs that do not maintain a placement rate consistent with national JTPA performance standards as noted above are removed from the approved list. For example, based on our own on-going evaluation, some TDC programs (as well as programs at other local training institutions) have been de-certified and removed as options for JTPA-supported training.

The Grand Jury Report identifies some important issues relative to the evaluation of program effectiveness. WDD's vendor and training program evaluation process will seriously consider the findings of the Report and will incorporate its recommendations as appropriate.

SUMMARY:

The findings of the Grand Jury Report re-confirm for us the important role WDD plays in the administration of federal re-training resources. WDD staff will continue to evaluate program effectiveness at all levels, including specifically the client assessment and enrollment process, the review of classroom training vendors, and the cost-effectiveness of each program. Relative to the Report's comments on customer service, WDD, along with its several partner agencies in the delivery of re-employment and re-training services, is this year developing a career competencies training program to assure that all staff are appropriately trained and supported in every capacity of our enterprise.

Should you have any questions about this Response, please contact Marty Robinson, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer for Regional Development at 654-2864 or Bruce Stenslie, Director of Workforce Development, at 652-7634.