

Economic Opportunity Institute

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Welcome to EOI. We use new tools for building the middle class. The Economic Opportunity Institute, based in Seattle, Washington, defines and details new public policies that address the bread-and-butter issues faced every day by middle- and low-income families. We build a bridge to economic security through research, policy, and media work.

Community Jobs Outcomes Assessment and Evaluation

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Executive Summary



The new era of welfare reform emphasizing the movement from welfare to work began in 1996 with the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). The PRWORA abolished entitlements to public assistance, created Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)^[1], and gave primary responsibility to the states to develop new methods of encouraging welfare recipients to work.

Community Jobs (CJ), a component of WorkFirst, Washington State's welfare reform, sets a precedent as the first and still the largest wage based public job creation program for "hard-to-employ" TANF recipients. The typical CJ participant is 30 years old, does not have a high school degree, is dealing with many personal issues such as domestic violence and lack of transportation, and has churned through the labor market holding past jobs for short lengths of time. In CJ, participants work 20 hours a week, earn a paycheck for hours worked and receive one-on-one support and mentoring to resolve barriers to work. Program participants work in CJ up to nine months. CJ is intended to provide valuable work experience and training to move individuals out of poverty, create public jobs, and benefit communities. The Office of Trade and Economic Development (OTED) first implemented CJ in June 1998.

The Economic Opportunity Institute and the Northwest Policy Center began collaborating on a program outcomes assessment and evaluation in January 2000 to understand this unique program's progress toward achieving its goals. Unemployment insurance (UI) wage data was collected to assess employment, job retention, and wage progression for individuals leaving the Community Jobs program. Surveys and focus group data were collected to evaluate the quality and performance of the most significant components of CJ through feedback from key stakeholders: program participants, CJ contractors, DSHS case managers, and worksite supervisors.

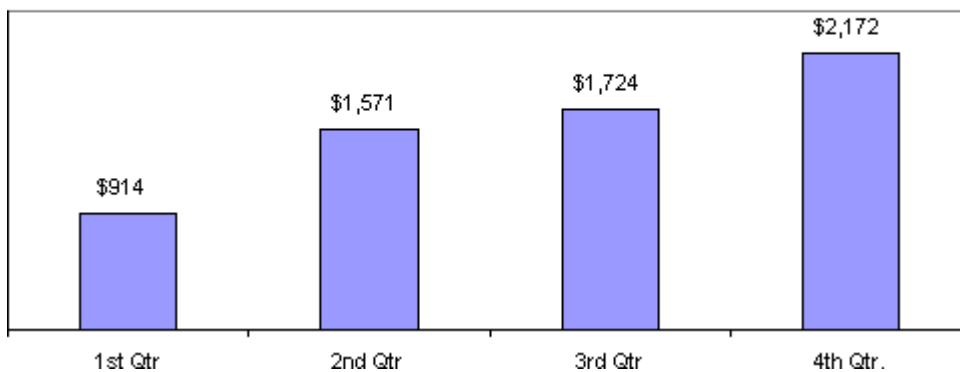
Outcomes Assessment



Due to limited education, poor work history and difficult family situations the majority of CJ participants had no real opportunity to find and keep work prior to their involvement in Community Jobs. Following participation in CJ, the wage data confirm that significant numbers of program participants have worked, continue to work, and move up a wage ladder.

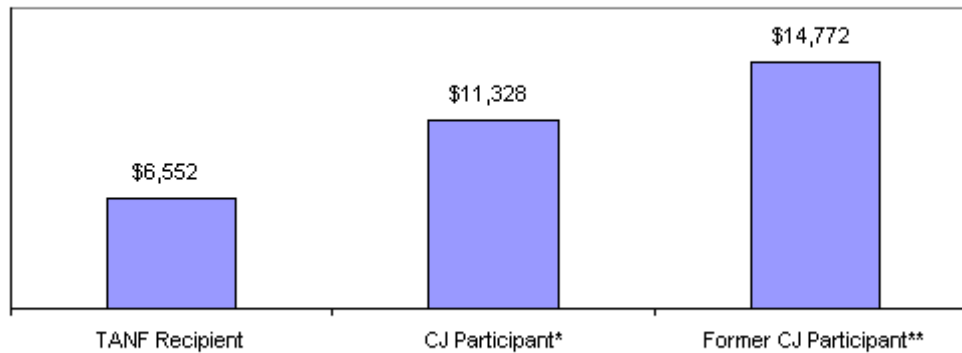
- 66% of all participants find employment after leaving Community Jobs.
- Of those who completed their CJ experience a year or more ago:
 - 76% find employment in the first two quarters after leaving Community Jobs.
 - 53% are employed in the 4th quarter after leaving Community Jobs.
- Graduates begin to move up an income ladder with earned income increasing in each successive quarter of employment. Median earned income in the 4th quarter is 137% higher than the median earned income reported in the 1st quarter of employment.

CJ Wage Progression
Median earned income for each quarter of work post CJ



- Overall annual median earned income for participants after CJ is 18% higher than annual median earned income reported for all WorkFirst participants in the WorkFirst Study [\[2\]](#), although CJ participants began with fewer job skills.
- Participants' income increased while in CJ, and those employed a year after CJ had more than doubled their pre-CJ income.

Community Jobs - Average Annual Income Comparison



*includes average CJ wages, average EITC, and an earnings disregard on TANF assistance

**annualized 4th qtr. average wages, average EITC, and an earnings disregard on TANF assistance

While two thirds of participants have found jobs after CJ, not all have worked continuously. Of those who concluded their CJ experience a year or more ago, about half worked at least two-thirds of the quarters since leaving CJ and 30% worked in each of four consecutive quarters.

Evaluation



Overall, survey and focus group results demonstrate that CJ helps participants prepare for unsubsidized work. Participants, and worksite supervisors consistently identified the job experience and skill building provided by worksites as the main benefit of the program. The mentor-like relationship between CJ contractors and participants is also a valuable CJ component. In particular, DSHS case managers reported that the paid component of CJ provided a great incentive for the population. They also stated that a supportive, structured workplace was necessary for participants to succeed.

Both participant and worksite supervisor survey results were highly positive. Key findings include:

- Over 90% responded that they would like to continue with this same type of work after CJ, and nearly 90% of participants rated their overall CJ experience positively.
- Over 90% of supervisors agreed that program participants added value to their organization.
- 75% of participants surveyed felt that their contractor was working with them to provide a quality employment experience.
- 85% percent of worksite supervisors and 85% of participants reported that CJ had helped prepare participants for work during their time at the worksite.
- 39% of worksite supervisors raised issues relating to lack of job readiness skills and participant barriers to work and only 9% identified technical or “hard skills” as their concern about participants.
- 45% of participants reported having a job lined up as they left the program. 85% of participants reported that their CJ contractor or worksite supervisor had helped them search for a permanent job.

Participants placed great value on the self-esteem, skills, and knowledge gained from the program. Comments from the surveys included:

- “[CJ is] helping me to find my independence and self-esteem, after getting myself and child out of an abusive situation.”
- “This experience gave me the experience, self-confidence and self-esteem that I needed.”
- “It got my children used to mom working.”
- “I’ve learned a lot about office work and I feel without this program I would have no knowledge or experience.”

This evaluation has shown that the main areas where CJ could be strengthened include the need for increased job readiness training before participants reach the worksite and more intensive assistance in the transition to unsubsidized work. Participants, supervisors, and case managers also reported the need for more communication between different stakeholders.

Conclusions and Recommendations



The data collected for this report suggest that participants gain personal and long-term employment benefits from Community Jobs. Although these data show that people value work, they also clearly show the complications of resolving the employment issues that previously prevented these individuals from keeping a job. Reviewing all of the data in this evaluation, it is clear that this already valuable program can be significantly improved.

Recommendations to more fully achieve program goals include:

1. Provide ongoing hands-on job readiness training and vocational skills training within the context of the work experience.
2. Strengthen and refocus services in the last three months of CJ to support participant preparation and transition to unsubsidized employment.
3. Implement a retention services component that continues to provide some level of support and follow-through for CJ graduates in unsubsidized employment.
4. Create a permanent evaluation system to support continuous improvement.

[1] TANF replaced Aid to Dependent Families (AFDC) as the means of federal public assistance.

[2] Weeks, Greg. 2000. “Education and Training”. *WorkFirst Study: 3000 Washington Families*. Washington Employment Security Department 1 (3).

Acknowledgements



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Related Link(s)

- [EOI Workforce Development Policy: Community Jobs](#)



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