

# Occasional Paper Series

## **A PARTNERSHIP FOR FULL EMPLOYMENT**

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*by*

Fred Grossenbach  
*President*

*Grossenbach, Purtell and Associates*

Jay Hein  
*Director*

*Welfare Policy Center  
Hudson Institute*



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# A Partnership for Full Employment

In today's U.S. economy, two interesting realities co-exist. First, Americans are experiencing a sustained period of low unemployment. Second, there are over two million low-income adults who will be required to leave welfare

and find a job within the next five years. At first blush, the coincidence of these realities appear to quite serendipitous. Employers need workers while local public assistance agencies need to find work for their caseload. But making the connection between the two interests is more complicated than it appears, requiring improved public-private collaboration to make it successful.

For too many years, government employment efforts were defined by their needless duplication and ineffectiveness. The federal government created over 100 separate employment and training programs, and none of them were coordinated with the others. This led to multiple local public agencies contacting the same employers, sometimes even for the same person. And if the redundant effort wasn't bad enough, these agencies often failed to provide employers with quality employees for the position being filled. The agencies' paid attention to the need to place an individual rather than the desires and needs of the employer.

In addition to government inefficiency, reform critics claim that the attempt to move low-income citizens from the welfare rolls to the workforce has been slowed by a lack of enough jobs available for everyone on the caseload. Even if enough jobs exist, the same skeptics

argue that recipients often lack the skills necessary to be successful on the job. This paper addresses these two claims, then presents a new employment and training model that replaces multiple categorical interests with a focus on two primary customer groups: (1) job seekers and (2) employers.

First, are enough jobs available to employ today's welfare caseload? According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics Daily Labor Report, employment in the U.S. is expected to grow by 18 million jobs between the years 1994 - 2005. With an unemployment rate of 4.6% in September 1998 (lowest since 1969), many employers are not able to meet present needs. To today's labor shortage, add the aging boomers phenomenon. Research conducted by the Hudson Institute's Workforce Center indicates the over-65 population in the U.S. will increase 60% between 1995 and the year 2020. During that same time, the 45 to 64 year-old cohort will increase by only 34% and the 18 to 44 year-olds will increase a mere 4%. The result of this demographic reality? As baby boomers begin to retire in unprecedented numbers in the early 21st century, "Now Hiring" signs will likely be posted in store windows for quite some time.

The most vocal of welfare reform critics are unconvinced by these numbers. They often

claim that there are not enough jobs to accommodate the present unemployed, and that the problem will be simply unbearable if states begin to push the welfare caseload into the labor market. According to John Weicher, Hudson Institute economist, this was exactly the situation which Wisconsin Governor Tommy Thompson faced when he began to require all welfare recipients to work in exchange for their benefits in September 1997. In mid-1996, there were 17,500 job openings in Milwaukee County, only 10,500 of which were full-time. Meanwhile, there were 20,400 unemployed persons in Milwaukee at that time and 18,800 families on welfare. These numbers offered convincing evidence for the aforementioned critics, who said, "Do the math. There aren't enough jobs."

Fast-forward one year. The Milwaukee County welfare caseload has shrunk to well under ten thousand, and each of those remaining on the rolls are in a government-funded job placement for at least 28 hours per week. There has been no evidence reported of increased hardship among these families, and the 1998 unemployment rate is lower than it has been in years. How did nearly 20,000 former AFDC recipients find work in Milwaukee when only 17,500 jobs existed a year ago? How did Milwaukeeans avoid the disaster that wasn't? Dr. Weicher explains the situation as a tale of labor market disguise. Labor market data is typically captured in certain point-in-time snapshots, though the market itself is very dynamic. To illustrate, a variety of U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics studies reveal that half of all job openings are filled in less than a month. Due to this short period of time, many of such openings do not appear in point-in-time reports. Thus, approximately twice as many people find jobs in a given month as were advertised during that month.

This indicates that Wisconsin's welfare adults found jobs which apparently did not exist before they entered the workforce. This is an important finding that offers evidence that welfare-to-work policies can succeed, even in

tight labor markets. It also indicates that employers are willing to hire people off the welfare rolls, at least under the right circumstances. This conclusion is supported by a recent survey commissioned by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, which found that many employers do not distinguish between welfare recipients and other job applicants. As a matter of fact, many companies already hire former recipients without an awareness of that person's former welfare dependency.

But before we can automatically count the welfare caseload as a silver bullet solving the workforce dilemma presented by the current (and anticipated future) worker dearth, the question still looms regarding whether former welfare recipients can succeed in their jobs once placed. It is important to note that over 1.5 million families have left the welfare rolls over the past two years, and many have successfully obtained employment paying a living wage. But of those cases which remain, a growing percentage include the long-term welfare dependent adults who possess low skills and have spotty employment records.

Research by LaDonna Pavetti and Krista Olson found that deficits in basic skills are the strongest predictor of employment status. In their study, about 44 percent of those with extremely low basic skills were employed, compared to 68 percent of those without the same deficit who were employed. As today's workplace becomes more technologically sophisticated, employers' demand for skilled employees will likely increase. The good news, while perverse, is that welfare-to-work participants who lack basic skills are in the same boat as many of their job-seeker counterparts. According to a National Association of Manufacturers survey, more than half of U.S. companies claim that their workers have serious shortcomings in basic math, written language, and reading comprehension skills.

One of the leading causes of this lack of job preparedness is the breakdown of high school

and college course work. Roughly one-third of college freshmen need to take courses in remedial reading, writing and math, and over ten percent remain functionally illiterate following college graduation. To compensate, the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates, 93 percent of companies with more than fifty employees provide formal training for the workforce. One-third of this type of training is in basic skills. Costs for these type of programs are estimated at \$7.7 billion annually for in-house trainers and \$5.5 billion on outside trainers.

This trend has translated into a bifurcation of today's labor market. Some job requiring highly skilled workers pay high wages, offer benefits, and tend to be full-time. Other jobs pay low wages, require low skills, are often part-time, and don't provide benefits. Unfortunately for many, the days of high wage, low-skill jobs are over. Job seekers do not have trouble finding work, but many lack a reliable career ladder and job stability. Today's market tends to reward only those workers with an education, skills, and an ability to adapt to changing conditions. Hiring welfare-to-work participants can serve as an effective strategy in addressing the demands of our tight labor market. However, if former recipients are to find economic self-sufficiency at the other end of an entry-level job, they are going to need more skills to ensure job retention and career advancement.

So how to we get there from here? We think that training people for the workforce and matching workers with jobs is a local concern which requires a decentralized government system that takes advantage of local knowledge and infuses a strong sense of accountability. State and local government must adopt a new employment and training strategy which involves all job seekers in the workforce and continually upgrade skills of each worker. Unfortunately, most communities have no real strategy for helping workers cope with the realities of the new economy. Regional areas offer too few education programs strategically designed to prepare workers for local labor

force needs and have far too many service providers operating programs dictated by categorical government interests (e.g., welfare, physical disabilities, etc.) rather than client needs.

# The Federal Government's Response

The chief source of this hodgepodge approach is the flow of federal money. Federal job training programs, at a cost of \$25 billion per year, are funneled to the states through a myriad of separate silos. A consensus has steadily been formed to tackle this inefficiency, and the federal government's new approach can be summed up in two words: block grants. In the past two years, President Clinton signed into law separate block grant programs radically redefining welfare reform and job training funding and services. In August 1996, President Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) into law. As the Act's name suggests, this legislation focused on creating work opportunities for welfare recipients. Each state must engage 50% of its welfare caseload into 30 hours of work activity per week by the year 2002. Further, states must move 90 percent of their two-parent families into 35 hours of work activity per week by the same time period.

In addition to new work requirements, individuals are limited to five years of welfare benefits over the course of their lifetime. Some states have imposed even stricter time limits than the federal law. The primary opportunities presented by the law include the devolution of policy decision-making authority away from the federal government and increased funding and spending flexibility for states. This allows state and local government agencies to build innovative welfare-to-work programs which are suited to their particular labor market, culture, and interagency relationships.

Two years after adopting PRWORA, Congress ended a five year debate and passed bi-partisan workforce legislation that the president signed in August 1998. This measure, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), consolidates 60 separate employment and training programs and creates three block grants. The Act requires

every local service delivery area to have at least one job center and ensures core labor market services (job search, skills assessment, etc.) to all citizens regardless of income. The legislation sets performance measures for training programs, including job placement and retention, post-employment earnings, and percentages of participants who achieve their skills targets. The key feature of the WIA is that it seeks to enhance the skills of job seekers rather than simply placing people into jobs.

Both federal measures create an unprecedented opportunity for states and local governments to consolidate employment and training services. However, it should be noted that the interaction between traditional welfare and labor agencies is very complex. The former welfare culture was process- and rule-driven, whereas the JTPA mode was more entrepreneurial and the Unemployment Insurance system was hierarchical. These systems made different assumptions about families' needs and therefore developed markedly different problem-solving strategies.

State governments are taking various paths to make this welfare and labor partnership successful. Three states (Utah, Texas and Wisconsin) have formally merged their welfare and labor agencies. The theory is that with the same boss and the requirement to work side-by-side, the former welfare and labor staff will unite in mission and performance. In Utah, the governor combined the welfare agency and employment services agency to create a Department of Workforce Services. This new department is organized by function and local services are provided by one-stop job centers which provide comprehensive services and are open to all job seekers. Wisconsin's similar approach will be addressed in more detail later in the paper.

Another method being employed by states is to combine welfare with employment services in the form of cooperative agreements. This strategy is effective where a healthy relationship already exists between welfare and labor agencies. In these places, a new structural relationship is not needed; rather, an enhanced partnership can be articulated through formal contracting processes. At least 29 states have designated their employment and training agencies as the service delivery structure for job training under federal welfare reform. And to date, nine states have established one-stop job centers as the primary TANF service delivery system.

# A Case Study in Consolidated Services: The Partnership for Full Employment

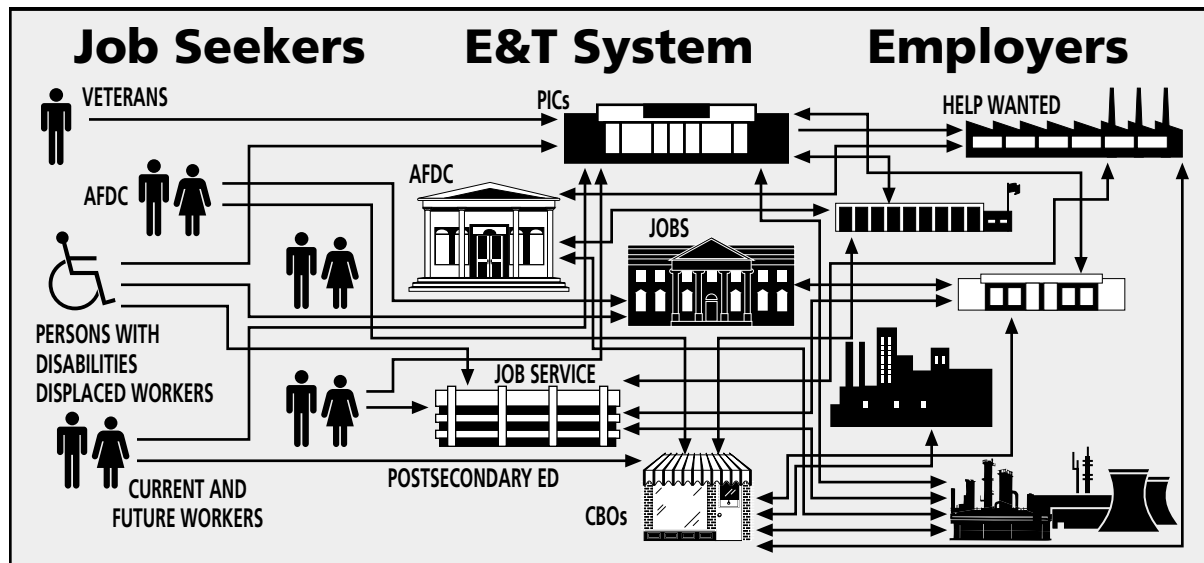
Research by the Welfare Policy Center indicates that it takes more than a statutory mandate for local communities to design and implement a new integrated employment and training system. While co-location of a wide range of agencies in a one-stop agency is a desirable first step, a comprehensive planning process with all stakeholders is required for true integration. The state of Wisconsin provides a useful case study regarding the issues presented in this paper since it is the only state in the nation to require 100% of its welfare caseload to participate in employment immediately upon receipt of benefits and because it has completely reorganized its welfare and job training system at the state and local level.

The state of Wisconsin is well-known for its effort to overhaul the welfare system. In 1993, the Wisconsin Legislature passed a bill abolishing AFDC in the state and requiring the

governor to submit an alternative plan by 1999. The governor signed the bill into law with an important amendatory veto — that the new plan would be effective 1997, two years ahead of schedule. Between 1994 and 1996, the Hudson Institute worked with state officials to craft a welfare replacement program. This plan, known as Wisconsin Works (W-2), literally replaced the AFDC check with a job. Beginning in September 1997, all welfare applicants seeking public assistance in Wisconsin were offered a graduated option of work placements based on their job readiness.

While W-2 has received both national and international attention, the state's new employment and training delivery system has drawn far less notoriety. Prior to implementing W-2, Governor Thompson sought statutory authority to merge the former welfare, labor and vocational rehabilitation agencies into a

## Current System



Source: Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development



new Department of Workforce Development. Administration officials understood that new letterhead alone would not be enough to accomplish a meaningful integration of services. To create a philosophical framework to steer the new agency's workload, the Department hired a re-engineering consulting firm, Grossenbach and Purtell, to lead a comprehensive planning process.

The subsequent planning effort involved more than 800 individuals from 110 businesses, organizations and associations. Participants came from 33 cities, counties and tribes, 12 state agencies, and 20 colleges or vocational schools. The chief goal of the planning process? To consolidate the state's 101 disparate employment and training programs. These overlapping programs were previously administered by multiple agencies depending on whether the job seeker was a veteran, person with disability, former welfare recipient, recent graduate, laid off from their job, displaced homemaker, or otherwise re-entering the workforce.

The consultants used a software program to allow participants to perform a series of planning exercises, which resulted in the identification of numerous strategies to over-

come employment barriers. Other inputs included gathering customer data from focus groups and surveys, and a review of the most innovative technological tools available.

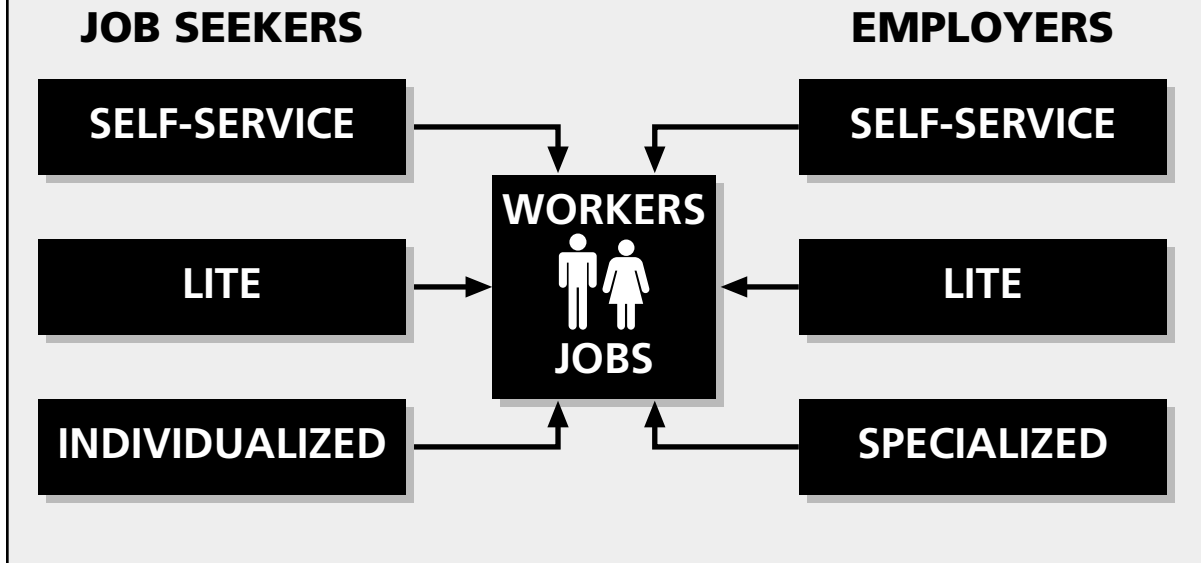
The product of the workgroups' planning activities is a comprehensive employment and training strategy called the Partnership for Full Employment (or PFE). The PFE streamlines the job search process by co-locating major employment and training programs in one facility and by facilitating interagency communication and coordination. The PFE is designed to treat the job seeker and employer as dual customers, and assigns the primary responsibility for planning to the local employment and training community. Specifically, the PFE is designed to:

- Promote the well-being of individuals and families through work.
- Meet employers' needs for quality workers.
- Offer quality job opportunities for job seekers.

**Guiding principles:** The new Department and consolidated employment and training system was designed and is operated:

1. With the philosophy that independence is preferred over dependence;
2. With the understanding that most people want to work.
3. With the expectation that people who can work will work when jobs are available.
4. For the benefit of clients and employers.
5. To minimize duplication.
6. In a cost-effective manner.
7. To serve all clients in one system but not with a "one-size-fits-all" approach;
8. So that it is broadly accepted; and
9. Knowing that some people genuinely need a dependable "safety net."

# Partnership for Employment Job Center



Source: Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development

- Integrate services for employers and job seekers.
- Help those who need a job to obtain a job.
- Allow local leadership to determine their own strategies.

The chief service delivery vehicle for the PFE is the state's innovative job center network. Each county and tribe has access to a local job center which houses the following types of agencies in the same facility: welfare-to-work; private industry council; labor union; JTPA; vocational college; and other related organizations.

Job centers offer an extensive array of services including information about jobs, careers and the area labor market. They provide access to training programs, testing, assessments, job re-

errals and job search assistance. All local job centers offer the following core services:

- A computerized listing of job openings, on-site or through access to Job Net on the Internet.
- The ability for employers to input job listings electronically.
- Assistance with job search skills, testing and assessment.
- Information on education and training programs.
- Automated links to the unemployment insurance system.

The PFE model is operational in each of the state's 76 job centers. What is distinctive about the PFE is that different levels of service exist



Source: Department of Workforce Development

for customers based on need, and that the customers are either job seekers or employers. The levels of service range from self-service to intensive case management:

### 1. Self-Service

Job seekers can access JobNet, an Internet-based listing of jobs available by region and throughout the state that includes the minimum requirements for each position. Also available is information on certain types of jobs, required skills, resume writing, training opportunities and financial aid as well as what areas of employment best suit their work history and aptitudes.

Employers can also access JobNet for the following services: search for potential employees; post their companies own vacancies on the system electronically; and access current labor market information and/or input information regarding future employment needs via the JobNet system.

### 2. Light Service

Job seekers can attend workshops and group sessions on resume writing and interviewing, as well as job search clinics and job clubs for assistance and guidance. Job centers also offer life skills training to prepare individuals for employment on such topics as proper attire, co-worker relations, and consistent and prompt attendance.

Based on the needs of local employers, job center staff may conduct in-person or video conferencing on a host of issues: lay offs; starting a small business; accommodating persons with disabilities; or finding workers during a labor shortage. Job centers also host regular job fairs to provide comprehensive and convenient access between employers and job seekers. Some job centers dedicate space for employers who are interested in conducting interviews on-site.



Source: Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development

### 3. Specialized Service

As the one-stop center for employment and training services, Job Centers are the central entry point for vocational rehabilitation services, veterans services, customized training, and W-2 cash assistance.

For employers, industry specialists assess the needs of employers in a defined industry group (e.g., machine tooling) and help with employment planning. Job Center staff will retrain existing workers and work with employers to design a re-employment plan for workers when layoffs are anticipated.

#### The PFE and Wisconsin Works (W-2)

The decision to place the W-2 Agencies inside Job Centers was a deliberate one. As a work-based program, the most logical place for W-2 was in a workforce development agency. By placing the W-2 Agency within the Job Center, state officials took the first step to eliminating the stigma associated with the receipt of wel-

fare. Whether deserved or not, the welfare office was seen as the place where poor people go to get their hand-outs. Putting the W-2 agency inside the Job Center sent the following messages:

- To participants...you are capable of working;
- To service providers...you are expected to work collaboratively on behalf of your customers;
- To employers...W-2 participants are potential employees; and
- To the community...these job seekers are just like you and me.

Additionally, the conceptual framework of the Partnership for Full Employment (PFE) is one of the chief reasons of the program's early success. This is largely attributable to what

management strategists Donald Schoen and Russell Ackoff refer to as the active synthetic skill of designing a desirable future and inventing ways to bringing it about. State and community leaders came to an agreement on the end game—jobs for job seekers and workers for employers—and the local agencies

became very inventive about accomplishing those goals. The PFE model has enabled state and local agency partners to build their new systems around a single conceptual framework, which has fostered innovation and consistency.

# Success Factors

Based on the authors' experience in Wisconsin, we have identified a number of success factors that states may consider as they plan to redesign their welfare and workforce systems as a result of PRWORA and WIA. To illustrate these factors, we have selected the Racine County (WI) Workforce Development Center to serve as our object lesson. While many job centers in Wisconsin are highly effective, Racine has been particularly successful in implementing the principles of the PFE and in meeting the needs of all job seekers, including (but not limited to) distressed workers.

## Select a Mission

In the design process leading up to the creation of the Racine County Workforce Development Center (RCWDC) in 1995, local officials focused their efforts on creating a center that did not emphasize any particular target population. Rather, their ultimate goal was to develop a system that responded to the workforce needs of all of the community's residents and employers. The State's PFE conceptual design, the expected changes in federal welfare and workforce legislation, and this broader vision served as the foundation for the RCWDC planning and its subsequent operations. This vision is reflected in the center's broader name of Workforce Development Center rather than simply Job-Center.

Despite the practice in Wisconsin to identify one-stop facilities as job centers, the County leadership determined that their mission went beyond simply placing people into jobs. To emphasize this new vision, RCWDC officials developed the following mission statement: It is the mission of the WDC to promote the economic prosperity of the community by providing quality services to area employers and job seekers. This mission does not mention welfare recipients, persons with disabilities, veterans, or any of the other target

populations which are served by RCWDC staff. The underlying belief is that if the center meets its mission, these individuals will benefit as well as the general population. This belief has been borne out in reality over the past two years of operations. Each of the programs that provide "specialized services" (e.g., welfare-to-work) to eligible customers have significantly surpassed their previous years' programmatic outcomes.

During planning, great effort went into creating the idea that the RCWDC would be a new entity. Employers and other key community leaders were consistently involved in the planning, which was presented as a re-invention of the entire publicly funded system. At no time was this endeavor described to the community as a re-design of Job Service, the Welfare Department, or the Private Industry Council, even though in reality, one of the underlying goals was to recast these programs into a more coherent model. Yet, the local planners realized that starting from that perspective would have limited the vision and input from the community, especially employers, to how they could improve past performance. The higher set of goals in this endeavor required them to start with a blank slate and to create the optimum workforce system for their county.

One tool to help stretch the planners' vision was a strategic thinking exercise whereby planning team members operated under the assumption that they received a block grant for all employment and training programs. This, of course, had not yet occurred at the federal level. But the Racine planners used the block grant concept to discuss what they would do if such an arrangement ever became reality. They asked each other, "If we combined all of our funding, what would a good system look like?" This process helped to break the rigid service models which had been shaped by federal funds and rules for many years, and they

allowed everything to be open to discussion. The outcome of this exercise was that agency leaders determined that they could (and should) share resources, even before federal block grant authority was granted. The key was a shared vision and mutual commitment to pursuing the goal of establishing a county-wide workforce development system.

### **Bricks and Mortar**

When Governor Thompson announced his plan for Wisconsin Works (W-2), the press conference backdrop was a dilapidated old manufacturing plant which Racine officials planned to convert into a state-of-the-art workforce center. Several years later, that old eyesore is a gleaming, high tech operation which has drawn visitors from across the country and numerous foreign countries. The center houses virtually every government and community resource necessary to find employment and move up the career ladder.

Visitors to the center are greeted by a receptionist and several kiosks containing service and employment information. Examples of other physical offerings include:

***Resource Room:** The design model focused on a public library and a Barnes and Noble-style setting. The room is spacious and contains thirteen Job Net terminals, eight computers (with resume and cover letter preparation software) and Internet access for a variety of on-line employment assistance sites. Each of the terminals and computers have separate printers. There are private telephone cubicles for job searches. There is a library area containing over two hundred books related to job search, newspapers and employer information. In the center of the room is a Help Desk, staffed by five full-time staff (employed by four different employing organizations). Throughout the*

*room are couches, tables, plants, and pictures intended to create an atmosphere of professionalism and comfort. Three enclosed interview rooms are connected to the Resource Room, at the request of employers during planning. Employers are on-site, conducting interviews nearly every day of the week.*

***Career Development Area:** The physical atmosphere of the Resource Room is carried into the Career Development Area. The area is staffed with three full-time vocational counselors. There are six computers containing software specifically developed to assist individuals to plan careers, to identify transferable skills, and to test specific skills. Appointments for career counseling can be made at the registration kiosk in the lobby of the center or through a specialized services case manager. Testing for employers is offered on a fee for service basis.*

***Child Waiting Area:** The center has a spacious, bright and cheerful area for parents to drop off their children while they use the center services. This service is open to all customers. It is not a licensed daycare center, so parents need to be in the building at all times.*

### **Integration, Not Just Collaboration**

While bricks and mortar and the co-location of multiple agencies is a necessary foundation for success, communities will not reach their highest level of service potential until they effectively integrate the planning and operation of all key employment and training agencies. And this is much more of a process than an event. Due to the differing cultures and competing interests of each agency, this

fragile partnership between multiple agencies needs constant care and feeding rather than attempts to set in place and fix any strategies. According to Ron Hunt, the Wisconsin official responsible for job centers, it is vital for the state to issue clear guidelines yet to allow local flexibility.

The RCWDC integrates virtually every resource necessary to find employment and move up the career ladder. While the center houses many employment organizations, it is far more than a co-location of agencies. Each agency is dedicated to helping administer one system of service. As such, individual organizations are not identified by signage, business cards, or letterhead. The only identification used is that which pertains the workforce development center. This practice is especially welcomed by welfare-to-work participants who now interact with the same workforce center staff as any other community member, thus avoiding the stigma associated with being targeted as a welfare recipient.

The concept of integration, rather than co-location, is a very logical design for the development of a one-stop service delivery center. But is arguably far more difficult to achieve integrated services than more casual partnerships. Racine County was able to accomplish this status through four primary strategies:

1. *Place funding in one organizational budget.* At the direction of the local elected officials, the lion's share of all Racine-area's employment and training funding was placed in the Racine County government's budget. This helped shift the focus from organizational interests and allowed multi-agency managers to direct resources to important functions (see #2 below). Related, all costs are distributed by funding source rather than by the agencies.

2. *Organize operational staff into functional teams.* RCWDC operations are organized into functional areas, such as Resource Room, Job Readiness, and Employer Services. These areas are served by teams comprised of multi-agency staff. Indeed, no area is served by employees from just one organization. For example, the Resource Room has five full-time staff who are employed by four different employing organizations (Job Service, Racine Area Manufacturers and Commerce, Kaiser Group, and the Private Industry Council). It is important to note that no one is employed by the Workforce Development Center. However, the formation of functional teams ensures that everyone understands that they "work for the Workforce Development Center." The functional teams also ensured that the center would not be controlled by any particular organization.

3. *Secure management team buy-in.* The RCWDC management team is comprised of the executives of each of the local funding partners and two employer representative organizations: Racine Area Manufacturers and Commerce and Racine County Economic Development Corporation. The multi-agency management team sets the direction and enforces the integration strategy. Without this buy-in by the agencies representing the major funding sources, the integration would not occur. It is important to note that the management team design undertaken by the RCWDC does not include contract organizations on the management team, which avoids any potential conflict of interest.



4. *Use service contracts to enforce integration.* The staffing of the center is completed through contracts-for-service with a variety of community organizations (competitively bid). The contract for RCWDC service includes the integration design and the expected compliance factors (i.e. no organizational identification, functional team participation, universal policies and procedures, days and hours of operation, etc.)

It can be argued that the strength of a local workforce delivery system will be proportionate to the number of partners multiplied by their degree of integration. In addition to employers, RCWDC planners expanded their view of partnerships beyond the expected publicly funded organizations. New relationships were formed with the local economic development agency, the local Chamber of Commerce, Gateway Technical College, University of Wisconsin - Parkside, Racine Unified School District. While the center eventually housed many of these agencies, the relationships formed during planning ensured that the RCWDC staff could serve as a switchboard to unprecedented array of community resources which support area workers.

### **Information Technology**

One of the vital strategies necessary to facilitate true integration of services is the use of information technology. As a matter of fact, effective use of on-line resources achieves a level of integrated services which exceeds even the best designed and fully-staffed building. The RCWDC management team recognized this reality and therefore uses the latest technology available, both to manage internal operations and to provide services for customers. Examples of such uses include:

***Staff Intranet:** The RCWDC leadership team installed an intranet system which allows all center staff*

*to keep informed of center operations, new programs or services, and other agency news.*

***JobNet:** Numerous computers are made available throughout the center which offers this state-administered job listing service. Both job-seekers and employers will soon be able to access the system via internet.*

### **Registration and Information**

***Kiosks:** Developed locally, these touch-screen kiosks are located in the lobby of the center. The kiosk provides individualized information regarding available services. In addition, the user is able to register for a variety of services such as workshops and career counseling.*

***Job Search Instruction:** Approximately twenty five three-hour workshops are conducted weekly in high technology classrooms. They cover a variety of topics such as: Tapping the Hidden Job Market, Resume Development, Interviewing, and Job Searching by the Internet. The workshops are listed weekly in the local newspaper. The classrooms are equipped with Video Conferencing equipment which expands the customer base to include the western Racine County center located in the more rural part of the county.*

In recognition of their strong manufacturing base, RCWDC leadership has recently decided to create a Manufacturing Technology Center which will prepare companies and workers for continued information technology growth in the future. Governor Thompson has included \$1 million in his fiscal year 2000 budget to help Racine build the center.

## **The Essential Role of Employers**

While each community interest is important, there is obviously a bias to one constituency in particular: employers. RCWDC planners recognized that any attempts to focus on the job seeker are obviously doomed to fail without the active partnership of the employer community. A job placement requires the careful balance of employers' needs and appropriate job candidates. Without public/private coordination of training, recruitment and placement, attrition will be high and willing employers will be few. As such, local employers were included in the earliest development activities in Racine. While the WIA simply requires employers to be included on local boards, the Racine experience illustrates the value of asking companies to join in discussions regarding the center's development so their needs and interests can be met.

One of the overwhelming requests by employers during the planning phase was to reduce the number of people who solicit job orders from them. Prior to the RCWDC, each categorical program had some type of employer outreach effort which contacted employers on behalf of their very specific "targeted" client. Therefore, the RCWDC developed the Employer Account Representative model. Each employer is assigned just one Account Representative who is employed by either the local chamber of commerce or economic development agency and whose primary function is to market the services of the RCWDC using an employer's perspective.

There is a full menu of services for employers. One member of the Employer Services Team serves as Employer Incentive Broker. This individual has the authority to negotiate "incentives" for all target populations (e.g., Trial Jobs for W-2 participants, On-the-Job-Training slots for eligible JTPA participants, and Targeted Tax Credit verification). One member of the team is responsible for developing customized training programs either at, or outside, the employers' workplace. Finally, there is one Labor

Market Analyst on the team who is available to provide Labor Market Information upon request.

As with the job seeker services, the Employer Services Team represent the entire center, not individual programs. In many ways, they function as a case manager for the employer. Their job is to identify and access the services necessary to meet the employers' workforce needs. The ability to provide exposure for the employer's job openings to a variety of job seekers is the most utilized service. This is accomplished by listing job orders on both JobNet and America's Job Bank. Great effort has been made to solicit the full range of job orders, not just entry level or blue collar. During 1998, over 9,000 job openings were listed by local employers with their Account Representative. Notable, these job orders closely mirror the employment distribution by category within the community at-large.

Mitchell Fromstein, Chairman of Manpower, Inc., argues that the success of matching former welfare recipients with available jobs is largely predicated on the government job placement specialist's relationship with the employer. According to a report by the Mott Foundation (Roberts, August 1998) Fromstein considers it government's responsibility to "...mitigate the risks of low work readiness, trainability and retention rates, as these are the factors that negatively impact on the productivity and operating costs of all enterprises regardless of size or category." Therefore, public agencies need to become very good students of their local labor market and they must be committed to preparing workers to meet employer's specific needs rather than performing job training and placement in a top-down, cookie-cutter fashion.

## **Lifelong Learning**

Consistent with its mission to serve as a workforce development center versus a job placement center, the RCWDC offers a wide array of education and training resources for

job seekers as well as current employed county citizens. To establish and expand these educational options, RCWDC staff have forged a strategic partnership with all primary educational institutions in the county. This partnership has led to a plan known as “2x2x2,” which represents two years at three increasingly higher level academic institutions. To better prepare students for the workforce, employment and training officials assist Racine-area students to complete their final two years of high school, two years of vocational education (at Gateway Technical College), and two years of traditional college course work at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside. RCWDC officials brokered this strategy between all three educational institutions, which is the first time such a partnership has been formed.

**Examples of specific educational offerings within the RCWDC includes:**

***Academic Improvement:** The Academic Improvement Lab is equipped with twenty four computers with instructional programs that allow customers to work in a self-paced, individualized format. Computer software is available to help customers improve basic skills, to prepare for their GED, HSED, apprenticeship or post-secondary placement tests, to complete computer tutorials, and to learn or improve keyboarding skills. Courses offering post-secondary credit in software applications are offered on a regular basis.*

***Career Discovery Center:** A separate area has been designed for youth customers ages 10 - 18. This area contains a group instructional room and an adjoining computer lab with fourteen computer stations containing a variety of software designed to assist youth*

*in career exploration and educational planning. Each 5th, 8th, 10th and 12th grade student attending Racine Unified School District visits the center during the school year. Youth Net, a locally designed youth version of JobNet, is accessible through these computers (and soon on the Internet). Youth Net provides information regarding employment opportunities, volunteer and community services opportunities, school to work information, social service information relevant to youth, and “planning your future” activities. Youth Work Permits are issued through the Career Discovery Center, and all of the JTPA-funded youth programs are offered through the Center umbrella.*

**Maintaining the Safety Net**

The integration of TANF (Wisconsin Works) into RCWDC operations signals that the former welfare program is now squarely centered on work attachment. Public assistance customers immediately understand that they are considered to be a job seeker, merely by the location in which applications for assistance is made. Immediate job seeking activity occurs, many times even prior to completion of a public assistance application. But while the emphasis for every workforce development center customer is long-term attachment to the workforce, RCWDC officials recognize the essential role of supportive services for vulnerable families.

The Center makes supportive services available on an emergency basis or through the traditional eligibility-based programs such as Wisconsin Works (W2), Food Stamps, Dislocated Workers, JTPA adult and youth, Veterans programs, Children First (for non-custodial parents), and a variety of smaller local programs designed for a specific target groups. The specialized services offer one-on-one assistance through case management or financial employ-

ment planners. This personalized assistance includes development of employability plans, access to training, referral to social services necessary, support subsidies for child care and transportation, and emergency cash assistance. Although all of the customers who receive specialized services utilize the self and light services identified above, no staff in that area are able to distinguish a targeted individual from any other job seeker. The focus throughout is on customer service.

The Racine County Human Services Department is located in the same building as the RCWDC, which has provided enhanced access to customers requiring emergency assistance or specialized services (e.g., AODA, mental health counseling, family and crisis counseling). Individuals who are eligible and request specialized services usually have a multitude of barriers, and many are unwilling to seek assistance if it is not made conveniently available. A special relationship has been formed between the RCWDC and child welfare services through the development of a local family preservation council. Racine's Family Preservation project is designed to address both urban and rural parts of the county, and includes representatives from major community organizations such as human services, schools, YMCA, and the faith community. Similar to the integrated workforce services approach described earlier, the RCWDC management team has established new partnerships with safety net organizations to provide a more coordinated delivery of support services, as well.

### **Putting It All Together**

The passage of Workforce Investment Act affirms much of the work done by Racine officials in the mid-1990s. The Racine experience indicates that the WIA requirement for all local employment and training agencies to form a unified plan is achievable. However, it also illustrates that the articulation of a common vision and integrative partnerships are the product of much planning and goal-setting

conducted by local agencies. And this is not an easy process. According to Debbie Jossart, Racine's lead planner, "...philosophical and cultural change was a difficult, frustrating, painful, yet a necessary process to go through." Ms. Jossart asserts that the following features were present and essential to their success:

***Strong County Leadership:*** *The County Executive set the broader vision for the center from the very beginning. The center was viewed as a county initiative to meet the workforce development needs of the community, focusing on the economic development goals of retaining and attracting our employer base. Ms. Jossart contends that the State or the Private Industry Council would not have been able to lead the re-design because of their very specific interests in welfare reform or JTPA services. Also, cultural change within organizations would not have been achieved because the predominant state-directed focus is on co-location. Further evidence of the County's value was evident in their purchase and renovation of the center's building with a \$14.5 million bond approved by the County Board of Supervisors. A County employee was assigned the operational planning for the center to assure that the vision was maintained.*

***Partnership for Full Employment:*** *The Department of Workforce Development's conceptual framework was utilized as the justification for the broader vision. The planning team embraced this design, and used the following principles for both physical layout as well as internal operations:*

*UNIVERSAL ACCESS—  
All Community Members Welcome*

*TWO CUSTOMERS—  
Job Seekers and Employers*

*THREE LEVELS OF SERVICE—  
Self, Light, and Specialized*

***Job Centering Experience in other Wisconsin Locations:*** *As stated earlier, Wisconsin has been a leader in the development of one-stop job centers. The traditional public organizations had co-located in other areas of the state. Bringing the right organizations to the table was not difficult because it had been done before. The difficulty was in convincing these organizations that the broad vision and integration of staff and resources into one center of service was the next generation of one-stop services.*

The essence of Racine's story is that theirs was a process reengineering initiative, not an incremental quality improvement project. Said another way, this was about systems change, not a new program. They reorganized core processes (intake, service coordination, and outcome management) and integrated functions between an unprecedented array of public and private partners. Similar to the stated intent of the Workforce Investment Act, the RCWDC seeks to make customers more employable rather than to simply place them in a job. The end game is jobs for job seekers, workers for employers, and lifelong learning to secure a high quality workforce in the future.

## About the authors:

Fred Grossenbach is president of Grossenbach, Purtell and Associates, a Madison, Wisconsin-based management consulting firm. In this capacity, Mr. Grossenbach served as the lead consultant to the state of Wisconsin in the development of its Partnership for Full Employment. Prior to operating his own firm, Mr. Grossenbach was a senior executive with IBM Corporation.

Jay Hein is the Director of Hudson Institute's Welfare Policy Center. Prior to his current position, Mr. Hein managed Hudson's Madison, Wisconsin field office and also served as a Wisconsin state welfare official. In these positions, Mr. Hein was involved in the planning and implementation of Wisconsin Works (W-2). He is presently co-authoring a Hudson Institute book on W-2.