

Erie County Work Experience Program Partnerships with Non-profits Offer Work Experience to Temporary Assistance to Needy Family Recipients

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What is TANF? TANF stands for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families. It is one of the United States federal assistance programs. It began on July 1, 1997, and succeeded the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. It provides cash assistance to indigent American families with dependent children through the United States Department of Health and Human Services.¹

What started work experience programs on a national scale?

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), which created TANF, established federally mandated work participation requirements for states.² It also mandated penalties for failing to meet these requirements. This gave states incentives to help TANF recipients find paid employment, unpaid work or work training activities as quickly as possible.³

Specifically, what started the Erie County Work Experience Program?

In response to the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, TANF administrators at the Erie County Department of Social Services (DSS) examined the structure of their TANF employment program in the context



of the local economy.⁴

They concluded that an expanded and redesigned work experience program

would provide TANF recipients with the best chance of meeting their work requirements mandated by PRWORA while building and improving their work skills.⁵

What is required of this program under Social Services TANF laws and regulations? The Erie County Department of Social Services is required to assure that 50% of TANF recipients be engaged in a work activity.⁶ The county encourages, but does not require, contractors to provide recipients with on-site opportunities combining 20 hours per week of work experience with 10 to 15 hours of education or vocational training.⁷

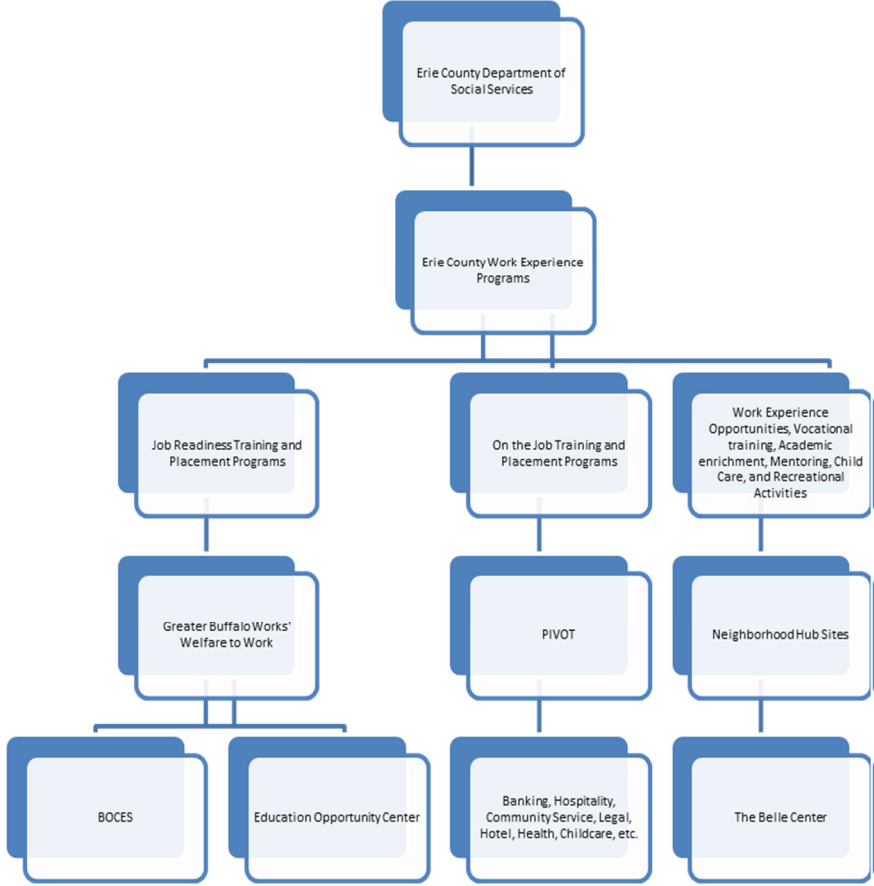


Chart: Showing the breakdown of the different types of work experience programs.

What are the goals of these programs?

- Increasing participation in federally accountable work activities by making work sites more accessible to recipients⁸
- Regenerating local communities by expanding services available at local community centers⁹
- Encouraging families to become involved with and invest in their communities¹⁰

What are the key program features?

- Work placements located in neighborhoods where TANF recipients live
- Subsidized work placements
- Specialized placements for those with high service needs
- Paid work site supervision
- Job development staff to aid with the transition to competitive employment
- Low staff to participant ratio
- Screening to refer **only** work-ready TANF recipients
- Incentives for contracted service providers to identify and report nonparticipation¹¹

Who are these programs run by?

Erie County seeks qualified organizations that will develop a cost effective, complete plan to provide work experience, employment and training services to TANF recipients. These organizations must be public agencies or not for profit corporations that can provide a work experience program for individuals who are receiving TANF funds to engage in work and work-related activities.¹²

How does Welfare-to-Work operate? The federal government also provides Welfare-to-Work (WtW) grants to states and communities to move unemployed TANF recipients into employment.¹³

In Erie County, the Buffalo and Erie County Workforce Development Consortium, Inc. in collaboration with the Erie County Department of Social Services, has received significant WtW funding, which it has used to fund the Greater Buffalo Works' Welfare to Work program. This program has enrolled about 12,000 recipients from 1997 – 2011.¹⁴

The participants are assigned to a work experience placement immediately after they qualify for TANF.¹⁵

The placement is typically short term – no longer than 6 months.¹⁶

What do the TANF recipients need most help with? Since many

TANF recipients have little or no work experience, they often need individualized help to learn basic work habits and strengthen their job skills. They also may need help in managing personal and family challenges.¹⁷

What do the TANF recipients gain when they become participants? The Welfare-to-Work program is designed to provide the most intensive level of training, work activity, placement assistance and follow-up training and supportive services to TANF recipients.¹⁸ These services will give individuals the support they need in order to be successful in not only obtaining, but also retaining, employment. The goal is to have the TANF recipients break the welfare cycle. It will also provide local employers with applicants who are prepared and job ready.



How are the TANF recipients placed? Greater Buffalo Works' Welfare to Work program uses a team of career counselors.¹⁹ Greater Buffalo works has a staff of about 30 made up of job developers, counselors, workshop instructors and program coordinators.²⁰ They sit down with each person and conduct an assessment through one-on-one interviewing and aptitude tests to decide placement.²¹ They could place them at BOCES or the Education Opportunity Center (this is pre-employment training). These training programs are short term (a matter of weeks to a month). At the same time, the recipients are put through job readiness training.²²

What does the job readiness training consist of? Workshops that teach various soft skills: effective communication skills, how to go to work on time, how to get to work every day, getting along w/ co-workers, resolving problems, how to write a resume, how to conduct yourself in a job interview, etc.. The trainings help recipients not only to get a job, but to keep a job.²³



What is the alternative to job readiness training workshops? On the job training through programs such as PIVOT.²⁴

What is PIVOT? Placing Individuals in Vital Opportunity Training is a wage subsidy program designed to meet the hiring needs of local employers. The program will

pay the full-time wages of the participants for the training period – six months.²⁵ When individuals are referred to PIVOT they are assessed and then screened to match their skills with the employer needs. After placement, PIVOT provides supportive services, monitors the client and

works as a liaison between the client and the employer. At the conclusion of the 6-month training period, clients may become permanent employees at their company. Since August 2000, over 2400 individuals have participated in the PIVOT Program.²⁶

What industries does PIVOT work with? PIVOT is currently working with employers in the banking, hospitality, community service, legal, hotel, manufacturing, health, childcare, clerical, warehousing and retail sectors.²⁷

What do the TANF recipients do in these work programs? An agency may assign TANF recipients to work on temporary projects. These are based on the agency's immediate needs.²⁸ For example, one agency gave several TANF work experience recipients the task of building new coat racks for the in-house child care center. Other work experience jobs may include janitorial, clerical, or grounds keeping positions. Agencies also may organize a group of participants to complete a project in the community.²⁹ Such project assignments may last a few days or a few months.

Where are the TANF recipients assigned? Nearly all TANF recipients are assigned to a work experience position on-site at the neighborhood hub site. Sometimes these hub sites will arrange placements with other organizations in the community for TANF recipients who are already competent to transition into competitive employment.³⁰

How does a neighborhood hub site work? The use of neighborhood hub sites increases the TANF recipients' connectivity with the community.³¹ It reduces their need for transportation. Usually



recipients live a short walk or bus ride from the hub site.³² Recipients may access the following services available within the hub site: child care, preschool, after-school and mentoring programs, and mental health counseling. These services are funded by a variety of sources (government contracts, federal grants, private donations, etc.) and are available to all neighborhood residents. GED and ESL training is also offered on-site.³³

What is an example of a neighborhood hub site? The Belle Center serves recipients in the west side of Erie County. It offers social service programs for TANF recipients and other low-income families.³⁴ It has an operating budget of \$1.2 million per year.³⁵ The Center provides social services, work experience opportunities, vocational training, academic enrichment (GED, ESL, computer training, etc.), mentoring, child care, and recreational activities for families in the neighborhood.³⁶

Who works directly with the TANF recipients? Work site supervisors work exclusively with the TANF recipients.³⁷ These supervisors are paid employees of the hub sites. They give the TANF recipients a foundation for effectively functioning in a competitive work environment.³⁸

What do these site supervisors do? Each supervisor is assigned to work with 15 to 35 TANF recipients. They are able to directly observe recipients' behaviors and help them develop healthy work habits.³⁹ For example, they teach recipients to call a supervisor or find a coworker to trade shifts when their child is sick and they do not have backup child care. They may help a recipient to resolve an interpersonal conflict at the workplace or may provide suggestions for improving a recipient's appearance.⁴⁰ Work site supervisors build recipients' job skills to use computer programs, operate complicated telephone systems, or use various cleaning equipment. Lastly, the supervisor contacts the TANF

case manager who then helps the recipient resolve personal or family challenges interfering with a recipient's attendance or ability to perform a job.⁴¹

How much funding is provided? In 2012, in Erie County, it is anticipated that \$500,000 will be awarded to the successful proposers to provide work experience, job skills training, GED preparation and vocational training services to TANF family recipients. This award is subject to County Executive and County Legislative approval and is also subject to state and federal funding.⁴²

What are the program's biggest challenges?

- Working with individuals that have limited formal education⁴³
- Recruiting participants – some TANF recipients are very hard to trace because they don't have phone numbers or are constantly changing residence.⁴⁴

What are the biggest challenges for the participants?

- Finding adequate childcare while working or training⁴⁵
- Being able to find transportation to the work sites⁴⁶



What are the program's achievements thus far?

- Over two years, the county experienced a 15 percent increase in the work participation rate.⁴⁷

- Of those participating in the PIVOT program, 85 percent transition into permanent jobs.⁴⁸
- 60 to 90 percent of the TANF recipients assigned to contracted service providers meet federal work participation requirements.⁴⁹
- Greater Buffalo Works shows 65% successfully completed the program and entered unsubsidized employment. Of that number, 70% were still employed approximately six months afterwards.⁵⁰

¹ Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temporary_Assistance_for_Needy_Families

² Ellen Mosack, Department of Social Services, REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP) TO PROVIDE WORK EXPERIENCE, JOB SKILLS TRAINING, GED PREPARATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING FOR TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE TO NEEDY FAMILIES (TANF) RECIPIENTS AND SAFETY NET FAMILIES (SN) IN RECEIPT OF SOCIAL SERVICES TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR YEAR 2012 http://www.erie.gov/pdf/rfp_10188BC_012811.pdf

³ Id.

⁴ Id.

⁵ Id.

⁶ Id.

⁷ Id.

⁸ Michelle K. Derr, Providing Unpaid Work Experience Opportunities for TANF Recipients: Examples from Erie County, New York; Montana and Hamilton County, Ohio. <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/08/TANFWPR/3/report.pdf>

⁹ Id.

¹⁰ Id.

¹¹ Id.

¹² Ellen Mosack, Department of Social Services, REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP) TO PROVIDE WORK EXPERIENCE, JOB SKILLS TRAINING, GED PREPARATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING FOR TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE TO NEEDY FAMILIES (TANF) RECIPIENTS AND SAFETY NET FAMILIES (SN) IN RECEIPT OF SOCIAL SERVICES TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR YEAR 2012 http://www.erie.gov/pdf/rfp_10188BC_012811.pdf

¹³ Buffalo and Erie County Workforce Development Consortium, Inc., Greater Buffalo Works, <http://www.wdcinc.org/works/>

¹⁴ Id.

¹⁵ Id.

¹⁶ Personal Communication. Joseph Sullivan, BETC.

¹⁷ Michelle K. Derr, Providing Unpaid Work Experience Opportunities for TANF Recipients: Examples from Erie County, New York; Montana and Hamilton County, Ohio. <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/08/TANFWPR/3/report.pdf>

¹⁸ Buffalo and Erie County Workforce Development Consortium, Inc., Greater Buffalo Works, <http://www.wdcinc.org/works/>

¹⁹ Personal Communication. Joseph Sullivan, BETC.

²⁰ Id.

²¹ Id.

²² Id.

²³ Id.

²⁴ PIVOT Program, Department of Social Services. <http://www2.erie.gov/socialservices/index.php?q=pivot-program>

²⁵ Id.

²⁶ Id.

²⁷ Id.

²⁸ Michelle K. Derr, Providing Unpaid Work Experience Opportunities for TANF Recipients: Examples from Erie County, New York; Montana and Hamilton County, Ohio. <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/08/TANFWPR/3/report.pdf>

²⁹ Id.

³⁰ Id.

³¹ Id.

³² Id.

³³ Id.

³⁴ Id.

³⁵ Id.

³⁶ Id.

³⁷ Id.

³⁸ Id.

³⁹ Id.

⁴⁰ Id.

⁴¹ Id.

⁴² Ellen Mosack, Department of Social Services, REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP) TO PROVIDE WORK EXPERIENCE, JOB SKILLS TRAINING, GED PREPARATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING FOR TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE TO NEEDY FAMILIES (TANF) RECIPIENTS AND SAFETY NET FAMILIES (SN) IN RECEIPT OF SOCIAL SERVICES TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR YEAR 2012 http://www.erie.gov/pdf/rfp_10188BC_012811.pdf

⁴³ Personal Communication. Joseph Sullivan, BETC.

⁴⁴ Id.

⁴⁵ Id.

⁴⁶ Id.

⁴⁷ Michelle K. Derr, Providing Unpaid Work Experience Opportunities for TANF Recipients: Examples from Erie County, New York; Montana and Hamilton County, Ohio. <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/08/TANFWPR/3/report.pdf>

⁴⁸ Id.

⁴⁹ Id.

⁵⁰ Personal Communication. Joseph Sullivan, BETC.

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