

Job-Driven Training Principle Five: Stepping Stones

CVAF Spotlight on Service Case Study

In 2014, the Federal government held a review of federal training programs in order to identify and implement steps to make these programs more “job-driven.” Job-driven training, defined as “training that is responsive to the needs of employers in order to effectively place ready-to-work Americans in jobs that are available now or train them in the skills needed for better jobs,” includes seven core principles.

Seven Core Principles of Job-Driven Training

- Principle One: Engage with Employers
- Principle Two: Earn and Learn
- Principle Three: Use the Data
- Principle Four: Measure Results
- **Principle Five: Stepping Stones**
- Principle Six: Opening Doors
- Principle Seven: Regional Partnerships

Principle Five, Stepping Stones, requires that employment placement show a stepping stone approach to success. In practice, this means a training process shows a progression and advancement, with integration of training and education activities as needed. In agencies offering employment services for homeless veterans, stepping stones allow for progression through services to employment readiness and competitive employment using tools like Individual Employment Plans (IEPs).

The California Veterans Assistance Foundation, Inc. (CVAF) has been an advocate for homeless veterans in Kern County, CA for 13 years. CVAF operates a variety of programs, including VA’s Grant and Per Diem (GPD), Transition in Place services, and DOL-VETS’ Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP), with the goal of ending veteran homelessness countywide. Many veterans who come to CVAF are facing multiple challenges at once – homelessness, unemployment, physical disabilities, mental health or substance abuse issues – and require services from many programs. CVAF helps each veteran to develop an individual plan to include needed services when they are best accessed.

After attending the 2015 HVRP Post Award Training and hearing from other HVRP grantees in the San Francisco region, the staff at CVAF realized that many of their programs gather similar information from veterans.

Grantee Spotlight: California Veterans Assistance Foundation, Inc. (CVAF)

HVRP grantee since: 2012

Current HVRP grants: One

Other grants/services: SSVF (2), GPD Transitional Housing (3), Transition in Place, Permanent Supportive Housing, Resource and Referral Center, Annual Kern County Stand Down.



*Chris Allen, HVRP Program Director;
Heather Kimmel, Executive Director*

A veteran enrolled in multiple programs goes through an intake/assessment conversation with a case manager from each program. During this process, the veterans can become frustrated, confuse program details, and set up conflicting plans.

Streamlining the Process

To address this challenge and make things easier for participants, Heather Kimmel, CVAF's Executive Director, decided to streamline its internal processes through the creation of an Individualized Housing and Employment Plan (IHEP). A hybrid of the traditional IEP (see insert) and housing stability plan, this new tool capitalizes on the similarity of goals across programs to create one comprehensive plan for the veteran.

The IHEP is divided into sections including skills/income, mental/physical health, self-determination, and residential stability. It is developed by a case manager at the veteran's point of entry into CVAF and is then added to the client file. The client file is stored on a shared computer drive that can be accessed across the organization. As the client uses additional services, case managers from any program can expand or update the IHEP. CVAF still uses HMIS to capture case notes and services, but the shared drive functions as a companion system, allowing staff to upload and share documents like the DD214.

Working through Change

Like any major programmatic shift, this new approach required training to help staff understand the change and the rationale behind it. CVAF used a multi-level approach, first hosting a session with all the case managers to

get buy-in for the change. Next, Ms. Kimmel followed up with specific training for the Program Directors so they could support their staff throughout the change process. CVAF regularly and actively seeks feedback from staff and veterans to determine what is and is not working, allowing the process to evolve over time.

While the implementation of the IHEP is only a few months old, CVAF is already seeing the benefits of this integrated approach. According to HVRP Program Director Chris Allen, the new process has resulted in more collaboration and fewer silos among case workers across the organization. Some staff members who were initially resistant are now realizing the advantages of greater teamwork, and veterans appreciate not having to repeat their story which has resulted in less frustration. Over time, CVAF hopes the new process will lead to more time spent working on goals and improved outcomes for veterans as they work to maximize income, address health issues, identify benefit eligibility, and obtain stable housing.

Individual Employment Plans (IEPs)

The Individual Employment Plan (IEP) is an essential strategy for helping homeless veterans find employment. The IEP outlines concrete goals, completion dates, and responsibilities to guide the participant toward success and promote accountability. As each milestone is achieved, the veteran builds confidence and self-esteem. Effective IEPs include the following components:

- Start small to ensure early successes;
- Include SMART goals;
- Negotiated through a collaborative process between the participant and case manager to ensure buy-in;
- Revisited on a regular basis and revised as necessary;
- Flexibility to reflect accomplishments, barriers, and changes in the participant's circumstances.