More than 12 million Americans were unemployed in October 2012. The current economic recession has increased unemployment rates to between 8 and 10 percent, compared to 4-5 percent in 2006 and 2007, the years leading up to the recession. Recent unemployment rates are the highest since the late 1940’s, which has contributed to a “lackluster recovery.” Unemployment, stagnant or falling incomes, and less secure jobs that offer fewer benefits cause more families to experience homelessness. From 2007-2010, the number of children experiencing homelessness increased by more than 448,000 to 1.6 million, a 38 percent spike.

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) is the largest single source of federal funding for workforce development activities, such as training and employment programs administered through the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). It requires states and localities to establish workforce investment boards to create employment and training systems and allocate resources within communities. Each local board develops a “one-stop” system that allows a job seeker or an employer to access an array of employment and training services in one place. The purpose of these activities is to increase employment, job retention, earnings, and occupational skills for participants.

HOW CAN FAMILIES EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS USE EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING PROGRAMS?

Almost half of all people experiencing homelessness work at least part-time, and families who are homeless average a monthly income of $475. WIA provides universal access to employment-focused assistance for all individuals who qualify, including parents and youth experiencing homelessness.

Eligibility Requirements

WIA authorizes services for youth, adults, and dislocated workers (people who have been terminated or laid off, are formerly self-employed and now unemployed, or have been providing unpaid services to family members in the home and either have been dependent on the income of other family members but are no longer supported by that income or are unemployed/underemployed). To be eligible for WIA services, participants must: be 18 years of age or older (adult services); be between 14 and 21 years of age (youth services); meet income requirements; be a U.S. citizen or authorized to work in the U.S.; and meet Military Selective Service registration requirements. In addition to the eligibility requirements for adults, youth or dislocated workers must also meet an additional set of requirements particular to their specific situations.

Barriers to Access

Many families who are homeless have difficulty accessing education and training programs. Lack of transportation and access to phones, email, and a reliable mailing address are among the challenges. Additionally, some homeless shelters require residents to be on the premises during certain hours which may not coincide with the requirements of a training program or job. Lack of child care is another large barrier to entering a job training program; parents who are homeless often do not have a reliable place to leave their children during the day. Families experiencing homelessness often have limited access to

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technology which impedes searching for, applying for, and maintaining employment. Additionally, WIA holds states, communities, and service providers accountable for performance measures, such as success rates in placing people in jobs and improving earnings. This may discourage them from reaching out to hard to serve populations who may need more supports to find employment.6

**IMPROVING ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR FAMILIES EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS**

Efforts by federal, state and local governments and local homeless service providers could improve access to mainstream employment and training programs for families who are homeless.

**Federal Government**

- Strengthen resources and increase training and educational opportunities so programs are better able to serve youth and parents who are homeless.
- Require states to ensure that youth and parents who are homeless receive job training services designed to improve job skills, maximize earning potential, and provide placement in decent paying, stable jobs.
- Increase effectiveness by coordinating WIA programs with homeless assistance, social service, veterans’ service, youth, and housing programs.
- Promote coordination between WIA programs and the Department of Education’s after-school and summer learning programs, funded through the 21st Century Community Learning Center program, to maximize youth academic and work-force skill development year-round.
- Collect data on families served, such as housing status and children’s health, education, and safety outcomes, to evaluate the effectiveness of WIA in serving families experiencing homelessness.

**State and Local Governments**

- Include services for people who are homeless in state workforce investment plans.
- Improve response to families who face the most serious barriers to accessing and maintaining employment by increasing resources and support to workforce system planners and practitioners to implement evidence-based workforce development practices.
- Promote the use of online benefits access and screening technology to ensure clients are accessing employment programs and other benefits.
- Establish cooperative working relationships with homeless and housing providers to maintain and increase the number of families participating and provide transportation to programs and services.

**Homeless Service Providers**

- Educate local employment and training programs about how the needs of families who are homeless could be met through access to WIA programs.
- Implement systems to link families experiencing homelessness to WIA programs and other mainstream benefits while in shelter and provide transportation to programs when resources are available.
- Support improvements to how employment and training programs serve at-risk and homeless families.

**LEARN MORE ABOUT WIA:**


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