

Serving Low-Wage Workers at the South County (San Diego) Career Center: A Survey of a One-Stop

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This paper describes the results of a 2004 survey of walk-in customers entering the South County Career Center, a One-Stop established by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, in Chula Vista (San Diego), California. The Career Center, operated by a for-profit company, is an active One-Stop Center that houses a variety of workforce services and shares its space with a small number of partners, but currently has no in-house welfare or work support staff to provide eligibility services for child care, food stamps, or Medicaid/CHIP. This survey — one of the first of its kind — was conducted to inform program development for MDRC’s national Work Advancement and Support Center (WASC) demonstration. This project targets low-wage workers and their employers, and is aimed at increasing rates of job retention, job advancement, and receipt of financial work supports (including child care subsidies, food stamps, and government health insurance).¹ Together with the Job Center in Dayton, Ohio, the South County Career Center in Chula Vista is one of two “learning” sites, selected to develop and refine program services during the demonstration planning period, prior to selecting three additional sites.

Key Findings

- Seventeen percent of the customers entering the South County Career Center were already employed. Most of these working customers had low-wage jobs— close to two-thirds (62 percent) worked in jobs paying \$10 per hour or less.
- Of those most likely to be eligible for work supports (working parents earning under \$8.00 per hour), only 22 percent were receiving any of the three main supports captured by the survey (food stamps, Medicaid/CHIP, and child care),² and only four percent were receiving the full package of these services. None of the working parents earning above \$8 per hour reported receiving any of these work supports. Given these low take-up rates, the WASC program has the potential to add a great deal of value to the package of services that customers are currently receiving through the South County Career Center.

Working Customer Characteristics

Close to one-fifth of the customers (17 percent) entering the South County Career Center were employed, and 61 percent of those employed were working full-time. Of those who were working, 45 percent were supporting children and nearly 40 percent were married. Thirty-six percent of employed customers with children had at least one child under the age of five (see [Table 1](#)).

Table 2 illustrates that many of these customers were working in jobs with low wages. Over one-third of working customers (36 percent) were making less than \$8 per hour; over 60 percent were making \$10 per hour or less. Not surprisingly, part-time workers tended to have lower wages than full-time workers (see Table 2) and were much less likely to have employer-sponsored benefits (see Table 4).

Receipt of Work Supports and Other Services

The survey asked customers about the public benefits that they were receiving to supplement their income and support their work effort — including subsidized child care, food stamps, Medicaid/CHIP, and partial welfare grants. Few working parents reported receiving these benefits. This is not entirely surprising given that the Career Center does not provide direct access to these supports on site. However, in California, a family of three (one adult and two children) with a full-time worker earning under \$8 per hour would likely be eligible to receive a child care subsidy, food stamps, and Medicaid/CHIP, and yet the vast majority of working parents at the Career Center who were earning less than \$8 per hour (96 percent) were *not* receiving the full package of these supports, even though 22 percent were receiving at least one of them. The most common supports received by working parents earning less than \$8 per hour were food stamps and Medicaid/CHIP (13 and 20 percent, respectively). Very few of the working families with children under 12 were receiving government-sponsored child care assistance (10 percent), and only 10 percent received welfare (see Table 6).

¹ The project is being supported by the U.S. Department of Labor, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the Ford, Rockefeller, Casey, Irvine, and Packard Foundations. The survey was administered at the Chula Vista, South County Career Center between February 10 and March 31, 2004. A total of 817 customers took the survey (every customer that entered the Career Center); 135 of the respondents were employed.

² Because of the small sample sizes of working parents, these findings should be interpreted with caution. In addition, the survey did not ask for household income or composition, which are two major factors for determining eligibility for most work supports. Therefore, the survey provides a very rough approximation of the proportion of low-wage, working parents who are not receiving the work supports for which they may be eligible. The lower the wage rate, the more likely the worker and his/her family is to be eligible. In this case, we looked specifically at working parents earning under \$8 per hour. The child care subsidy was not included as part of the “full package” of work support for working parents with no children or with children aged 12 and older. Also, for this paper, we are not including work supports administered through the tax system: the Earned Income Tax Credit or Child Tax Credit.

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APPENDIX**

Table 1 – Working People

	Percent
Employed	
Part-time	39.2
Full-time	60.8
Have at least one child less than 19 years old	45.1
Age of youngest child	
aged 0-4	36.4
aged 5-11	47.3
aged 12-18	16.4
Married	39.3
Sample Size*	135

*Sample size varies across items; maximum sample size reported.

Table 2 – Wages

%	Working Full-time	Working Part-time	Total
Wage			
Less than \$8	24.0	55.1	36.3
\$8-\$10	24.0	28.6	25.8
\$10.01-\$12	14.7	12.2	13.7
More than \$12	37.3	4.1	24.2
Sample Size*	75	49	124

*Sample size includes all working respondents who answered items about hours and wages.

Table 3 – Employer-sponsored Benefits by Wage (by Percent)

	Under \$8	\$8.01-\$10.00	Over \$10
Health insurance	15.6	53.6	66.0
Paid sick leave	11.4	46.4	63.6
Paid vacation	15.6	56.7	72.3
Paid holidays	22.2	50.0	64.6
Sample Size*	49	32	52

*Sample size includes all working respondents who answered items about hours and wages. Within this sample, the number of non-missing responses varies by item.

Table 4 – Receipt of Employer-sponsored Benefits (by Percent)

Working Full-Time	Working Part-Time	Total	
Health insurance	57.1	21.4	44.2
Paid sick leave	49.2	23.3	39.7
Paid vacation	58.2	31.9	47.5
Paid holidays	58.8	25.5	45.5
Sample Size	76	49	135

*Sample size includes all working respondents who answered items about hours. Within this sample, the number of non-missing responses varies by item.

Table 5 – Reasons for Coming to the Career Center

Percent of Working Customers	
For food stamps	0.7
For medical insurance	3.0
For job placement or job readiness services	66.7
For child care	1.5
For education or training services	28.9
For TANF	1.5
For unemployment insurance	8.2
For “other” reason	20.7
Percent of employed respondents who came to the Career Center for more than one reason	26.7
Sample size	135

Table 6 – Work Support Receipt Among Working Families (by Percent)¹

Under \$8	\$8.01- \$10.00	Over \$10	Total	
Working (Total)				
Food Stamps	13.0	0.0	0.0	5.5
Medi-Cal/Healthy Families	20.0	0.0	0.0	8.7
Child care ²	10.0	0.0	0.0	4.3
Any of the above 3	21.7	0.0	0.0	9.1
Any 1 of the above 3	8.7	0.0	0.0	3.6
Any 2 of the above 3	9.5	0.0	0.0	3.8
The full package ³	4.3	0.0	0.0	1.8
Welfare	10.0	0.0	0.0	4.3
Sample size*	23	10	22	55

*Sample size includes all working respondents with children who answered items about hours and wages. Within this sample, the number of non-missing responses varies by item.

¹ Because of the small sample sizes, these findings should be interpreted with caution.

² Percentage only includes those families with at least one child under age 12.

³ For respondents with children younger than 12 years old, “the full package” of major work supports includes a child care subsidy, food stamps, and Medicaid/CHIP, while for respondents without children younger than 12 years old, “the full package” of major work supports includes food stamps and Medicaid/CHIP only.