

The Delivery of Manpower and Supportive Services to Rural Areas

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This study identifies problems encountered by state employment service agencies and other organizations in the delivery of equitable manpower and supportive services to rural and migrant workers and recommends solutions to these problems.

Secretary of Labor Brennan has ordered that state employment service agencies provide equity of access to manpower services for rural workers and employees. In addition, he has mandated that local offices provide a full range of manpower and supportive services to migrant agricultural workers. One of the prime purposes for this study was to identify problems now being encountered by state employment service agencies in the delivery of equitable manpower and supportive services to rural workers who reside outside a radius of 20 miles of the local offices and to recommend solutions to these problems. Special emphasis was placed on the review of counseling services, referral to training, and other supportive services provided for rural workers.

Rural workers are often at a disadvantage because of the lack of qualified employment counselors, services for handicapped applicants, and lack of vocational and technical education facilities. The almost total lack of usable labor market information for rural areas, the lack of exposure of rural residents to the wide range of occupations found in urban areas, and the need for many rural high school graduates to leave their home base areas after graduation to secure suitable employment creates a special need for counseling services in rural areas.

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Another purpose of the study was to review the special problems associated with the provision of manpower and supportive services to migrant agricultural workers and to recommend possible solutions. Migrant workers are being forced out of the migrant stream as the number of job opportunities decline due to mechanization and technological changes. This means that agricultural workers with limited transferrable skills, often having only limited ability to speak, read, and write English, must make the difficult transition to a new occupation and an entirely different life style. Migrants attempting to make this transition almost invariably need numerous supportive services.

In order to identify the problems encountered by state employment services and other agencies in the delivery of equitable manpower and supportive services to rural and migrant workers and in order to recommend solutions to these problems, the authors visited the following locations during December 1973: Local Employment Service office in Madison, Wisconsin; special offices established in rural counties to provide manpower services to rural workers and employers at Elkhorn, Wisconsin (Project Grow-ACE); Adams Friendship, Wisconsin (Employment Service County Agent Project); Mauston, Wisconsin (Operation Hitchhike); Local Employment Service office in South Bend, Indiana; Mid-West Council of La Raza (Local Migrant Organization sponsoring the National Migrant Worker Program in South Bend); and the Local Employment Service office in Logansport, Indiana. We wish to convey our appreciation for the assistance given by all agencies, organizations, and staffs during the above visits.

SERVING THE NEEDS OF MEXICAN-AMERICANS

This discussion is largely concerned with Mexican-Americans who have been migratory workers, but who have decided to settle permanently in a specific area. This does not imply lack of recognition of the plight and problems of the migratory workers, but the services that should and can be rendered tend to be limited to traditional short term placement as well as to aid in ensuring adequate housing. Providing services to migratory workers by an employment service office is similar to using a first aid kit; minor problems may be dealt with, and temporary aid may be rendered for some serious problems. But the migratory status makes it very difficult or impossible to deal adequately with most of the major problems. A promising long range solution seems to be enabling Mexican-Americans, as well as other disadvantaged populations, to settle and integrate permanently in nonurban or rural areas of the country. It is with this group that manpower programs have great potential for assistance.

Obviously, assisting Mexican-American families to become permanently established in a community is not simply a matter of job placement. The migratory family trying to settle permanently generally has a low level of education, few occupational skills, minimal English language skills, cultural values and mores quite different from those of the established population; and they tend to be quite insecure. On the other hand, the Mexican-American

family is usually a cohesive unit and has the normal basic human needs and desires of any other American family. Assisting one or more members of a family to gain permanent employment, as opposed to unskilled seasonal work, may be a major task in itself.

But the cohesive family demands even more; all members of the family, particularly the children, must be happily integrated into the schools and the community. Adequate housing, health care, and friendly acceptance by the established population, as well as employment and economic security, are all equally important to the successful permanent establishment of a family in a new community. It is within this context that the role of manpower services must be considered. This role is clearly different from that of providing manpower services to the more traditional American family where housing, health, education, and acceptance factors are not likely to be as crucial. Manpower services cannot be isolated and dealt with independently. All facets of life and problems of the family must receive proper attention and assistance in order to enable satisfactory adjustment.

However, this does not mean that the employment service or manpower programs should take full responsibility for all problems. Luckily, many other federal, state, local, and private agencies exist and render appropriate services. The quantity and quality of such available services, however, do vary around the country. Such services are logically specialized, providing aid to particular individuals or assisting individuals or families in specialized ways. Family income, or adequate employment for one or more members of a family, is an absolute necessity for satisfactory family adjustment. Since employment is related to adjustment in every aspect of family life, manpower programs must ensure that all types of essential assistance to a family are rendered, and they must cooperate with and coordinate all forms of aid that may be needed for a particular situation. When essential services are not available, employment service or manpower personnel may be required to provide them, if the goal of employment and family security is to be attained.

Meeting the needs of Mexican-Americans as outlined above requires a broadly trained counselor who is both bilingual and bicultural. The term bicultural includes not only a full understanding of both the Mexican-American and the traditional local culture but also involvement in and acceptance of the two cultures as well. Although it would certainly be possible for a white middle class counselor to bridge this cultural gap, the chances are generally better that a Mexican-American counselor would more readily succeed.

It is very difficult to provide effective manpower and supportive services to Mexican-Americans because of language barriers and cultural isolationism. Mexican-Americans need someone they can trust, someone who is not a power yielding person, someone who can be objective and yet show understanding, acceptance, and positive regard. They need a person they can reach directly, without going through the crew leader or other political leaders in their cultural group. Providing such a person is the only way to overcome the cultural and the language barrier problem. The use of interpreters is not very effective because interpreters can change the meaning of what the client is trying to say.

Thus, there is a need for well-trained counselors who understand the language, culture, and circumstances of the Mexican-American. These are persons fluent in Spanish who have the well-being of each individual client in mind and who are well prepared in the helping relationship of counseling. Since well prepared professionals meeting these qualifications are few, we suggest that well educated Mexican-Americans be recruited and trained as counselors. (Ideally, individuals selected would have bachelor's degrees and would be given a year of full-time graduate training in counseling and testing and the use of referral sources and occupational information.) Once trained, these individuals could devise programs that would not put pressure on the clients to work at only certain types of jobs or for only certain employers.

However, a person's culture provides both strengths and weaknesses. Counselors and other staff members should make use of the client's culture and broaden the client's frame of reference beyond it.

Where we found effective counseling services being provided, counselors went to outstations (community centers, migrant camps, local migrant organizations, and skill centers) to explain and provide the following services:

1. Interviewing, helping assess an individual's occupational strengths and weaknesses, and providing occupational and labor market information.
2. Orientation to attending the skill center, learning survival skills which include understanding and speaking English, learning how to make use of agencies, buying insurance or a home, and learning to get along in the new environment.
3. Providing supportive services while attending a skill center (training) to completion of acquisition of a skill. In addition to providing rehabilitation services, community organizations can involve the Mexican-Americans in community activities that make them more visible as contributing members of the community and can also help them benefit from what the community itself has to offer.
4. Job placement (counselor or job developer) either through the auspices of state employment security divisions or the local migrant job placement offices.

Counseling services are provided on an individual basis, with special attention to the specific strengths, weaknesses, and needs of the individual.

Initially, in counseling the Mexican-American we must be concerned with other basic needs in addition to employment. The sophistication of the counseling will depend on the ability of the counselor and counselee to communicate. The problems of ability, skills possessed, and aspirations are similar to those of other groups of individuals.

Although an attempt has been made to describe what it takes to assist Mexican-American families to gain economic security, there are potential conflicts within employment service and manpower procedures and policies that need clarification. Using the primary criterion of productivity in employment service as the number of placements made, a counselor working with Mexican-Americans may not have an impressive record. A single successful placement may entail endless hours resolving a variety of problems which are

basic but not directly related to job placement. Yet one single placement of a Mexican-American may be as valuable to society as 10 or 20 more routine traditional job placements.

Particularly in a small employment service office a small number of placements by one staff member significantly hurts the productivity record of the office when it is based on the number of placements alone. Such a conflict can only be resolved by a clear differentiation of placement credit based on the complexity and relative value of each placement. It must be recognized that providing effective services to Mexican-Americans is relatively expensive and time consuming, but providing only partially adequate services is a waste of effort and money. Such a program should be properly carried out or not at all.

Another significant conflict concerns compensation and position classification of a counselor working with Mexican-Americans. In reality, the successful person must be a well qualified counselor, manpower specialist, and jack-of-all-trades with unique skills and qualifications. Since this person tends to work independently as a professional and may not supervise others, a logical position classification does not exist in most state civil service systems.

SERVING THE NEEDS OF RURAL AREAS

Each rural county or area is unique in terms of its population characteristics, the nature of its agriculture, the number and size of its towns, and the characteristics of its businesses, industries, and other institutions. Manpower service needs vary accordingly. Even though generalizations are limited by such variations, certain statements are presented as being relatively true of rural areas. First, the cost of living in rural areas is about as high as in urban centers, but the going wage tends to be appreciably lower. This wage differential tends to cause appreciable migration back and forth between rural areas and the cities, and it causes the need to commute considerable distances to work.

Second, many people living in rural areas were raised there. They are relatively conservative and closeknit, tend to resist change, and do not readily accept newcomers. Finally, the range and extent of problems related to employment are certainly as critical in rural areas as in urban centers, as is the need for employment and manpower services. Particularly critical problems result from the seasonal nature of agriculture employment. The same problem applies to the tourist industry.

By definition, a rural area has a population smaller than urban centers, and it is scattered over a wider geographic area. With a similar degree of need for manpower and employment services, the question is raised as to whether the delivery of such services is feasible. As a result of the field visit, our opinion is definitely positive. Not only are such services feasible, but they can provide a most intriguing challenge to appropriate and qualified manpower personnel. There are some limitations related to the density of population and size of the geographical area to be served. No attempt will be made here to define limitations, but it is obvious that the needs of a population of only a few thousand

scattered over an area of several hundred square miles would be excessively costly. Hence, this discussion is primarily concerned with an area of at least 10 to 20 thousand people living within a reasonably accessible geographic range.

For a rural employment service office to operate effectively certain conditions must be met. First, the office and nature of the services must be known to all potential employers and a large proportion of the population, which requires an active public relations program. Second, the office must be manned on a full-time basis so that employers and applicants may make contact in person or by telephone at any time. Third, a complete range of employment services must be offered, including counseling, job bank, and other placement services. Finally, the personnel staff must be competent, compatible to the setting, and fully familiar with and integrated into the community.

The success of such an operation depends on the extent to which the manpower specialist and the counselor become acquainted with and accepted by the employers and the people in the area. This is particularly true of the manpower specialist who has to be the manager, public relations person, and personnel consultant to local business and industry. The individual should thus be an active participant or member of appropriate community organizations. The person should be able to do at least some counseling in order to effectively cooperate with the counselor and provide emergency assistance when the part-time counselor is not present. All of this requires a capable and broadly trained person who enjoys the variety of responsibilities and duties as well as the extra hours that it takes to be a really active participant in the community. Although the person does not have a large staff to supervise, the job description should be similar to all of the job descriptions of a large employment service office. The position is unique and should be so treated in position, classification, and compensation.

The counselor does not have to be as widely involved as the manpower specialist but must be just as familiar with all employment possibilities and must maintain close contact with all other agencies and facilities that may render assistance in some form to applicants. Effective counseling related to employment requires a thorough knowledge of the environment, considerable personal involvement, and contact with the community being served.

For an employment service office in a rural area to operate effectively, certain minimal services must be rendered. The ideal minimal staff would contain one manpower specialist (manager), one counselor, and one secretary, each on a full-time basis. A counselor can serve two offices relatively effectively, particularly if the offices are within a reasonable distance of each other. Under certain conditions a manpower specialist might be able to serve two offices, but further division of staff time would basically put the service in the itinerant category, which appears to be relatively ineffective. Any reduction below a two-and-a-half or three staff member office significantly reduces the effectiveness of the service; and although service may be rendered, the actual effective service may be so costly and inefficient as to limit its value.

One office visited has provided itinerant placement service with a modicum of success. But most attempts to provide counseling service on an itinerant basis

have proven less than satisfactory due to applicants not showing up for appointments. For effective counseling service, counseling appointments should be available immediately or soon after the initial contact; the longer the delay in the appointments the greater will be the proportion of "no shows." Furthermore, it is very difficult, if not impossible, for a manpower specialist or a counselor to maintain an adequate liaison with a community when present only on an intermittent basis.

A small rural office is a valuable asset to the area it is serving. Even on the basis of placements alone it appears that the cost per placement in a small rural office compares very favorably with the cost per placement in an urban office. However, the value of a rural employment service office to the community is far greater than just placement. Such an office can enhance cooperation, coordination, and integration of various agencies, services, and other elements of the community. Unfortunately, many of its contributions to society are not reported on accountability forms, and they tend to be ignored in evaluating the effectiveness of an office. It is the authors' guess that a comprehensive study of selected effective rural offices would clearly indicate that overall benefits to the community per dollar cost would far exceed the community benefits per dollar cost of an urban office.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the information gained during the field visits it appears that effective employment and manpower services can be delivered to rural areas as well as to Mexican-Americans who are settling in these communities. The cost per placement of Mexican-Americans will generally be high, but the long range benefits to society will be as high proportionately. The cost per placement for the general rural population will probably be similar to that in urban offices, but the many other benefits to the community will be appreciably greater. These other benefits, which may not be apparent in accountability systems, include the enhancement of cooperation, coordination, and integration of the helping agencies and all other aspects of a community, which derives from a focus on creating employment opportunities and assisting people in gaining employment. It would appear that per dollar spent an effective employment service office in a rural area has the potential of being one of the most beneficial agencies or positive forces in the community. The least productive approach appears to be an itinerant service based out of an office removed from the area being served.

In extremely isolated areas where manpower exists but no employment opportunities are available, other programs may be necessary. For instance, local governmental units might be contracted to provide limited manpower services and serve as a source of referrals to the local offices. Suppressed job bank listings, as well as pamphlets on manpower programs (for example, job corps and work incentive programs) could be provided in local libraries, city halls, or other governmental units. Another possibility might be seeking help from the National Chamber of Commerce which has contact in most com-

munities. Telephone communication could be negotiated between these job bank information sites and the nearest local office.

The counselor must possess the ability to use and coordinate supportive services, as the services will be wide spread or nonexistent in some cases. Much more needs to be done in coordinating the efforts of employment services, farmers unions, 4H clubs, Future Farmer of America Organizations, school counselors (outreach in schools), and librarians in providing and using occupational and labor market information. In addition, the counselor selection should be based on an ability to engage extensively in job development and employer contact.

The manpower specialist and the counselor should be well trained, capable, and eager to become fully involved and integrated into the community. Staff members should live in the community and become involved in community activities. They must be bilingual and bicultural if Mexican-Americans are to be served. Consistency of service and sufficient involvement in the community are essential for creating job opportunities. Every effort should be made to make the position classification and compensation of positions compatible with demands in order to ensure the recruitment and tenure of qualified staff.

As a result of these field trips, we are most enthusiastic about the potential of providing rural manpower services at a moderate or reasonable cost. As a result, we strongly recommend that the Manpower Administration sponsor a more formal and comprehensive study of the problem. Such a study could be conducted at moderate cost and could present a set of guidelines for providing and extending rural manpower services and for establishing policy. Such a study should cover 15 or 20 rural areas representing a reasonable cross section of rural communities in which some attempt has been made to work with rural or migrant problems. It should include for each area such aspects as an analysis of current employment, population characteristics, all helping agencies and services, and attitudes and opinions of employers and a sample of the population.

Ultimate dispersion and integration into rural areas of disadvantaged peoples now concentrated in the cities may be a vital need of the future, and the existence of effective rural manpower services would greatly facilitate such a movement.

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