

Marin Employment, Treatment & Training Project

Center Point, Inc.

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Center Point METT
FINAL REPORT
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I. Introduction and Overview

A. Introduction

For over thirty-three years, Center Point has been providing comprehensive, integrated substance abuse and essential supportive services to at-risk individuals and families. Through the Agency's vocational programs, which have always been an integral part of Center Point's treatment continuum, and the cornerstone of re-entry services, we have demonstrated that hard to employ individuals with substance abuse problems, self sufficiency challenges, and other significant barriers (deficits in social and interpersonal skills, job and job finding skills, learning disabilities, etc) can achieve positive employment outcomes when they are provided with the fundamental yet essential skills and competencies in combination with follow-up supportive counseling.

This report documents Center Point's success in implementing the Marin Employment, Treatment and Training (METT) Project, which was designed to demonstrate innovative ways in which difficult-to-employ individuals can be transitioned from welfare dependence to employment. Section I. provides an overview and background of the METT Project, e.g. when it was implemented, target population, etc; Section II. describes Center Point's Service Strategy and Vocational Track options; Section III. documents the Clients Served, e.g. client demographics, primary drug of choice, and Vocational Assessment status; Section IV. discusses Client Placement Success rates; Section V. documents Job Retention rates; Section VI. includes information regarding overall Client Progress; and Section VII. covers final statements and Conclusions. In addition to the quantitative data that is analyzed and described in this report, the evaluation team conducted hour-long, semi-structured interviews with three METT clients. These interviews have been formatted into client vignettes and can be seen in Sections IV. V., and VI.

B. Background

In October 1999, Center Point, Inc. was awarded a grant from the United States Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, Office of Welfare-to-Work (WtW) to establish the Marin Employment, Treatment and Training (METT) Project

in San Rafael, a city of 56,063 residents and the County Seat of Marin County, California*. Through the METT program, and in keeping with the intent of the Department of Labor's nationwide Welfare to Work initiative to serve those in the "primary eligible" category, Center Point has made it a priority to serve two target populations: (1) *custodial parents* who have received Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits for 30 or more months or custodial parents who are within 12 months of the Federal 30-month time limit; and (2) *non-custodial parents*, of which two thirds were male and one-third were mothers whose children were receiving TANF benefits but are in foster care or the custody of another relative.



* Originally, the Department of Labor awarded Center Point a 30-month grant, however due to the project's success and the availability of remaining funds, Center Point was awarded a 30-month no-cost extension, thus expanding the grant time from two and a half to five years (1999-2004).

For over five years now the METT Project has been providing this target population with *Job Placement* services (through Center Point's Employment Development Department), *Post-Employment Services* including educational and occupational skills training, referrals for ESL training and mentoring, and *Job Retention* or *Support Services* including substance abuse treatment, counseling and case management, short-term housing assistance and child care and transportation assistance. Research has shown that *vocational training and services* can help clients obtain marketable skills, find jobs, develop interviewing skills, and acquire attitudes and behaviors necessary for work, such as punctuality, regular attendance, appropriate dress, and responsiveness to supervision¹. Furthermore, employment subsequently serves as a means of (re)socialization and integration into the non-substance-using world². It also helps moderate the occurrence and severity of relapse to addiction³.

II. Service Strategy and Vocational Tracks

The Service Strategy of this project can be summarized in four main points:

1. **Commitment:** Participants are evaluated for their commitment to training and employment. This commitment is nurtured and reinforced throughout their participation in the project.
2. **Barriers to Employment:** The project continuously works to identify and then remove barriers to completion of training and obtaining and then keeping a job. By working with motivated participants, barriers such as lack of childcare and low self-esteem are identified and addressed during the project.
3. **Employment Skills:** An integral part of the project is continuous improvement of employment skills. Employers want employees who understand the importance of dependability, promptness, ability to work with others, ability to resolve conflicts and similar skills.
4. **Linkage:** All training and occupational enhancement is linked directly to available employment in the local job market. This ensures credibility both with participants and employers.

*It is Center Point's philosophy that immediate work experience
is the best preparation for permanent employment.*

Hard-to-employ individuals such as TANF recipients, particularly those with substance abuse problems, invariably have multiple and complex needs that have to be addressed sequentially in order for the individual to achieve stability and self-sufficiency. The METT Project uses three basic service tracks in which participants with comparable service needs and/or problem severity are grouped. Participants are free to move between these tracks as their needs are met or new challenges arise.



During the first week of the program, participants undergo a comprehensive assessment in order to determine which service track is most appropriate for them. Four instruments (a structured substance abuse assessment instrument; Vocational Readiness Screener; a General Aptitude Test; and a Vocational Opinion Index) provide a complete picture of the participant's problems, needs, and strengths. The three service tracks include:

- **Job Ready**, which is for individuals who have the fewest service needs, face less pervasive employment barriers, and are the closest to being ready to re-

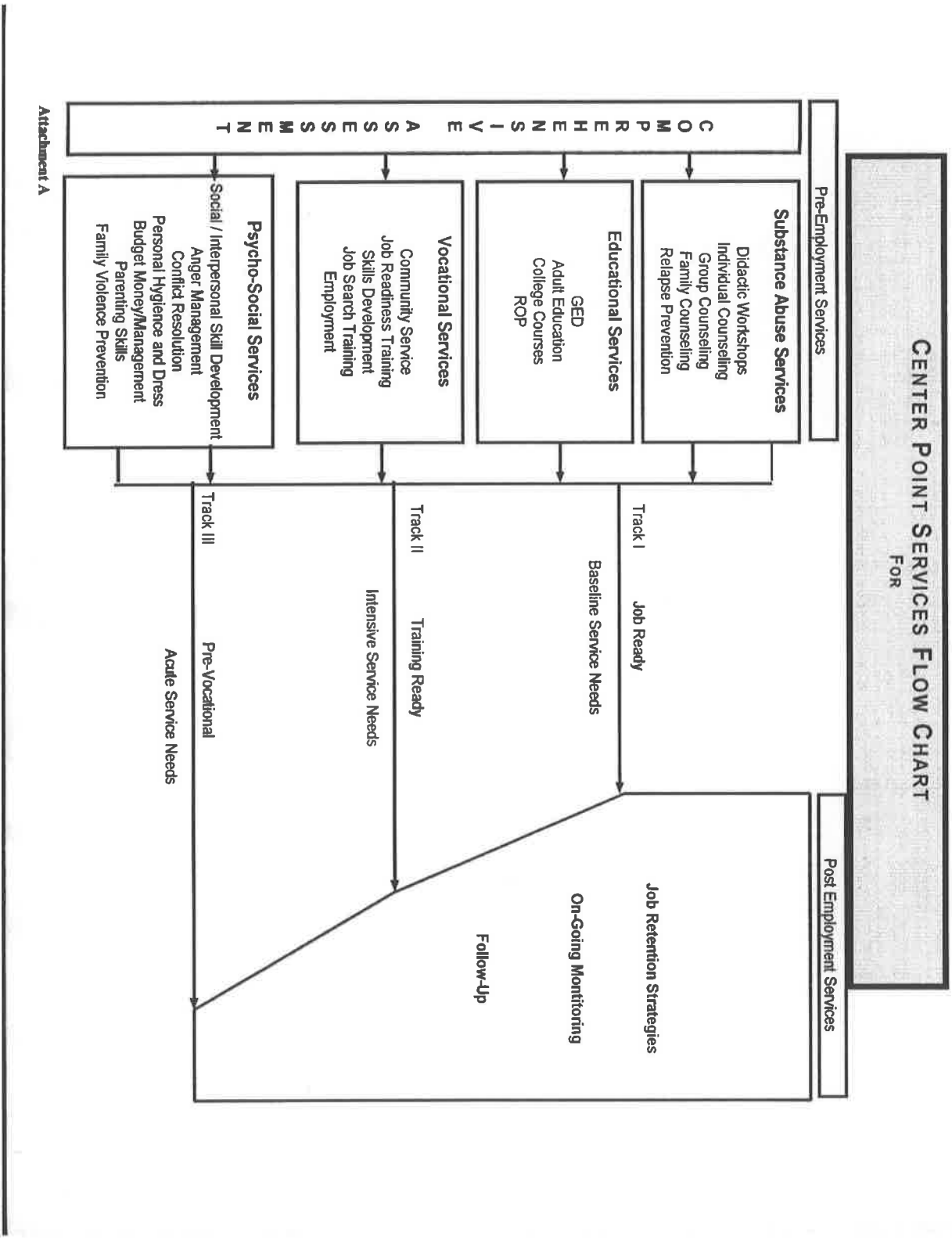
enter the working world. These participants should secure employment within one to two weeks following completion of four to six weeks of vocational workshops.

- **Training Ready**, which is for individuals with intensive service needs. These participants typically have profound drug treatment issues and fairly extensive training needs. Participants begin their job search after they can demonstrate that they have mastered key competencies.
- **Pre-Vocational**, which is for individuals who have acute service needs and extensive vocational deficits. These participants begin the program by learning how to master basic and then more sophisticated vocational competencies, until they are adequately prepared to enter the job search phase.

Attachment A on the following page describes in detail each of these tracks and their services.



Attachment A Center Point Services Flow Chart

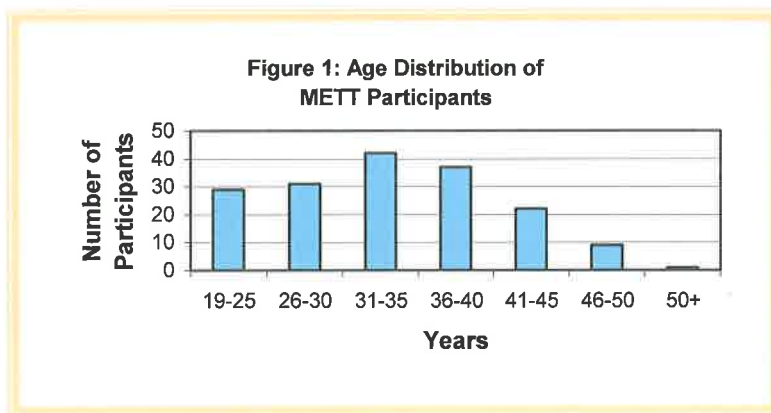


III. Clients Served

Center Point implemented the METT Project through its Employment and Training Program at its offices in San Rafael, Marin County, California. Throughout this five-year grant period, Center Point has enrolled 271 participants, which exceeds the original goal of serving 250 participants and is equal to a 108% enrollment rate.

Of the 271 participants 154 (57%) were hard-to-employ TANF recipients, while the other 117 participants (43%) were considered non-custodial parents (NCPs). Although Center Point slightly missed their target goal of serving 50% NCPs, this population remains an integral focus in Center Point’s vocational programs.

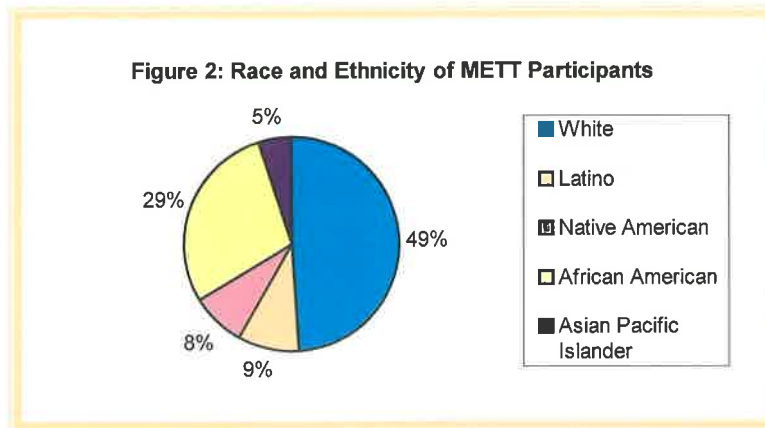
The majority of clients who participated in the METT Project* were female (71%). The average age for female participants was 32 years, while the average age for males was 38 years. The overall average age for all participants was 34 years, with the minimum age being 19 years and the maximum age being 53 years. See Figure 1 for additional details.



In general, almost half (49%) of the METT participants were White, followed by 29% who were African American, 9% Latino, and 8% Native American and 5% Asian/Pacific

* A total of 271 clients were served over the five-year grant period, however demographic data was only available for 92% (249) of these clients.

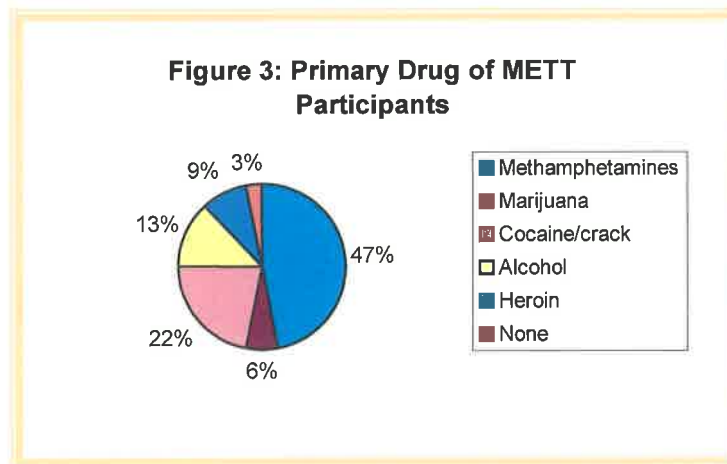
Islanders, reflecting the overall race and ethnicity of the participants served by Center Point's Marin County programs.



When these 271 clients were first enrolled in the METT Project, 47% reported their primary drug problem was with amphetamine and/or methamphetamines. Other substances regularly reported as a primary drug of choice include:

- Cocaine/crack (22%),
- Alcohol (13%), and
- Heroin (9%).

See Figure 3 for details of Primary Drug Use.



The majority of METT participants, 78%, were assessed as “job ready,” followed by 20% who were “training ready”, and 2% that were considered “pre-vocational.” In order to be considered “job ready” clients must be able to minimally speak and read in English AND have a high school diploma or GED, training certificate, union card, or 5+ years of work experience, AND demonstrate sufficient motivation to obtain a full time job, part time job, or a job with benefits. These clients appear to have basic employment skills but need to focus their employment search and require guidance on ways to improve their social skills, positive value systems, and self-esteem. The vocational counselors recognize this and provide extra support and assistance in these areas as well as other supportive services.

METT Participant Vignette #1: Non-Custodial Parent

Shelly (not her real name) is a 32 year-old African-American woman who is the mother of four children ranging in age from 15 to 3 years. She had endured decades of physical and sexual abuse and an addiction to crack cocaine before she was referred to the Center Point METT program by her Child Protective Services case manager. While Shelly had a variety of employable skills, e.g. phone/computer skills, her drug addiction often caused her to quit or be fired. Shelly’s Child Protective Services case manager recognized that her substance abuse was the key factor in her case and, although she removed the children from Shelly’s care, she referred her to Center Point for treatment services. At the conclusion of the assessment battery, Shelly was placed in the “Job Ready” track during which she refined her resume, interviewing, communication, and employment skills.

Since the completion of her participation in the METT program Shelly has been employed at a national grocery store chain where she earns \$13/hr and receives full medical/dental and life insurance benefits. Additionally, because of her strong work ethic, she received a promotion in early December 2004 to a management training position and is currently earning \$17/hr. Shelly has also bought her first car (and obtained her first driver’s license) and in December 2004 received full custody of her four children and her Child Protective Services case was closed.

Shelly credits her success to her participation in Center Point’s residential women and children’s treatment program and the METT program, both with their intensive structured activities, writing assignments, and job training workshops, e.g. how to develop a resume, interview skills, what to wear to an interview, money management and budgeting, etc. Moreover, Center Point has helped Shelly develop effective and positive parenting skills, which led her to create structured routines for herself and her children as they reunited.

Center Point was the best thing to happen to me, it saved my life. Now I’m growing instead of shrinking.

IV. Client Placement Success

Over the past five years, Center Point's METT Project has achieved success rates that are considerably better than those originally proposed:

- Between October 1999 and September 30, 2004, Center Point had placed 231 of its 271 clients. (The average time that elapsed between referral to the program and subsequent placement was between 10 to 15 days.) Of these 271 clients 231 attained full-time unsubsidized employment. *This 85% unsubsidized placement rate exceeds Center Point's original objective of 80%;*
- Of the 271 participants, 41 were enrolled in On-the-Job Training (OJT placements) at Center Point. Based on the regional needs of employers, the majority of OJT placements have been in the areas of childcare and food service, although other tracks were available**. By the end of September 2004, 100% of the OJT participants who had completed their program had achieved full-time unsubsidized employment; and
- As a final point, the average hourly pay rate at the time of placement in Year 01 was \$8.75/hr. However, by Year 05 the average starting salary was \$10.27/hr, with 60% of participants receiving medical, dental, and/or other benefits. This data show that *METT participants are achieving starting salaries that exceed Center Point's original goal by almost \$2.50/hr.* These starting salaries also exceed Marin County's living wage ordinance, which was approved in November 2001, and calls for starting salaries of \$7.50/hr plus benefits, or \$15.75/hr without benefits. When considering the barriers faced by participants at admission to the METT Program in conjunction with the significant downturn in the economy of Northern California, this data is even more remarkable. See Figure 4 for additional details.

** Through the OJT Service Track the METT Project offers participants training in four areas: food service; childcare; clerical training; and maintenance training. These areas had been developed based on local market research and Center Point's involvement with the employer community (through the Private Industry Council/Workforce Investment Boards) and the Chamber of Commerce.



As an example of the wide range of salaries, during the 19th calendar quarter, April - June 2004, the highest salary was \$18.95/hr. for a METT participant who re-entered the job market as a journey level carpenter. This individual not only benefited from the METT training workshops, but also received assistance from the vocational case manager in negotiating his re-application and re-certification with the union. By comparison, the lowest starting salary, in the same quarter, was \$8.75/hr. for a METT participant who accepted a position as a clerical worker at a local computer software company. This participant was a beneficiary of Center Point’s extensive Job Data Bank - as the employer contacted the vocational counselor seeking a qualified individual, which is another indicator that the employment community is satisfied with the individuals that Center Point refers to them. It is important to note that each of these positions offered *extended benefits, and therefore these two METT participants were able to earn a “livable wage” in Marin County.*

V. Job Retention Success

During the five-year lifetime of this grant the METT project has been able to place 231 of the 271 participants in unsubsidized employment. In calculating the overall retention rate for the project, the California Employment Development Department determined, as of June 30, 2004, that out of 182 eligible participants 107 have retained employment.[♦] This

[♦] This number reflects only those placements who have retained employment for six months, or two subsequent quarters, *and* have been counted by the Employment Development Department (EDD), Workforce Investment Division, Performance Management Unit. However it is important to note that the EDD does not actually begin to count individuals as employed until 12 months after the initial date of hire.

is equal to an overall retention rate of 59% for those eligible to be included. However, in previous years the METT job retention rate as calculated by EDD reached a high of 69%. This lower retention rate is attributed mainly to the sluggish Bay Area economy over the past four years and the relatively high unemployment rate in Northern California. Although the national economy is (slowly) recovering, the Bay Area continues to lag behind the national economic “recovery” trends and remains in a difficult employment market. Low-skill positions are scarce and opportunities for highly skilled, trained workers are often out of reach for the typical METT participant. However, in recognition of these factors, METT case managers modified strategies and participant service plans in order to accomplish better matching of the skills, aptitudes, and interests of participants with available employment opportunities. Relationships with the Marin County employment community (both formal – Private Industry Council & Workforce Investment Board participation – and informal – 30 year history in the community) were integral in assisting participants in obtaining and retaining employment.

Other strategies to counter this difficult economic and employment situation include Center Point’s ongoing emphasis on follow-up/post employment support services. These services include: post-placement one-on-one counseling and problem solving interventions with the METT participant; meetings with employers to address issues and find solutions in order to preserve employment; ongoing assessment of participant performance; and where appropriate referrals to other employment opportunities. The METT staff routinely visit with employers so as to remain *proactive* in addressing employer concerns regarding participant needs for additional training, resolving on-site conflicts, ongoing substance abuse treatment needs as related to the workplace, and any other needs presented by the new employee.

The fact that 59% of those employed have consistently remained employed throughout the economic downturn is a reflection of these support services.

Therefore, the 107 participants that have been verified through EDD have actually been continuously employed 18 months, not simply six months.

METT Participant Vignette #2: Non-Custodial Parent

Dan (not his real name), a Non-Custodial Parent, is a 48 year-old Latino male with a long history of crack/cocaine use and many years of criminal justice involvement. Dan used to be a professional kick boxer and prior to his participation in the Center Point substance abuse treatment program and METT vocational services had no relationship with his two children who have been adopted by other family and non-family members. Once his career was finished at age 33, Dan lost his direction and became involved in addiction and criminal behaviors. Although Dan had a number of employable skills in the food service industry and had some experience in the management of upscale restaurants, his addiction prevented him from succeeding.

Once he completed his primary treatment goals, Dan participated in the On-the-Job Training program, during which time he was able to refine his food service skills and experience and to develop additional contacts in the employer community. Since graduating from the METT program *Dan feels that his life is more fulfilling*. Although he always felt that he would be able to find a job, Dan now understands the importance of stable employment, long-term goal setting, and their connection to the need to “manage my recovery, my money, and my family”. Center Point has helped him to deal with his “unfinished business” and change his attitudes toward life. He now has a relationship with his young daughter, who he sees every other weekend and is for the first time providing regular financial support, and hopes to reconnect in the future with his older son.

Dan is grateful for all of the support he has received at Center Point. *Through this program he has been able to develop a healthy network of friends and supporters, has learned to be financially responsible and accountable to his children, and has developed an ethic that promotes positive and constructive values for he and his family. “I came here to get clean and to stop using drugs. I’m leaving with new friends, support, housing, and a job!* Dan has maintained a job with the same employer for over twelve months; he has received a promotion from “line cook” to kitchen supervisor; and is currently earning almost \$13.00/hour with full benefits.

In his own words, *“life is exciting without using”*.

A. Income/Career Enhancement

Although METT staff have been able to successfully support participants through post employment services, and have experienced success in assisting participants in retaining employment relationships (post-employment employer conferences; conflict resolution and problem solving; on-going counseling; etc.), the case managers are aware that, since the inception of the grant, very few participants (78 out of 231 placed) have received promotions, raises, and/or changed jobs to increase their earnings. The absence of a larger

number of participants gaining raises/promotions is clearly a reflection of the continuing economic difficulties, especially experienced in the greater Bay Area. However, the METT staff continues to address income enhancement and career development as core values for the project and provides ongoing workshops in order to increase prospects for the types of employment that provide long-term stability and “livable” wages. Budgeting and money management workshops, utilizing among other tools the Money Smart curriculum, have become some of the more significant post-employment services. Notwithstanding these issues, for those participants who have remained employed for two consecutive quarters (six months), there has been an *increase of wages of over 103%*. Center Point believes that this is a far more significant indicator of meeting the objective of reducing TANF caseloads and providing the foundation for long-term economic stability.



VI. Client Progress

By the conclusion of the grant on September 30, 2004, 271 of the 271 enrolled participants (100%) have been successfully discharged from the METT program after completing the requisite services, which include but are not limited to: (1) the series of skills development workshops (at least one week-depending on assessed need); (2) participating in vocational

case management and job search activities; and (3) participation in case-management follow-up (after having successfully secured unsubsidized employment). Each METT participant who had been enrolled and employed prior to March 30, 2004, also received, at minimum, six-months of post employment support services designed to increase job retention and to promote income enhancement. Of the participants who had not obtained regular employment as of September 30, 2004, all were provided with referrals either to Marin County's employment services providers (Marin Employment Connection or the CalWORKS office) or to Center Point's ongoing vocational services programs. Of those who chose to seek additional services elsewhere (a total of 41 participants who had not secured employment as of September 30, 2004), 16 are long-term TANF recipients and were referred to the CalWORKS division. Thirteen were NCPs and were provided referrals to other county or community-based providers. The remaining twelve (7 NCPs and 5 TANF) continue to utilize Center Point's vocational program and case managers.

Of the METT participants who have "graduated" and have been successfully discharged, 154 (57%) were long-term TANF recipients, while 117 (43%) were NCPs. At the time of their last contact with their case managers, of those who had secured employment prior to the conclusion of the grant, 81% of the long-term TANF participants and 85% of the NCPs were still employed-although not necessarily with their original employer. All NCP participants were required to sign a Personal Responsibility Contract prior to receiving METT services (as required by the Department of Labor, Employment Training Administration for all Welfare to Work competitive grantees). Acceptance of financial responsibility toward their children and renewed efforts to address these responsibilities (establishing contact with the Child Support Division; establishing formal child support payments; developing formal re-unification or visitation plans; etc.) were primary concerns of the METT program and were included in the needs and services plans of all NCP participants. By the conclusion of the grant, METT case managers had assisted close to 55% of the NCPs (64) in establishing legal contact with their children and had established child support payment plans for over 50% (61).

METT Participant Vignette #3: Long Term TANF Recipient

Mary (not her real name), an African-American woman, is a 22-year-old mother of five children who was admitted into the METT program in November 2000. At the time of her enrollment, four of her children - all but the youngest - had been placed in foster care settings by Child Protective Services as a result of her extensive history of drug use. Mary had been on welfare and other public assistance programs since the age of 16 and completely lacked any marketable skills or work history.

At the completion of her vocational assessment and evaluation, Mary was assessed as "training ready" and finished two weeks of skills development workshops. Because her Case Manager felt that Mary was not ready for employment on the open market she participated in an On the Job Training (OJT) clerical module for 90 days, affording her an opportunity to further improve her employment skills and to gain more stability in her recovery and parenting. Following Mary's successful completion of her OJT, she actively participated in a job search and obtained a \$12.00/hr clerical position at a local auto glass company that included medical and dental insurance. This was the first legitimate job that Mary had ever had, and, moreover, a job that has provided her with a sense of accomplishment and self-worth.

As a result of her participation in Center Point's substance abuse program and the METT program, Mary has maintained custody of her youngest child, regained custody of a second child from foster care, has purchased her first car (and obtained her first driver's license), and is making daily progress towards achieving financial self-sufficiency. She currently resides in Center Point's transitional housing and continues to participate in living skills and parenting education workshops, recovery support activities, and receives ongoing vocational and income enhancement support. Through this program Mary feels that she has built a foundation for herself, which she continually builds upon through her employment and Center Point's support services. Mary is thankful for all of Center Point's support, as she said, "*Center Point supported me and assisted me when everyone else turned me out. Center Point has been there for me as long I wanted and this is comforting to know. I wouldn't have my kids with me today if I didn't come to Center Point.*"

VII. Conclusions

Taken altogether, the data presented in this close-out report are highly encouraging. They show that the METT Project has been successful in moving it's hard to employ clients from welfare (receiving TANF benefits) to the world of employment. These clients have been able to re-enter the world of work and become productive members of society, which has in turn increased their sense of self worth and quality of life. Through the life of this project, October 1999 through September 30, 2004 Center Point has been able to:

- Enroll, assess, and evaluate and provide vocational and employment services to 271 Welfare-to-Work eligible clients (with an average time between referral to the program and job placement being 10 to 15 days.) Of these 271 clients 231 attained full-time unsubsidized employment. ***This 85% unsubsidized placement rate exceeds Center Point's original objective of 80%;***

- Enroll 41 participants in On-the-Job Training (OJT placements) with the majority of OJT placements being in the areas of childcare and food service. Moreover, at the end of September 2004, all OJT participants who had completed their program had achieved full-time unsubsidized employment with an average starting wage of over \$9.00/hour. Of these, 80% were in a field related to their OJT area of participation; and

- Support its working METT participants through post-placement one-on-one counseling and problem solving interventions; hosting meetings with employers to address issues and create solutions in order to preserve employment; assess participant performance; and where appropriate, make referrals to other employment opportunities. ***Through this type of proactive support almost 60% of METT participants have been able to retain employment* for over a six-month period even though the Bay Area's employment market and economy are still struggling.***

As a final point, Center Point has assisted its METT participants in not only securing employment, but also in securing employment that pays a *living wage and/or provides benefits*. The average hourly pay rate at the time of placement in Year 01 was \$9.79/hr. However, by Year 05 the average starting salary was \$10.27/hr, with 60% of participants

* This number reflects only those placements who have retained employment for six months, or two subsequent quarters, *and* have been counted by the Employment Development Department (EDD), Workforce Investment Division, Performance Management Unit. However it is important to note that the EDD does not actually begin to count individuals as employed until 12 months after the initial date of hire. Therefore, the 107 participants that have been verified through EDD have actually been employed 18 months, not simply six months.

receiving medical, dental, and/or other benefits. ***This data show that METT participants are achieving starting salaries that exceed Center Point's original goal by almost \$2.50/hr.*** These starting salaries also exceed Marin County's living wage ordinance, which was approved in November 2001, and calls for starting salaries of \$7.50/hr plus benefits, or \$15.75/hr without benefits.

In conclusion, this report shows that Center Point's METT program has been successful in demonstrating that hard to employ individuals with substance abuse problems and/or self sufficiency challenges *can* achieve positive employment outcomes when they are provided with the fundamental yet essential skills and competencies in combination with follow-up supportive counseling.

In the words of a former METT participant,

I have been clean now for over a year, I'm living without any legal supervision for almost two years, and have a great job that I love, all thanks to Center Point. Center Point gave me the "Concepts" which gave me the structure I needed! They not only saved my life but gave me the tools to save the lives of my family.



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