



CalFresh Employment and Training – The Basics

Prepared by Jessica Bartholow for the California Labor Federation 2017 Workforce Conference

Two million new jobs have been created and unemployment has dropped in half since 2011. Still, many Californians struggle with unemployment, underemployment and low-wages and, as a result, experience hunger or are forced to rely on programs in the social public safety net. Without support to improve their skills, these Californians will linger in poverty regardless of how hard they work. In fact, in 2015, nearly 80% of poor Californians had earnings from work.

For low-income Californians, both those who work and those who do not or cannot, the CalFresh program is an essential support, preventing hunger and malnutrition.¹ For people looking for work, this access to food is essential, as hunger can easily undermine employment goals. But that's not all. For many CalFresh recipients, receipt of hunger-fighting food benefits makes them eligible for the CalFresh Employment and Training (CFET) Program, a program that Counties offer at their option.²

Counties that wish to participate in CFET must submit an annual CFET Plan to CDSS for approval. This non-competitive proposal contains key elements of a proposed CFET program. DSS aggregates information from county CFET Plans into a California CFET Plan, which in turn is submitted to the USDA FNS for approval each year. Amendments to the plan may be submitted at the discretion of CDSS. Changes to the CFET Program made in 2013 (SB 1321, Chaptered laws of 2012), led County Human Services Agencies to improve their CalFresh E&T Programs and, today, 33 Counties now participating in the CFET program.³ The United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service has approved the DSS CFET plan for Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2017 pending final 2017 Federal Budget approval. This allocation includes 100 percent federal funds totaling \$10,335,573, Administrative federal "match" reimbursement funds totaling \$76,341,582 and Participant Reimbursement Transportation/ Ancillary funds totaling \$17,139,956 for a grand total of \$103,817,111.⁴ Some of these federal "match" reimbursement funds are for third-parties (i.e. community colleges, non-profit employment and training centers, etc.).⁵

In addition, several counties have recently chosen to participate in an innovative CalFresh E&T option, called Fresh Success⁶ that fully relieves them of provider accountability and significantly reduces their workload in comparison to a traditional county-based model. The model is implemented through a statewide intermediary, the Foundation for California Community

¹ CalFresh is known nationally as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). For a state factsheet about who receives CalFresh in California, go here: <http://www.cbpp.org/research/a-closer-look-at-who-benefits-from-snap-state-by-state-fact-sheets>

² The federal SNAP Employment and Training manual lists allowable activities and program rules and can be found here: www.fns.usda.gov/ET-policy-guidance

³ Source: <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/cdssweb/entres/pdf/EmploymentTrainingProgramPlan.pdf>

⁴ Source: http://www.cdss.ca.gov/lettersnotices/EntRes/getinfo/cfl/2016-17/16-17_48.pdf

⁵ Effective with the December 2016 quarter, PC 364 CFET Third Party Match is available for claiming third party reimbursements to the CFET 50 percent allocation. Counties may utilize this code separately and/or concurrently with the PC 464 (CFET Administrative Activities). Please see CFL NO. 16/17-44 for additional information.

⁶ For more about "Fresh Success," go to: <http://foundationsccc.org/What-We-Do/Student-Services/FreshSuccess>

Colleges, which contracts directly with CDSS to provide administrative, billing, and full oversight functions for selected CalFresh E&T programs. In turn, the intermediary contracts with local community colleges and community-based organizations to provide services. Both intermediary and county-based models may operate within a single county. Fresh Success is expected to expand significantly over time, and currently includes two community colleges and two community-based organizations in three counties.

In 2015, the USDA FNS created a Center of Excellence for SNAP E&T, known as SNAP to Skills, at the national level. The work of SNAP to Skills⁷ has been helpful in the development of California's CFET program to help support expansion of CFET, especially the "third-party match" model. CalFresh recipients and they seek employment skills, transition into work or prepare to advance in their chosen field. Buoyed by this increase in county participation and recent federal funding supporting pilot programs CFET Programs are finding success in helping families secure employment that allows them to leave the safety net altogether. Legislation currently pending in the California State Legislature could increase support for CFET and the third-party match model.⁸

CFET Expansion is More Important Now than Ever

According to federal law, Aabled Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs) are subject to a three month in three year time limit in the CalFresh program, unless there is an area waiver, they qualify for an exemption or are working 20-hours a week or more. The ABAWD time limit is one of the most hardhearted and backward thinking of the policy changes implemented during federal welfare reform, because it denies food aid to people who want to work and will accept any job or work program slot offered but are simply not able to secure one.⁹ Unlike work requirements in other public assistance programs, states have no obligation to offer employment services to someone unable to secure 20 hours of work before cutting them off assistance. As a result, most of these recipients are denied food help and go hungry, making it more difficult to find work, not less.

The ABAWD population often faces the most severe barriers to work and could benefit from a county-administered employment and training placement and barrier removal support services that could come with it. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP), only about half of ABAWDs nationally have a high school diploma or the equivalent.¹⁰ In Ohio, where the ABAWD waiver was recently ended, advocates found that more than 34% of ABAWDs has a criminal record and, with no expungement services, they faced high barriers to employment.¹¹ This mirrors data published in a recent report showing that men with criminal records account for 34% of all nonworking men ages 25-54 and that the numbers of people with a criminal conviction on

⁷ For more information about national technical assistance available for SNAP E&T and CFET providers, see www.nationalskillscoalition.org and www.seattlejobsinitiative.org

⁸ Assembly Bill 563 (Arambula), Assembly Bill 415 (Chiu) and Senate Bill 282 (Wiener).

⁹ California now requires counties to implement CalFresh E&T as a voluntary program for all participants that reside in a federally determined work surplus area. Currently, California has been determined a work surplus area statewide, but that determination, upon which the California ABAWD waiver is also based, is anticipated to be retracted in 2018. At that point, the option for a mandatory program will be reintroduced to counties unless mandatory programs are disallowed by legislation.

¹⁰ Ed Bolen, "Approximately 1 Million Unemployed Childless Adults Will Lose SNAP Benefits in 2016 as State Waivers Expire Affected Individuals Are Very Poor; Few Qualify for Other Help," (Jan. 2015)

<http://www.cbpp.org/cms/?fa=view&id=5251>

¹¹ A Comprehensive Assessment of ABAWDs and their Participation in Work Programs in Franklin County: <http://admin.ohiofoodbanks.org/uploads/news/WEP-2013-2014-report.pdf>

their record, especially men of color, has increased significantly since the failed war-on-drugs and during the prison boom.¹²

Lacking job opportunities and with multiple barriers to work, these SNAP recipients may be able to find a low-paying service sector work, but those jobs are increasingly part-time and lack fair scheduling practices making it difficult to guarantee 20 hours a week on a regular basis.¹³ According to one study, 43 percent of part-time workers wished they had more hours and this involuntary part-time work only grown over the course of the economic downturn, more than doubling between 2007 and 2012 from 3.6 to 7.8 percent among women in the workforce and from 2.4 to 5.9 percent among men.¹⁴ According to federal law, if a CalFresh recipient who is subject to the time limit falls short of the 80 hours of work activity, the entire month must count toward the three month in a three year period time limit, regardless of the reasons for not meeting the requirement of the household's circumstances. Under current state law, if this person also is required by a County to participate in a mandatory CFET program, the person will not be able to regain eligibility when they begin complying with the law again, but rather, after a sanction period of up-to-six months. AB 563 would still require these individuals to be subject to the ABAWD time limit and related work rule, but would remove the double sanction caused by a mandatory placement in CFET.

CFET Works to Help Prevent Hunger & Support Employment

There has been a lot of rhetoric surrounding the intersection of work and public benefits in recent years. Some of it has been without merit and un-substantiated by facts about who is working, who is not working and who needs help in order to find work. CFET works not only to improve the likelihood of employment and self-sufficiency among low-income Californians, but also to prevent hunger, which can be a profoundly powerful barrier to employment.

About Western Center on Law and Poverty

Western Center on Law and Poverty leads the fight in the courts, counties, and capital to secure housing, health care and a strong safety net for low-income Californians. Learn more at: www.wclp.org For more information about Western Center's work on CalFresh, contact:

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¹² Binyamin Applebaum, "Out of Trouble But Criminal Records Keep Men Out of Work," New York Times, March 1, 2015 <http://mobile.nytimes.com/2015/03/01/business/out-of-trouble-but-criminal-records-keep-men-out-of-work.html?referrer=&r=0>

¹³ Charlotte Alexander and Anna Haley-Lock, "Not Enough Hours in the Day: Work-Hour Insecurity and a New Approach to Wage and Hour Regulation," (Dec. 2013) <http://www.irp.wisc.edu/publications/dps/pdfs/dp141713.pdf>

¹⁴ Rebecca Glauber, "Wanting More Working Getting Less: Involuntary Part-Time Employment and Economic Vulnerability," (July 2013) <http://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1198&context=carsey>