

Tehama County

Washington Street Productions - Getting People to Work

Washington Street Productions (WSP) is an employment program designed increase the work participation rate for welfare recipients by providing immediate, meaningful subsidized work, while addressing barriers and increasing job skill development.

The Welfare to Work Program faces unique challenges. It is a federally funded, structured employment and training program designed to promote self-sufficiency for adults currently receiving California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) assistance. CalWORKs recipients are assessed to determine activities and services that will lead them to self-sufficiency, including identifying and addressing severe barriers including mental health issues, drug and alcohol addiction, and domestic violence. In Tehama County over 30% of the WTW caseload has at least one of these barriers identified. It is required for the WTW program to address these barriers with participants, while also maintaining strict work requirements for each participant.



Tehama County identified the need for a work program that addresses participant's barriers and teaches them life and work skills, in a safe and consistent environment, while also contributing to the hourly work requirements set forth by the state and federal government.

Washington Street Productions was developed through a partnership between the Tehama County Department of Social Services and the local Workforce Investment Agency, the Job Training Center. Job Training Center has been providing employment and training opportunities to CalWORKs clients for over a decade, however none of them are as creative or impactful as Washington Street Productions.

This program provides a 40 hour work week to participants for a minimum of a 30-day period, five days per week, at \$11.00 an hour. The goal of the project is to engage clients in meaningful work activities, which includes production of goods through wood working and craftsmen's skills such as building garden boxes, picture frames, furniture, wooden signs, picnic tables and benches, chalkboards, bird houses, walking sticks, easels, yard art,

stepping stones, frames, beading, clocks and mobiles, and tie quilts. This program teaches work related soft skills, applies behavior modification techniques, evaluates work readiness, and provides CalWORKs WTW staff with relevant information for developing the ongoing service strategies for their clients.

This program is funded through Assembly Bill 74, in the amount of \$275,000. Costs covered include participant wages, taxes and workers compensation, staff costs, and operating expenses for the facility, equipment, materials and supplies. To the extent possible, the raw materials are reclaimed/recycled items from the landfill, secondhand stores, contractors, manufacturers, or donated. Finished products sold, return revenue back into the project for the replacement of goods and materials. A cost benefit of the program includes participants obtaining employment after participation in this program, removing them from CalWORKs assistance and saving government funds long term. Additionally, the requirement of the federal government to meet hourly work requirements instills a penalty process through the State of California for those counties who do not achieve the required rate, which could total 500 million dollars. This program has the potential to save the county from federal penalty pass down.



Washington Street Productions provides opportunities to address barriers with a work first mentality, contributing to the success of the participant and the WTW program requirements. Since the implementation of WSP in November 2015, there have been 59 placements into the program. Of those, 76% completed their required number of hours in the Welfare to Work Program, and 19% were able to secure unsubsidized employment after participating in Washington Street Productions. This high completion rate has increased the overall county work participation rate. In January 2015, the WPR averaged 18.71%, and in January of 2016 the WPR averaged 36.41%. This 17.7% increase in work participation rate will assist the county in avoiding federal penalties, but moreover, this program has helped individuals address barriers, increase confidence and obtain the skills they need to become self-sufficient. Please see attached article from the *Daily News* publication.

Contact: Amanda Sharp, Director, PO Box 1515, Red Bluff CA, 96080, asharp@tcdss.org, 530-528-4079

Tara Loucks- Shepherd, Program Manager, PO Box 1515, Red Bluff CA, 96080, tloucks@tcdss.org, 530-528-4158