

Overview: Placer’s Resource Huddle allows residents to easily and safely access community resources, coaching, networking support and jobs in an interactive and innovative virtual format.

Challenge: Prior to the pandemic, Placer County Employment Services held an in-person Job Huddle event, where CalWORKs customers seeking employment were invited to attend. Employment Services Counselors and Job Developers, with connections to local employers, came prepared with job openings in field of interest. During the Huddle, job seekers were asked—in front of staff and each other—to deliver a “30 Second Me,” a bio sketch to build confidence and practice promoting themselves in front of others in a relaxed environment. Beyond this practice, this exercise provided key information for Counselors and Job Developers who would next be working with customers to apply for jobs presented during the event. Over 30 staff were present to sit with and help customers, work one-on-one with them to apply for jobs, create or refine resumés, navigate job applications and conduct mock interviews. Job Huddle helped customers build confidence, find good jobs and get personalized service. In 2019, 156 attendees applied for 243 jobs at the Job Huddle. The last in-person Job Huddle was held in February 2020 as face-to-face interactions abruptly stopped due to the pandemic. Customers’ priorities changed as unemployment benefits increased, and childcare and school disruptions made it difficult to pursue employment.

Solution: Despite the crisis, and the unfamiliar territory of learning Skype, Teams and Zoom, we were inspired to implement new ways to offer personalized service in a virtual format. The team went to work, learning new skills, researching “how-to” videos, creating written materials, fliers, and instructional materials to assist customers new to using technology, and in a short time Job Huddle was reborn as “Resource Huddle”. Customers were asking to be matched with not only jobs, but critical resources such as food, diapers, work clothes, and low-cost internet services. The switch from the in-person Job Huddle to a highly personalized video conference format was initially fraught with challenges. So, workers helped customers use Zoom, the microphone, the camera, the chat, and use annotations, while teammates monitored the chat box, answered questions, and provided one-on-one service in break-out rooms that had before only been available in person. Customers are also asked to give a “30 Second Me” and meet with a counselor one on one. In 2020, attendance was low; our customers were not exclusively focused on jobs amidst the struggles of Placer County Health and Human Services – Human Services

balancing children learning from home, reduced work hours and work loss, homelessness, illness, and feelings of isolation and anxiety. So, we shifted the primary focus from jobs to more immediate concerns: providing resources and information, linkage to community organizations, and job leads.

Innovation: The new “Resource Huddle” evolved to provide the best of what Job Huddle offered, networking and one on one coaching, yet was reimagined to respond to the pandemic’s circumstances. Instead of highlighting jobs as the only focus, staff listened carefully to customers’ broader needs and spotlighted tangible resources for the family, providing a place to share experiences and access services to stabilize the family, and ultimately help them resume their job search. In Resource Huddle, customers learn of parenting classes, legal services, education and immigration resources—as well as practice interviewing, resume preparation, and understanding how their unique skills can be an asset in the current job market. Resource Huddle includes an informational presentation, the “30 Second Me,” followed by break-out sessions with Employment Counselors and Job Developers to address personal, professional, and family goals, as well as help applying for jobs.

Results: In 2020 Job Huddle hosted three people. In 2021, following the reimagined virtual option, Resource Huddle hosted 38 customers, with attendance increasing each month. The Resource Huddle’s virtual format allows customers to attend without having to leave their homes—and is personalized with resources and job leads, updated in real time. Customers are now finding work in local markets, delivery, and manufacturing.

Replicability – Resource Huddle requires video conferencing technology and a passion to offer creative alternatives to in-person service. Customers can log in from smart phones or call in if they do not have access to a computer. Staff were excited when tasked with creating new ways of offering this service, collaborating across all of our offices in Tahoe, Auburn and Rocklin at a time when morale was low and customer engagement difficult during 2020. We are happy to share what works with this innovative practice.

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Additional Materials: [Job Huddle Resource Presentation](#), [Job Huddle Flyer](#) and [Resource Huddle Participation Graph & Zoom Meeting with Staff](#)