

# **Mobilizing Resident Networks in Public Housing**

**Implementing the  
Community Support for Work Component  
of Jobs-Plus**

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## Overview

Is it possible for an employment program to engage public housing residents in services and activities by tapping the social networks that exist in their developments? The Jobs-Plus Community Revitalization Initiative for Public Housing (“Jobs-Plus” for short), a multifaceted effort to use rent incentives, job counseling, and other inducements to help increase residents’ employment and earnings, attempted this approach. One of the program’s most distinctive features, a unique component called “community support for work,” focused on the recruitment of outreach workers from among the residents of seven public housing developments. The aim was to harness the knowledge and relationships of resident leaders to advance the employment goals of Jobs-Plus. Jobs-Plus administrators identified and trained resident outreach workers to serve as bridges between their neighbors and professional program staff. Mobilizing residents in this way extended Jobs-Plus’s reach in the community by facilitating neighbor-to-neighbor exchanges about program services, rent policies, and job opportunities.

### Key Findings

- **Outreach workers added to Jobs-Plus’s credibility among the larger tenant population.** By giving the program a familiar “face,” outreach workers helped make Jobs-Plus more accessible to fellow residents and boosted turnout for program services and activities. At ethnically diverse developments, outreach workers from different language groups brought wary immigrants into Jobs-Plus.
- **Recruitment of outreach workers had to be selective and ongoing.** Jobs-Plus aimed to enlist widely respected and well-connected residents who were employed, participating in job-related training or studies, or retired, and who were eager to help the community. Recruiting such people was not easy, and maintaining an effective team of outreach workers required sustained efforts, as many workers moved out of their developments or went to work.
- **Formal program oversight of the community support for work component was essential.** Outreach workers were extensions of the program, not an independent resident association. To keep them energetically focused on Jobs-Plus’s employment goals, the sites found it important to pay the outreach workers a stipend for their efforts; assign staff to supervise them; and equip them with task-specific training about program services, outreach skills, and team building.
- **Maintaining outreach workers’ independence from the housing authority was challenging but critical to their effectiveness.** Because outreach workers were employed by Jobs-Plus, some residents suspected them of being agents of the housing authority. Their positions required careful training in confidentiality issues and their assignment to perform tasks that would not compromise their standing in the community. Serious public-safety issues at some sites also hindered them from going freely door-to-door.
- **The Jobs-Plus community support for work component offered residents new possibilities for civic leadership development.** In Los Angeles, the outreach workers demonstrated that a community support for work component could further the development of residents’ leadership potential. The skills derived from their Jobs-Plus experience enabled outreach workers to take the lead in bringing an array of services on-site and to sustain high turnout- and completion-levels for education and training courses.

A subsequent report will determine whether the package of Jobs-Plus services, financial incentives, and community supports succeeded in improving public housing residents’ employment, earnings, and quality-of-life outcomes.



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The Author





## Introduction

Over the past decade, a variety of initiatives have been exploring ways to bring about enduring communitywide changes in their efforts to help urban neighborhoods address pervasive poverty and unemployment. Instead of simply providing these communities with additional services, one of the hallmarks of these initiatives is the effort to build the capacities of local institutions and social networks among residents to promote and sustain positive economic and social changes. “These initiatives,” one observer notes, “were different from past efforts in rejecting the notion that discrete ‘programs’ were the answer to urban poverty, in favor of a longer-term approach that builds community institutions, social networks, and residents’ self-reliance.”<sup>1</sup>

This report examines the social capital–building dimensions of one of these community initiatives: the Jobs-Plus Community Revitalization Initiative for Public Housing Families (“Jobs-Plus” for short). Jobs-Plus is a nationwide demonstration that has been attempting since 1998 to transform “low-work, high-welfare” public housing developments into mixed-income communities by significantly raising the employment and earnings of the current residents. In addition to offering the residents employment-related services and generous rent policies that help “make work pay,” Jobs-Plus also includes a component that proposes to build extensive “community support for work” through residents’ social networks and local institutions. This report discusses the efforts of the Jobs-Plus demonstration sites (see the accompanying box) to design and implement this component of the program. It is one of a series of special-topic reports issued as part of the ongoing evaluation of the Jobs-Plus demonstration.<sup>2</sup>

The Jobs-Plus demonstration offers a valuable opportunity to systematically explore and assess the feasibility and added value of using a social capital–enhancing component in a community employment initiative. Little research has been done on these matters in studies of neighborhood-based programs and comprehensive community initiatives, from which Jobs-Plus derived aspects of its community-building approach to promoting employment.<sup>3</sup> This report attempts to fill some of these knowledge gaps.

As background for this analysis, it is important to understand that Jobs-Plus is a voluntary program that seeks to substantially raise the employment and earnings of public housing residents by offering them the following novel combination of program components:

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<sup>1</sup>Walsh, 1997, p. viii.

<sup>2</sup>The complete list of Jobs-Plus publications is included at the back of this report.

<sup>3</sup>For an overview of comprehensive community initiatives and their assessments, see Kubisch et al. (2002).

- **Employment-related services and activities** to help residents secure and retain employment, including job search instruction, education programs, vocational training, and support services such as childcare and transportation assistance.
- **Financial incentives to work**, consisting of changes in public housing rent rules that help “to make work pay” by reducing the extent to which higher earnings from work are offset by increases in rent. These incentives assure residents that program participation and higher earnings from employment will not automatically raise their rents.
- **Community support for work**, which seeks to strengthen social ties and activities among residents to support their job preparation and work efforts, for instance, by fostering neighbor-to-neighbor exchanges of information about concrete job opportunities or various employment services available to them through Jobs-Plus.

Jobs-Plus utilizes a bold *saturation strategy* that targets its services and activities to *all* working-age residents of a housing development — from the most motivated and most likely to succeed to the hardest to serve. Jobs-Plus seeks to *inform* all working-age residents in the development about its employment services and activities — drawing also through community support for work on residents’ networks to spread the message — and then to *accommodate* all residents who come forward for these services and activities, instead of requiring them to compete for a limited number of slots. Jobs-Plus thereby endeavors to enhance residents’ take-up of its services and activities and to infuse the entire housing development with its “employment message.”<sup>4</sup>

### **The Jobs-Plus Public Housing Developments**

- Gilmor Homes in Baltimore, Maryland
- Harriet Tubman Homes in Chattanooga, Tennessee
- DeSoto Bass Courts in Dayton, Ohio
- Imperial Courts and William Mead Homes, both in Los Angeles, California
- Mt. Airy Homes in St. Paul, Minnesota
- Rainier Vista Garden Community in Seattle, Washington

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<sup>4</sup>For further information about the background of the Jobs-Plus demonstration and the features of the Jobs-Plus program model, see the Appendix of this report and Chapters 1 and 2 of Riccio (1999).

This report draws on numerous intensive interviews and observations of program activities that were conducted by on-site field researchers and the author over a period of three years, from summer 2000 through summer 2003. Those who were interviewed, sometimes repeatedly, include residents, staff members of the Jobs-Plus programs and the housing management offices, MDRC employees and consultants who provided technical assistance to the programs, and representatives of partner agencies that assisted Jobs-Plus participants.

Many of this report's illustrative examples are drawn from the community coaches program in Los Angeles, which is presented as a kind of "best-case scenario" of what the community support for work component can achieve in a public housing context. Of all the Jobs-Plus sites, Los Angeles has had the most success in recruiting, training, sustaining, and effectively deploying a sizable and diverse body of resident outreach workers on behalf of Jobs-Plus. The community coaches have made substantial contributions to enhancing residents' participation in Jobs-Plus's employment activities at Imperial Courts and William Mead Homes. Moreover, they have become active partners with the Jobs-Plus staff in service creation and have acquired the skills and experience to assume substantial resident leadership responsibilities in their communities. Consequently, the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA) is currently making an effort to replicate the community coaches program at its other housing developments.

## **Designing the Community Support for Work Component**

### **Social Capital**

The inspiration for Jobs-Plus's community support for work component — as well as community-building elements of other community initiatives — can be traced primarily to the literature on social capital as it relates to economic development and employment in low-income communities. Theorists tend to use the term "social capital" rather loosely and expansively, but they are generally referring to pervasive group norms and social networks, infused with trust and reciprocity, which help a group or community to work together to solve problems and to advance the material well-being of its members. In the words of the popular aphorism, "What matters in getting by and ahead is not *what* you know, but *who* you know." Furthermore, theorists also make the assumption that these social networks can be identified with a "place" in linking together members who reside within a geographical area, such as a low-income neighborhood.

Some social capital theorists point to the existence and importance to survival in poor communities of "bonding" social capital that residents leverage to get by on a daily basis. This typically takes the form of a network of family members and neighbors who provide a short-

term safety net of emergency assistance in times of need.<sup>5</sup> “[S]ocial groups among [the poor] serve vitally important protection, risk management and solidarity functions.”<sup>6</sup> However, theorists distinguish this “bonding” social capital among the poor from the more diffuse and extensive “bridging” social capital that the nonpoor utilize to get ahead.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, a defining feature of being poor is said to be social and geographical marginalization from the hiring networks of employers and other broad-based educational and labor market institutions that the nonpoor use to access better-paying jobs with benefits and to advance their careers.<sup>8</sup> “It is the more extensive and leveraged networks of the nonpoor, by contrast, that are used for strategic advantage and the advancement of material interests. Crudely put, the networks of the poor play defense, while those of the nonpoor play offense.”<sup>9</sup> Finally, social capital takes concrete form in a community’s associations and institutions, which play a critical role in bringing residents together and transmitting social values.<sup>10</sup> However, there is often a relative dearth in poor communities of institutions that promote and sustain gainful employment, particularly in contrast to the often-sizable presence of social service agencies in these communities to assist the indigent with their subsistence needs.<sup>11</sup>

Typically, however, in assisting low-income people with employment, welfare-to-work and training programs have not made any concerted efforts to capitalize on existing social capital or to address its deficits in poor communities. The community support for work component represented Jobs-Plus’s attempt to do so, and it constituted one of the initiative’s most innovative features. The designers of Jobs-Plus assumed that “low-work, high-welfare” public housing communities are likely to share the characteristics of poor communities that are highlighted in the social capital literature. The designers therefore developed a comprehensive employment intervention: In addition to employment services and financial incentives for making work pay, the initiative called for efforts to strengthen the capacity and expand the role of residents’ social networks and local institutions in supporting gainful employment in these communities.

On the one hand, community support for work would attempt to strengthen and infuse existing social networks and community norms among residents (bonding social capital) with the message of employment and information about job opportunities and services. On the other hand, the component would also try to link residents to social networks and resources outside their communities (bridging social capital) that are critical for accessing better-paying jobs. Fi-

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<sup>5</sup>Edin and Lein, 1997; Briggs, 1998.

<sup>6</sup>Woolcock and Narayan, 2000, p. 16.

<sup>7</sup>Knoke, 1993; Gittel and Vidal, 1998.

<sup>8</sup>Fernandez and Harris, 1992; Wilson, 1996.

<sup>9</sup>Woolcock and Narayan, 2000, p. 16.

<sup>10</sup>Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993, 2000.

<sup>11</sup>McKnight, 1995.

nally, the component would work on modifying the priorities and procedures of community institutions to make them more supportive of residents' work efforts.

### **Giving Focus and Form to Community Support for Work**

The Jobs-Plus designers — inspired by the growing interest in and literature on social capital — saw potential value in including a component whereby employment-related information, encouragement, and support would flow at least partly through the social networks among public housing residents. However, they could not provide a blueprint for how to make this happen. Consequently, the experiences of the Jobs-Plus sites in developing and administering the community support for work component underscore the challenges of giving form and substance on the ground to a compelling body of theory and social constructs that provides no obvious guidelines for practitioners. Each of the sites experienced considerable confusion and difficulty in its pioneering efforts to implement this component. And the operational forms that community support for work ultimately assumed were far more narrowly configured and less ambitious in their goals and scale than the early rhetoric about this component seemed to envision.

The designers of Jobs-Plus believed that the community support for work component could be readily built on networks that already existed among the residents. Indeed, the early field research and the findings of the baseline survey of targeted residents that was conducted as the Jobs-Plus demonstration got under way did point to the existence of bonding social capital among residents, as in other poor communities chronicled by the social capital literature. Residents looked to relatives and friends living in the development or nearby in the neighborhood for help in a pinch, and they routinely lent each other money, looked after each other's children, fixed one another's cars, and gave each other food, car rides, and job leads.<sup>12</sup> Typical was the case of Maria, a Salvadoran resident who had been living with her three children at Imperial Courts in Los Angeles for over a decade.<sup>13</sup> Her meager earnings from a food service job and public assistance benefits did not generate enough income each month to support her family. Like many residents in the development and surrounding neighborhood, Maria relied on reciprocal support networks consisting of boyfriends, relatives, and neighbors to help her get by week after week. For instance, Maria's boyfriend gave her some money toward the purchase of a used car to replace the one that was totaled in an accident. She and her neighbors lent each other money — from \$20 to \$50 at a time — and exchanged goods. One neighbor frequently watched Maria's little boy, free of charge, and she picked up an extra gallon of milk or a loaf of bread for Maria's family when she went to the market. Maria did the same for her neighbors

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<sup>12</sup>See *Jobs-Plus Baseline Survey Data Resources Book, Vol. II, Cross-Site Information* (1999).

<sup>13</sup>All the names of the residents mentioned in this report are fictional, and some nonessential details about them have been altered to protect their identities.

and firmly believed in the idea of sharing when you had something to give. At one point during the research interview, a neighbor came by with some food that she had cooked, and, at another point, Maria's aunt called to ask for Maria's help in paying an immigration-related fee.

Residents also appeared to regularly share information about job openings, but they usually could only offer information about low-wage, dead-end jobs. As in other poor communities, networks among the residents in the Jobs-Plus developments typically lacked the bridging social capital needed to help them access better-paying jobs and other resources for advancement outside their housing communities. And while immigrant networks provided foreign-born residents with help in finding jobs and housing, these networks typically channeled members into the same low-paying occupations. Like immigrant hiring networks in general, the ones in the Jobs-Plus developments also tended to withhold their information and opportunities from residents who were from other ethnic groups.<sup>14</sup> For instance, some residents from various African regions who settled in the Jobs-Plus development in Seattle claimed that the hiring networks among the immigrants from Eritrea had a lock on the janitorial jobs in the city's downtown medical center.<sup>15</sup>

However, a key assumption that the Jobs-Plus designers drew from the social capital literature on which community support for work hinged turned out to be unfounded. This assumption was that, in addition to their other relationships, the public housing residents were connected to one another through place-based social networks that encompassed a sizable percentage of households in each development and that loosely coincided with the geographical boundaries of the development. The reality proved far more complex. On the one hand, support networks were often limited to households in specific sections of the development or to residents of the same ethnic group, in the case of the multiethnic developments in Los Angeles, St. Paul, and Seattle. On the other hand, residents also relied heavily on support networks that extended well beyond the geographical boundaries of the development. Indeed, foreign-born residents usually turned to relatives and members of their ethnic community who lived in other parts of the city or county. Finally, there were no civic organizations in the vicinity of the developments that drew a preponderance of the residents, with which Jobs-Plus could hope to partner in developing this component of the program. For instance, the African-American residents who

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<sup>14</sup>Waldinger, 1997; Sassen, 1995; Verma, 2002.

<sup>15</sup>Immigrants who lived at the Jobs-Plus sites in Los Angeles, St. Paul, and Seattle also faced the pressure from traditional norms to send financial support to relatives overseas, siphoning hard-won earnings away from their families and communities in the United States. For instance, a Somali resident at Mt. Airy Homes in St. Paul noted how hard it is to save and move forward in the United States in the face of such demands: "I would like to save money. But most of the time I need to send money to my parents, to my uncles. My father has five brothers and one sister." However, with relatives eking out a precarious existence in refugee camps in the face of civil war, famine, and unemployment, he exclaimed: "You can't just sit here and eat when a part of your family is somewhere starving. . . . So whatever is left, I just send it."

regularly attended church services were usually affiliated with different congregations that were scattered around the city.

In an effort to expand existing social networks to include a broader range of households, many of the activities that the sites initially undertook under the auspices of community support for work therefore focused heavily on *community-building*. But these activities were only peripherally related to Jobs-Plus's employment goals. Instead, they encouraged residents to come out and interact with one another, including, for example, community celebrations for Mother's Day, Cinco de Mayo, and the Vietnamese New Year as well as a quilting group in St. Paul, a community gardening group in Baltimore, and an aerobics class in Los Angeles. Jobs-Plus in Seattle also organized the Community Shares program, whereby residents offered services to the community — such as child care, home repairs, and transportation assistance — in exchange for credits that could be exchanged for a computer or a modest rent reduction. A Jobs-Plus staff member noted, however, that members primarily earned credits by attending community meetings instead of by offering services to neighbors.<sup>16</sup> An operations site representative in Baltimore observed:<sup>17</sup>

[The component] was undefined. We had no idea what it was. . . . We had a Kwanzaa celebration to bring people in. . . . We did different things like Senior Days, Youth Days. We had job fairs. We had garden programs. And then we had these different types of leadership training and leadership groups.

Further adding to this confusion over the component's form and purpose was the expectation that the residents — rather than, for instance, the Jobs-Plus project director and staff — would assume the responsibility for developing and administering community support for work, after some training. Indeed, the designers of the Jobs-Plus initiative envisioned this component as becoming a vehicle through which the residents would exercise their initiative and creativity in the Jobs-Plus demonstration. However, the residents at most of the sites lacked the leadership and organization needed to meet this challenge. Moreover, efforts that were made at some sites to assign the component to the management of the resident advisory council, and to train and mobilize the residents, became sidetracked in residents' pursuit of concerns unrelated to em-

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<sup>16</sup>The Community Shares program in Seattle provided a vehicle for engaging elderly and disabled residents in Jobs-Plus, but it wound down as residents moved away under the HOPE VI demolition and rebuilding process.

<sup>17</sup>MDRC was responsible for providing technical assistance to the Jobs-Plus sites as well as for conducting the demonstration research. An MDRC employee or local consultant was assigned to each Jobs-Plus site to be its "operations site representative," who was responsible for providing ongoing guidance and coaching to the program staff and collaborative.

ployment, such as longstanding grievances against the housing authority over housing conditions, rents, and regulations.<sup>18</sup>

By early 1999, the experiences of the Jobs-Plus sites with community support for work demonstrated the need for both a major change in course and a stronger direction and focus from the demonstration's designers. MDRC's technical assistance over the following years — including a conference in Dayton, Ohio, in summer 1999, dedicated to the topic of community support for work — helped to ultimately shape a working consensus among the Jobs-Plus sites about what the component's form and purpose should be. First, the principal purpose of community support for work was reinforced as helping Jobs-Plus to *promote employment* among the residents. Second, Jobs-Plus project directors and staff, rather than the residents, were charged with the primary responsibility for developing and administering this component. Finally, community support for work activities were more narrowly configured around the following institutional forms: (1) systematic efforts by Jobs-Plus and its collaboratives to get local agencies to modify their policies and practices to better support the work efforts of the residents and (2) outreach conducted by residents whom Jobs-Plus recruited, trained, and supervised to publicize its employment activities in the housing developments.

Operationalized in this way, the scope of community support for work was scaled back considerably — in what a senior MDRC official described as a “fallback effort” — to accommodate conditions in the developments and the limited time frame of the demonstration for getting the components online. In short, community support for work became an arm of the program to extend its reach into the developments and engage participants. Its outreach effort would *utilize* the networks of individual outreach workers to circulate program and employment information instead of more ambitiously creating or expanding networks among the residents overall to promote and sustain employment. And the component would try to link residents to external job-related networks and resources through the employment information and services provided by the Jobs-Plus program.

### **Changing Local Institutions to Support Work**

One form that community support for work has taken across the demonstration sites involves efforts by Jobs-Plus to promote changes in the policies and operations of local institutions, to help residents maintain their employment and take up employment-related services. Welfare agencies across the sites have been trying to make their services more accessible to residents who receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and who work on

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<sup>18</sup>A resident advisory council is an organization of public housing residents who are officially recognized by the housing authority for the purpose of improving the quality of life at the developments and participating in the overall mission of public housing. The residents hold formal elections to select resident council officers.



weekdays — for instance, by offering some services before and after the 9-to-5 workday and on Saturdays. Even so, the residents at the Jobs-Plus sites continued to cite barriers to employment and job retention that required institutional attention, including the lack of early morning or evening public transportation and the need for after-school programs to keep the children and youth occupied and safe until their parents came home from work. A resident in Seattle said: “There’s a lot of other things that concern residents, about their kids, who’s going to be there to pick them up. A lot of issues.”

The Jobs-Plus collaboratives made a point of engaging as partners key agencies like the local public transit authority or the public school district, whose cooperation Jobs-Plus needed to secure institutional changes in support of work. The collaboratives were particularly successful in improving working residents’ access to public transportation — for instance, by obtaining a shuttle bus for William Mead Homes in Los Angeles, to connect the local subway station and bus stop, and by securing additional routes and extended evening hours for buses serving the Jobs-Plus developments in Chattanooga and Dayton. Collaborative partners also helped Jobs-Plus to bring after-school programs on-site, including supervised activities for older children and youth, whom local gangs were otherwise eager to recruit. A member of Dayton’s collaborative who runs an agency that places residents into temporary jobs observed:

Transportation and child care are two of the biggest barriers once we get [the residents] employed. Especially for the second and third shift. . . . I have companies along bus lines. The Regional Transit Authority here in town is wonderful to work with. We’ve had a lot of success over the years getting routes extended, routes changed. One of my oldest clients, one that we’ve worked with for 18 years. . . the workers had to walk to get there, a mile and a half to the bus stop. The route was extended so that they could get the route to the company. . . . We showed [the transit authority] we had the number of people to make that change. It took a few months to do it. But if this is going to help people to get to work, this should help reduce welfare. . . . If you make that walk several days a week and it’s 30 degrees and you’re up to your knees in snow, that makes a big difference.

Several housing authorities also modified their standard operations to support working residents and Jobs-Plus work activities. For instance, the housing authorities of St. Paul and Seattle extended the hours of their community centers at the Jobs-Plus developments beyond 5 P.M. so that working residents could attend evening classes and activities. And the majority of the housing authorities began to offer working residents the option of scheduling their annual recertification interviews (to renew their leases) during evening and weekend hours.

## Engaging Residents in Program Outreach

Across the demonstration sites, the community support for work component of Jobs-Plus has also taken the form of institutionalized program outreach by residents who are trained, hired, and supervised by Jobs-Plus staff to assist in publicizing employment-related services and activities and job opportunities. Being on-site has given Jobs-Plus the opportunity to turn to the residents for help in recruiting participants and tracking and supporting residents' employment efforts. The resident outreach workers are known variously as court captains (Baltimore), building captains (Dayton), community coaches (Los Angeles), community outreach workers (St. Paul), and resident outreach and orientation specialists (Seattle).

Such a *participatory approach to service delivery* trains members of targeted communities to market and deliver services, recruit service users, and track the status of service recipients for the program. This approach is widely used to deliver public health services in developing countries. In the United States, it has been helpful in building program credibility and service take-up among those who may be difficult to reach with standard information campaigns or who are reluctant to come forward for assistance — for instance, in AIDS education and needle-exchange programs for injection drug users;<sup>19</sup> in drug prevention programs for low-income, at-risk youth;<sup>20</sup> and in public health programs for low-income communities.<sup>21</sup> By engaging members of the target community as *co-service producers*, programs like Jobs-Plus can capitalize on members' social networks, intimate knowledge of the target community, and informal interactions outside the program's offices and work hours; these members of the target community approach and assist other members wherever they happen to be, both physically and psychologically.<sup>22</sup>

## Resident Outreach Workers

Since resident involvement in program outreach is the primary form that community support for work has ultimately taken across the Jobs-Plus sites, the rest of this report looks extensively at what the resident outreach workers do and the kinds of training and supervision they receive at the various sites. This discussion identifies which approaches have been most effective in helping Jobs-Plus engage participants in its services and activities and make progress toward its employment goals.

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<sup>19</sup>Broadhead and Heckathorn, 1994; Henman et al., 1998.

<sup>20</sup>Perry, Komro, Veblen-Mortenson, and Bosna, 2000; McMahon, Browning, and Rose-Colley, 2001.

<sup>21</sup>Bailey, DeWolf, Hasnain-Wynia, and Margolin, 2001; Zukoski and Shortell, 2001.

<sup>22</sup>Venkatesh, 1997; Proscio, 2002.

## **What Do Resident Outreach Workers Do?**

The Jobs-Plus sites vary widely in the extent to which they utilize resident outreach workers and in the capacity of the outreach workers to assist their programs. However, the following description of the role of the community coaches in Los Angeles also generally applies to the activities undertaken by resident outreach workers at the other sites: To work with Jobs-Plus to “connect residents to jobs and economic opportunities, conduct outreach, coordinate community events, and access local resources.”<sup>23</sup>

## **Publicizing Program Activities and Jobs**

A key responsibility of the resident outreach workers is to assist Jobs-Plus in publicizing its employment activities and job opportunities to the other residents. The outreach workers take turns attending meetings of the resident advisory council to alert their neighbors to available services and activities. However, a good deal of their outreach work consists of going door to door with flyers and newsletters from Jobs-Plus about job openings and education, training, and other employment-related services offered by Jobs-Plus and other programs and about communitywide activities in the housing development. The Jobs-Plus staff emphasize to the outreach workers the importance of explaining the contents of the printed materials, since some residents throw flyers away without reading them: “[You’ve] got a lot of people,” said a court captain in Baltimore, “that get flyers in the mail slot and say, ‘Oh, it’s just trash,’ and throw it in the trash.” At their regular meetings, the staff member in charge of the outreach workers usually reviews the contents of materials to be distributed and instructs the outreach workers about what to tell the residents. “[The job is] not just dropping off the flyers,” said a Jobs-Plus staff member at William Mead Homes, “but knocking at the doors and talking to the residents about the program.” Indeed, Jobs-Plus in Los Angeles required the community coaches to maintain a list of residents who did not answer their door, and those people were followed up after each round of visits.

## **Capitalizing on Personal Networks**

The Jobs-Plus programs often assign the resident outreach workers to apartment units located near their own, in order to take advantage of their personal networks and intimate knowledge of their immediate surroundings. A Jobs-Plus staff member in Dayton observed that the residents generally do not stray far from the sections of the development where they reside: “They travel in their own little sections. So if you stay on Stewart, nobody from Bragg is going to tell you anything. They’re sectioned like that, in their own little sector.” In contrast, an opera-

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<sup>23</sup> *Jobs-Plus Community Coaches Program Manual*, Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles, 2003.

tions site representative said that Jobs-Plus in Baltimore relies on court captains who each frequent different social circles within Gilmor Homes:

They all have different social networks. . . . You [have to] have [Daniel] talk to his people; [Miss Mary has to] talk to her people; [Roberta] has to talk to her people. This new woman, this working person, has been very effective at bringing people in about the rent incentives. It all works out. So between the four of them. . . we're covering a good part of the community.

The response of residents to these visits is generally neutral or positive, although some understandably express annoyance at these "intrusions," living in communities that are bombarded by door-to-door salespeople, telemarketers, and junk mailings. A Jobs-Plus staff member in St. Paul observed that while "there are residents who just love to see us," the program conducts door-to-door outreach judiciously, out of consideration for residents who say that they "feel like we're invading their privacy" when the visits occur "all the time." Unlike the other sites, in Los Angeles, the community coaches have benefited from stability in their ranks. A coach at Imperial Courts said that while some residents initially thought that they were salespeople and so would not answer the door, this is no longer the case, as the coaches have become a familiar fixture in the community. Now people say: "Come inside. Want some coffee?" The coach continued: "We just let them know who we are and that we are here to help them. We are ourselves, one-on-one with them. We aren't from some big agency trying to intimidate them." Plans were under way in summer 2003 to provide the coaches with identification badges and business cards to present when making their rounds in the developments or visiting employers and merchants on behalf of the program.

### Targeted Campaigns

The Jobs-Plus programs also call on the resident outreach workers to help with targeted campaigns to publicize particular services or events. For instance, the outreach workers helped Jobs-Plus across the sites to get residents to take up the assistance that the program offered in applying for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) during tax season. In St. Paul and Los Angeles, Jobs-Plus turned to the outreach workers for help in getting the first group of residents who were facing lifetime limits on TANF cash assistance to come to the program to apply for a time-limit extension. For instance, in St. Paul, the community outreach workers went door to door to alert the residents that TANF's lifetime limits were scheduled to take effect in July 2002. Since the flyers they distributed contained the information about eligibility criteria for time-limit extensions, the workers only had to say: "Here's the information. Think about your time limits. Are they coming up? Talk to your counselor at Jobs-Plus. Find out what's going on." Consequently, Jobs-Plus was successful in helping the welfare agency secure extensions for all the targeted welfare recipients in St. Paul and for the majority of them at William Mead Homes in

Los Angeles. The welfare caseworkers who were assigned to Jobs-Plus in both sites emphasized the importance of the outreach workers' help in getting residents to apply for extensions on time. An application has to be filed at least a year ahead of a person's termination date, since the bureaucratic process takes that long or longer to review it. "Remember that it sounds like a lot of time to them," said the welfare caseworker assigned to Jobs-Plus in St. Paul; "They're the type that generally speaking aren't planning. They're living day to day." The welfare caseworker at William Mead Homes said, "I'm constantly calling them: 'C'mon!'"

### The Eyes and Ears of the Program

The resident outreach workers are also supposed to be Jobs-Plus's "eyes and ears" and to relay to the program any concerns that residents raise for the staff to address. These include problems and hardships that may not specifically be "employment issues" — the need for food or medical care, for example, or help with a troubled teen — but can seriously undercut a resident's ability to work or can distress the working poor, who have difficulties supporting a household on low wages without benefits. "The sign that this program is working," said a community coach at Imperial Courts in Los Angeles, "is that the people open up to you." She emphasized that many residents are not aware of support services in the community, whereas the coaches have received trainings about services to which they can refer residents. In 2002, the community coaches at William Mead Homes conducted a formal survey for Jobs-Plus to find out why certain eligible residents had not yet enrolled in the rent incentives program and what other services the residents still needed. Across the Jobs-Plus sites, however, many of the outreach workers' exchanges with residents occur informally around the development or neighborhood — outside their official rounds — on the front porches and lawns and corners and stores where residents "hang out." A community coach at William Mead Homes said that he makes an effort to mingle, to keep up with community events: "If you see a group of people in the community talking, . . . you just happen to be passing by, maybe you should stop in, if they don't mind, and join the conversation." A Jobs-Plus staff member in Baltimore said of the court captains:

They do a lot more than what they're really saying they do. . . . [T]hey do a lot of court communication. Say, for instance, people walking up and down the court and . . . know [that these residents] work for Jobs-Plus, and they will stop them and ask them various questions and let them know that various things are going on within the development itself. As well as the new move-ins, activities that's going on within the community, and in the Jobs-Plus program.

## Inroads into Ethnic Communities

Across the sites, the residents whom Jobs-Plus was called on to assist varied widely in terms of the demographic composition of their households, and they presented a variety of recruitment and employment challenges. Many of the targeted households in St. Paul (as well as in Seattle) were headed by immigrants from Southeast Asia, East Africa, and Latin America. Similarly, William Mead Homes in Los Angeles housed many immigrants from Mexico and Central America. And over the course of the demonstration, an influx of East African refugees has been transforming Mt. Airy Homes in St. Paul from a development whose household heads were predominantly Southeast Asian at the time of the Jobs-Plus baseline survey to one where the percentage of “black” household heads (31 percent) is now fast approaching the percentage of “Asian” household heads (41 percent). At these ethnically diverse sites, Jobs-Plus drew on the social networks, languages, and cultural understandings of foreign-born outreach workers to recruit program participants from the immigrant communities.<sup>24</sup> The programs recruited outreach workers from the major language or cultural groups at the housing developments. For instance, in St. Paul, the community outreach workers included residents who were Egyptian, Hmong, African-American, and Somali; and in Seattle, the resident outreach and orientation specialists have included Caucasian-Americans, African-Americans, and immigrants from various Southeast Asian and East African countries. In Los Angeles, the community coaches are Latinos and African-Americans. A housing authority official in St. Paul emphasized: “We’re not getting more homogenized in our communities. We are becoming more diverse. So having different language speakers is becoming more important in our communities.”

The Jobs-Plus programs use various ways of deploying these residents in outreach to capitalize on their ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. For instance, at William Mead Homes, if a Spanish-speaking coach is assigned to an area that includes monolingual Vietnamese residents, the coach indicates this to the community organizer (who coordinates the coaches) so that a Vietnamese-speaking Jobs-Plus staff member can relay program information to those households.<sup>25</sup> A Spanish-speaking coach will also help relay information to monolingual Spanish-

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<sup>24</sup>In contrast, the household heads of the targeted populations in Baltimore, Chattanooga, and Dayton were almost all African-American. The great majority of these household heads were women, many of whom were also single mothers without another adult on the lease to contribute employment earnings to the household. Imperial Courts in Los Angeles closely approximated these demographic patterns, although the percentage of Hispanic residents there steadily rose over the course of the demonstration. There were also more households with two or more working-age adults on the lease (the second was usually a relative) at Imperial Courts and William Mead Homes in Los Angeles and at Mt. Airy Homes in St. Paul than at the other three sites, although the majority of household heads at these three sites were female. (Source: Housing authority 50058 records for nondisabled household heads between the ages of 18 and 61 living in the Jobs-Plus developments between 1998 and 2000.)

<sup>25</sup>So far, Jobs-Plus at William Mead Homes has had a hard time recruiting an Asian resident to be a coach, even though almost a quarter of the development consists of Southeast Asian and Chinese immigrants. The  
(continued)

speaking households if these are located in an area assigned to a non-Spanish-speaking coach. These outreach workers helped Jobs-Plus to get entrée into immigrant communities, where employment programs were often outside the residents' cultural experience. A job coach in Seattle observed:

When I think back to the first group, they took a big chance coming in. It was outside of their cultural paradigm. They were very unusual people. . . . They thought they were coming to me for help, but they didn't realize that they were helping me out. These were all key people for me, leaders in the community. They started to bring their friends to me. . . . It really helped with recruitment.

In conclusion, by operationalizing community support for work as formal and informal outreach by residents, Jobs-Plus sought to capitalize on existing social networks and to extend its reach into the housing developments by creating a "sensor web" of multiple contact points whereby residents and Jobs-Plus could "find," speak to, and help one another about employment-related matters. This outreach network has ranged from the program offices of Jobs-Plus to the front porches, corners, and stores of the neighborhood where residents "hung out."

### **Staging Community Events**

The resident outreach workers also help Jobs-Plus set up community events and encourage residents to attend them. The activities typically have an employment dimension in addition to serving to bring the community together. For instance, during events such as the Father's Day celebration in Los Angeles, the "Celebrating Mt. Airy's Working Families Day" in St. Paul, a family picnic and basketball tournament in Dayton, and the Job Wellness Day in Baltimore, the activities and presentations included employers who were interested in recruiting residents for job openings, providers who wanted to advertise their training and employment support services, and recognition awards from Jobs-Plus to working residents.

The resident outreach workers in Los Angeles and St. Paul have been assuming increasing responsibility for staging such events. For instance, in June 2002, Jobs-Plus in St. Paul sponsored a well-attended Health and Wellness Day. More than a dozen vendors were involved, including the county's public health department, a local hospital (with an international health clinic), the YWCA, and a national food store chain — each of which offered the residents jobs as well as information about services for staying healthy, preparing for employment, and accessing employer-based health insurance benefits. The outreach workers lobbied the resident

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ones who have been approached expressed discomfort with the notion of going door to door to talk with residents and possibly being rebuffed by them.

advisory council to secure funding for the event and went door to door distributing personal invitations and first-aid kits as an incentive to attend. In June 2003, the community coaches at Imperial Courts sponsored a Parents Day celebration in response to concerns that teenagers were getting into trouble while their parents were at work during the summer vacation months. The coaches arranged for speakers to talk about “positive parenting,” which centered on advice about ways to talk with teens about drug use, resources for parents whose teens were using drugs, and summer job programs to keep youth out of trouble. The response to the event was enthusiastic, with families filling the newly constructed on-site gymnasium.

### **Sustaining Service Take-Up in Los Angeles**

The community coaches in Los Angeles stand out from the resident outreach workers at the other Jobs-Plus sites in the leading role they are taking in bringing employment-related services to their communities and in sustaining residents’ participation in these activities. In winter 2002, the coaches of William Mead Homes launched a successful on-site General Educational Development (GED) class for Spanish-speaking residents. A GED is considered essential to qualifying for better-paying jobs in Los Angeles. “FedEx, UPS — You need a GED just to lift a box!” exclaimed a Jobs-Plus staff member. After conducting a door-to-door survey in which residents expressed much interest in an on-site GED class, the coaches arranged for an instructor to teach classes two evenings a week in the community center, and they went door to door to recruit residents for the class. Furthermore, they continued to take turns setting up the classroom each evening and providing child care for the parents, and they could be heard on their way to the community center calling out to residents to remind them to come. Typically, GED class attendance at the other Jobs-Plus sites has been sparse and sporadic, regardless of whether the classes are offered on-site in the developments or elsewhere in the city and whether they are held during the day or evening. Residents frequently lose interest when they realize how much work is entailed. But class attendance at William Mead Homes has remained high, averaging around 25 residents each evening, and several residents have taken and passed the GED exam, for which Jobs-Plus pays the exam fee. This positive response is attributed to the community’s appreciation of the class as a resident undertaking and to the encouragement that the community coaches provide.

Similarly, in fall 2003, the coaches of Imperial Courts began an effort to bring English as a Second Language (ESL) classes on-site. Working with the senior case manager, they learned to navigate the labyrinthine bureaucracy of the housing authority to apply for space-use agreements, memoranda of understanding, and a classroom at Imperial Courts. Each coach was assigned the task of researching a potential ESL provider. The coaches worked with the case manager and one another to figure out whom to call in each institution and to create and practice scripts for the phone calls. The coaches eventually settled on Southwest College, which had the simplest guidelines for the minimum-size class as well as hours and supply costs that seemed to



best fit the residents' needs. The coaches went door to door to recruit residents for the classes — which currently have a waiting list — and they organized residents to provide child care during the classes; Jobs-Plus paid the residents for this service. A Latino couple who took the ESL course in spring 2003 and continued their study in the fall spoke enthusiastically about the on-site program: “Before, we didn’t study English because the schools were so far away. When the baby was born, there was nobody to take care of him.” The ESL class opened up better job opportunities for this couple as their English proficiency improved, and it expanded their circle of acquaintances at Imperial Courts, giving them a new lease on life there. They spoke of how frightening it was to move to a strange country and how difficult it has been to make friends. Before taking the ESL class, they hardly knew anyone at the development. The class introduced them to other Latino residents who were classmates, and it made them eager to speak English with their African-American neighbors. Now the husband is training to become a community coach.

## **Who Has Gotten Involved as a Resident Outreach Worker?**

Overall, the eligibility requirements for the position of resident outreach worker are similar across the Jobs-Plus sites. In general, a candidate must be:

- A legal resident of the housing development
- Age 18 or older
- Able to work the minimum hours required each month
- Able to attend trainings and meetings required by Jobs-Plus
- Compliant with lease provisions (for example, current on rent and utilities payments)

Candidates may be disabled or elderly and need not be work eligible. A resident of Rainier Vista in Seattle observed: “There are a lot of people who don’t work, or who don’t have kids, and they want to help the community too.” St. Paul is the only site that does not actively recruit disabled or elderly residents, although Mt. Airy Homes has sizable populations of both and has had difficulty maintaining enough outreach workers. The Jobs-Plus programs across the sites have also tried to achieve gender balance among outreach workers, but women greatly outnumber men. As noted previously, the programs in Los Angeles, St. Paul, and Seattle target residents from the key ethnic and linguistic groups at the housing developments.

## **The Importance of Compensation**

Financial compensation of some kind has been critical to recruiting and retaining resident outreach workers. The Jobs-Plus programs agreed early on that outreach workers should be compensated in recognition of the value of their service and the professionalism it requires. Compensation generally takes the form of a stipend. For instance, in summer 2003, the community coaches in Los Angeles received a monthly stipend of \$125 for an average of 12 hours work per month. In Baltimore, the court captains must complete 10 assigned activities per month to receive a monthly stipend of \$100. In St. Paul, community outreach workers are expected to work a maximum of 20 hours per month to earn a maximum of \$100 every two weeks; they may earn less, however, if there is not enough work to do during that time period. In contrast, the building captains in Dayton receive either \$6 per hour for 10 hours per week or a monthly rent credit of \$5 per hour of work, not to exceed the amount of their total rent. Funding for the stipends generally comes from the housing authority but is distributed in the form of checks from, for instance, Jobs-Plus in Baltimore and Los Angeles and the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation in St. Paul. In Los Angeles, the community coaches are required to keep a monthly time sheet and a log of activities; the case manager monitors these and, on the 28th of each month, submits them to the housing authority on behalf of the coaches.

## **Recruitment Strategies**

Across the Jobs-Plus sites, initial efforts to recruit resident outreach workers primarily took the form of door-to-door distribution of flyers describing the outreach program and urging residents to apply. At Gilmore Homes in Baltimore, a Jobs-Plus staff member reviewed participating residents' files and identified those who had been active in the past; they were targeted for recruitment, including phone calls urging them to apply. The staff in Los Angeles also targeted active program participants as well as other residents who might be interested in and available to join the community coaches' trainings and activities. Currently the coaches themselves identify candidates when openings emerge. "Instead of us appointing people, we want them to identify [candidates]," said a Jobs-Plus staff member at William Mead Homes; "They know the people . . . [and] whether they'll be serious. And they're [the ones who are] going to have to work with [the candidates]."

## **Characteristics of Resident Outreach Workers**

The characteristics of residents who have been selected to be outreach workers have varied from site to site over the course of the Jobs-Plus demonstration. In general, however, they are residents who either are working part time (not always in the formal economy) or are in training or school. In St. Paul and Los Angeles, some outreach workers are homemakers from two-adult households, while others are disabled or retired residents who want to contribute to

their community. In Los Angeles, St. Paul, and Seattle, the outreach workers represent the primary ethnic and linguistic groups at the housing developments, with the exception of Asians at William Mead Homes, from whose ranks the program has not yet recruited a community coach.

### **The Limited Pool of Applicants and Frequent Turnover**

The Jobs-Plus sites have varied greatly in the extent to which they have been able to recruit and maintain a sizable, stable, and reliable core group of residents as outreach workers. First of all, most sites were faced with a limited pool of eligible residents from which to recruit outreach workers. Furthermore, some sites, like Baltimore and Dayton, were initially able to recruit a sizable number of outreach workers but subsequently experienced frequent turnover in their ranks, requiring Jobs-Plus to find replacements to fill vacancies.

#### **Many Working Residents Are Too Busy**

The very success of Jobs-Plus in helping residents to secure employment undercut its efforts to recruit and maintain a stable corps of outreach workers. As more residents went to work full time, they had less time to commit to outreach work, even though working residents are the ideal candidates to promote employment in the community. An operations site representative in Baltimore observed: “[Working residents] didn’t really have time, because they were probably stressed out from commuting and working. . . . [T]he last thing they wanted to do was go to a meeting.”

#### **Substance Abuse Is a Barrier**

Widespread substance abuse among residents at some Jobs-Plus sites also limited the pool of potential candidates and contributed to turnover among outreach workers. Since Jobs-Plus wanted the community to regard the resident staff and outreach workers as role models, the program preferred not to enlist residents who were abusing drugs or alcohol. An operations site representative in Baltimore emphasized how difficult it was to find eligible candidates for program positions that had been allocated to residents. For instance, in recruiting for four or five resident aide openings, Jobs-Plus in Baltimore had 25 applicants but only eight who were able to pass the drug test: “So, right off, we knocked out a whole bunch of people.” Moreover, in that program, several court captains who were not currently abusing drugs or alcohol had suffered extensive damage to their short-term memory during past years of substance abuse. As a result, the staff had to simplify even the limited information that the court captains were asked to communicate while going door to door: “A lot of people want all the court captains to be walking around well-versed . . . but it’s not going to work out. . . . Again, we’re not trying for rocket science here.” In Dayton, where Jobs-Plus initially recruited more than a dozen building captains,

the numbers soon fell through turnover, including the loss of recovering addicts who lapsed into drug use and had to be removed from their positions.

### **Recruiting the Elderly and Disabled for Outreach Work**

One way for the Jobs-Plus sites to broaden the pool of potential outreach workers was to include elderly and disabled residents. In Los Angeles, the seniors who joined the community coaches were respected, longstanding members of the site's two housing developments. For instance, two senior coaches at William Mead Homes raised their families there and have been active in the resident council for many years. One of them also worked in food service at the local elementary school for 20 years and therefore knew several generations of residents. St. Paul was the only site that did not recruit disabled and elderly residents, even though its outreach worker program experienced frequent turnover.<sup>26</sup> In Dayton, however, the program had difficulty overcoming the anxieties that many disabled and elderly residents had about working and inadvertently earning an amount that would jeopardize their disability benefits or retirement pensions. A Jobs-Plus staff member observed:

This is the hardest thing I have ever done . . . getting seniors [to consider becoming building captains]. There's a stipulation that says in the job-shadowing rules that if you make over \$499 or \$599, you have to report this income, and [the seniors] go ballistic. "I have to report this income?" And I say, "No, you don't. Just don't work beyond this point." So [the coordinator of the building captains] and I have to go to their homes and sit down and talk with them, because they are so secretive [about their finances].

### **High Move-Out Rates in Baltimore and Dayton**

The experiences of the Jobs-Plus sites indicate that a measure of stability in a housing development's general population is important for the continuity and effectiveness of its resident outreach program. The less turnover there is, the more cohesive, experienced, and effective the resident outreach workers can become.<sup>27</sup> The community coaches program at Imperial Courts and William Mead Homes benefited a great deal from the stability of the resident populations, which primarily reflected the relatively high cost of private housing for low-income families in the Los Angeles area. Unlike the other Jobs-Plus sites, Los Angeles has largely retained its first cohort of community coaches, most of whom have lived in their developments for years, even decades.

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<sup>26</sup>It is important to note, however, that Jobs-Plus in St. Paul did enroll elderly and disabled residents in the program and offered them an array of employment and support services; it also encouraged disabled residents to find part-time work.

<sup>27</sup>Onyx and Bullen, 2000.

Furthermore, the efforts of the community coaches in Los Angeles to publicize activities and mobilize residents draw on the informal communications and support networks that have developed among the residents over the years. Indeed, the longer residents live in a community, the stronger the connections among them are likely to be, even before a program intervention. For instance, the coaches at William Mead Homes described their development as “peaceful and supportive.” “We help each other out,” said a coach, pointing to the way elderly and sick neighbors could count on others to help them with their yards, gardens, housecleaning, and errands. She mentioned an elderly Vietnamese neighbor who frightens easily, whose Latino and African-American neighbors check on her regularly to make her feel safer.

In contrast, the Jobs-Plus developments in Baltimore, Chattanooga, and Dayton had unexpectedly high levels of resident turnover. Housing authority administrative records show that of all nondisabled residents who were living in these developments and who were between ages 21 and 61 in October 1998, only 49 percent were still living at Gilmore Homes (Baltimore) three years later; only 46 percent were still at Harriet Tubman Homes (Chattanooga); and only 42 percent remained at DeSoto Bass Courts (Dayton). Residents of these three sites had ready access to “soft” rental housing markets and to Section 8 vouchers from local housing authorities. High resident turnover at these sites undercut Jobs-Plus’s efforts to cultivate and maintain a sizable, well-connected cohort of informed and engaged program participants to help with outreach and community development.<sup>28</sup>

### **How Are Resident Outreach Workers Trained and Supervised?**

The experiences of the demonstration sites also illustrate the need for program staff leadership in administering the community support for work component of Jobs-Plus. In regard to the outreach workers, the programs must dedicate staff and resources to maintaining residents’ commitment, developing their skills, deploying them effectively, and keeping their activities focused on employment.

The recruits at each of the Jobs-Plus sites go through a formal application and interview process and receive an orientation about the program. In Los Angeles, for instance, Jobs-Plus put together a community coaches manual that describes the mission of the program and the eligibility requirements and responsibilities of the coaches. Currently, recruits in Los Angeles are assigned to a veteran coach and are given on-the-job training for a trial period, to see whether they “fit” for the role. The experiences of the outreach workers over the years have

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<sup>28</sup>Verma (2003) provides a detailed study of mobility trends among public housing residents at Jobs-Plus’s treatment and comparison developments and discusses the implications of such mobility for undertaking a community initiative and place-based research when a sizable number of residents who are tracked by the research have not received a substantial dose of the treatment.

helped the Jobs-Plus sites to identify the kinds of skills and training that residents actually need to carry out their responsibilities.

### The Need for Task-Specific Training

The initial experiences of Jobs-Plus in Los Angeles in training the community coaches highlight the learning curve that all the sites have had to traverse in understanding what kind of preparation the residents needed in order to carry out their responsibilities, which centered primarily on program outreach. In Los Angeles, the community coaches program was implemented with the ambitious hope that the coaches would eventually become leaders who would promote economic and social improvements in their community. Consequently, the six-week training course that the first cohort of coaches received from the Career Development Technologies Center (CD Tech) of Los Angeles heavily focused on an agenda of resident empowerment and community mobilization around economic development. The CD Tech training sessions sought to increase the coaches' awareness of labor market conditions and employment barriers that historically have impeded the advancement of low-income, inner-city communities; the training also introduced the coaches to the possibility of mobilizing their community to campaign to bring well-paying jobs into their area. Similarly, in Baltimore, the two-week training that the court captains received included sessions at The Enterprise Foundation and Center on Budget and Policy Priorities about the local economy and labor market and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) — training that often went beyond the “limited formal educational backgrounds” of the court captains.

It soon became clear across the sites that the resident outreach workers needed information of a far more rudimentary kind to prepare them adequately for their responsibilities. In multiethnic Los Angeles, for instance, the community coaches asked for help with communications and cultural sensitivity, since so much of their work was “one-on-one” with residents of different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. They wanted to know how to present information in a pithy and engaging manner; how to approach people of various cultural backgrounds; how to handle encounters with hostile residents when going door to door; and what to do if they were unable to assist a resident to his or her satisfaction. A Jobs-Plus staff member at William Mead Homes emphasized that outreach workers have to be “outgoing, not afraid, comfortable with all kinds of people. . . . The coaches can't be too easily intimidated or hurt by people's reactions.” Households tend to get a lot of irritating door-to-door solicitations, and some residents “can be mean, can get upset” when the coaches knock on their doors.

Furthermore, since residents regard the outreach workers as the “face of Jobs-Plus,” the workers need to be well informed about the program and up to date about its services and activities; they need to be prepared to answer rudimentary technical questions and to refer residents to Jobs-Plus for help with problems. A community coach at Imperial Courts emphasized that the

residents bring all kinds of family problems to them, and so they need to know how to listen and to encourage residents to go to the program for assistance. A Jobs-Plus staff member at Imperial Courts observed: “[The residents] seem to ask a lot of questions of the coaches — not just what’s happening at Jobs-Plus, but also about programs at the gym, the child care center, and the Head Start Center.” Finally, in Los Angeles, the coaches are also expected to work cooperatively as a cohesive team in carrying out their activities. “We’re nine different personalities!” emphasized a coach at Imperial Courts.

### The Need for Ongoing Staff Supervision

The experiences of the resident outreach workers underscore the importance of ongoing institutional support and formal staff supervision for developing their skills and guiding and sustaining their work. At each Jobs-Plus site, at least one program staff member has been assigned the task of supervising and training the outreach workers. In Dayton, the lead case manager supervises the building captains, running their meetings and setting their agenda of activities, while the outreach specialist manages their daily activities, distributing their packets of flyers, monitoring their time sheets, and going out periodically to talk with residents to ensure that the captains are keeping them informed. In Baltimore, the court captains have worked variously under the supervision of the job developer and other program staff. In Los Angeles, the community coaches work with the community organizer and the case manager. In St. Paul, a VISTA worker who is employed by the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation coordinates the community outreach workers.

The staff members usually hold regular check-in meetings with the resident outreach workers. During these meetings, the staff relay assignments to the outreach workers and receive input about the community from them. These meetings also provide a practical venue for the staff to conduct ongoing skills development. In St. Paul, one of the VISTA workers assigned to the community outreach workers offered weekly activities to help them become more effective in outreach and community-building. These activities included viewing and discussing a video on immigration and racism in the United States and taking a personality inventory on communications styles: “You need to look inward and understand yourselves in order to understand others.” In Los Angeles, a Jobs-Plus staff member at William Mead Homes said that the twice-monthly meetings with the community coaches offer a periodic opportunity to review “what Jobs-Plus is and what we provide . . . the components and how we are trying to work with the residents.”

### Incremental Leadership Development in Los Angeles

Of all the Jobs-Plus sites, Los Angeles has provided the most concerted and systematic ongoing training of outreach workers. Its community coaches continue to attend formal work-

shops on interpersonal communications, cultural sensitivity, and community organizing, and they receive specialized instruction about various Jobs-Plus components and services, such as the rent incentives program, the federal EITC, and the housing authority's recently launched homeownership program, which the coaches are publicizing. A community coach at Imperial Courts spoke of the value of a workshop they attended on domestic violence and family counseling; it helped the coaches to understand residents who suffer from these problems and to refer them to appropriate services.

Indeed, in Los Angeles, the ultimate goal of the Jobs-Plus staff continues to be preparing the coaches to assume more and more responsibility for initiating and implementing projects and to become leaders of their communities. "We keep thinking of new ways to let them take charge," said a Jobs-Plus staff member at William Mead Homes. For instance, she began by teaching the coaches how to put together the information flyers that they distribute. She emphasized to the coaches the need to limit the amount of information on each page and to use phrases that grab the reader's attention: "Break it down to second- and third-grade [reading] level. . . . A lot of people [here] can't read. They don't like to read." The coaches also learned how to organize and conduct their meetings, putting together the agenda and taking turns facilitating the meetings. "It's their time," said a Jobs-Plus staff member. "They tell us what they want to discuss at a meeting. We [the Jobs-Plus staff] just sit there and take notes these days." Finally, each month, one coach is designated as the "coach of the month" and is responsible that month for contacting the other coaches when Jobs-Plus needs their help — for instance, to put together packets of flyers and to oversee the coaches if the community organizer needs to be away from the office. The community coaches at both housing developments have learned to take more of the lead in planning events or campaigns and organizing and implementing them. After the activities are completed, the coaches take time during their meetings to discuss what worked and what needs to be improved for the next activity, in order to learn from their experiences.

Interestingly, by focusing the community coaches more narrowly on assisting the program with outreach and employment service delivery and ensuring that they could assume these responsibilities effectively, Jobs-Plus in Los Angeles has managed to provide the coaches with structured, supervised, and incremental opportunities to develop and utilize skills that they can subsequently use to assume weightier leadership responsibilities in their communities.

It is important to note, however, that the Jobs-Plus staff at both Los Angeles developments continue to play a more than advisory role in the effort to sustain the interest and commitment of the community coaches; the coaches are still far from a self-sustaining civic group. For instance, the staff help the coaches deal with disagreements among themselves, which often arise when the coaches believe that one of them is slacking off on responsibilities. This is a problem, since each coach receives the same stipend amount each month. The community or-



ganizer at William Mead Homes encourages the coaches to raise such concerns at their regular meetings and helps the coaches to resolve their conflicts.

## **What Have Resident Outreach Workers Contributed?**

The goal of the community support for work component of Jobs-Plus is to help promote residents' participation in employment-related services and activities. While it is not yet clear what effect, if any, the outreach workers have had on employment and earnings at their housing developments, the other residents and Jobs-Plus staff across the sites agree that the outreach workers have helped to increase residents' awareness of — and thereby participation in — the services and activities offered by Jobs-Plus and other local providers. “They do a very good job of outreaching, saturating the community with information,” observed a Jobs-Plus staff member at William Mead Homes. A staff member at DeSoto Bass Courts in Dayton emphasized the contribution of the building captains in getting residents to enroll in the rent incentives program and then to comply with requirements to attend resident advisory council (RAC) meetings:

I had a letter that just went out [through the building captains]. And in the letter it stated that [the resident] had signed an agreement, and in the agreement you agreed to attend six resident council meetings. The phones have been jumping off the hook. . . . [T]hey're calling me and saying, “I work on Saturdays. I can bring the documentation.” And that's okay, as long as it's a valid excuse. So the building captains did that. Their primary purpose is to bring residents into Jobs-Plus and the RAC . . . it's working well.

In Los Angeles, both Jobs-Plus developments experienced a notable rise in participation once the programs received a full and stable complement of staff and the community coaches' outreach efforts were able to proceed under their supervision. At William Mead Homes, this began in summer 2001, and it helped boost the take-up of the rent incentives. “A lot of people didn't want to go into the office, because they were afraid or something,” said a coach at William Mead Homes. “But when you talk to them and explain to them what is going on, it makes them feel better.” Another coach added: “It makes them want to get up and go in. . . . If we don't get out there, people won't know what's going on.” In contrast, a community coach at Imperial Courts noted that participation in the financial incentives program there had not been as high as it could have been, and the coach partly attributed this to the lack of adequate outreach by Jobs-Plus: “A lot of people didn't know.” However, with the long-awaited appointment of a site coordinator for Imperial Courts in mid-2002, the staff received the support they needed to supervise and deploy the coaches more effectively. Indeed, in 2003, the housing authority's Welfare-to-Work program sponsored a six-month computer training program at the University of Southern California's Multi-Media Academy for residents age 21 years or older and another training program at the New Media Academy for youth ages 18 to 21. The commu-

nity coaches at both housing developments helped Jobs-Plus win an award from the housing authority for recruiting the largest number of participants of all the developments for these training programs.

In contrast, a Jobs-Plus staff member, who is also a resident of another public housing development, noted that her neighbors make little use of the housing authority's on-site Community Service Center (CSC), which offers employment assistance and job leads: "If you move in [to the development], you wouldn't even know it's there." She attributed this to the lack of door-to-door outreach by the CSC. She added that if Jobs-Plus were like the CSC and just displayed information about its services and job openings in its resource room, only the residents who regularly visit the office would get this information. Furthermore, many residents need to have the community coaches talk with them personally about printed materials and flyers — to explain the nature of the job opening or training opportunity being offered or who they need to see about eligibility requirements and the application process. A coach at Imperial Courts said: "A lot of people don't even read the flyers. So by me being a community coach, when I take them to my friends, I can tell them: 'Look at this flyer. . . . Tell your guy that they have this opportunity. They're hiring.' A lot of times you miss out on things that you really wish that you could have gotten in on." Another coach at Imperial Courts emphasized the importance of the coaches' being residents, because it lets them gain access: "We do what outside people who don't understand [this community] can't do."

## **What Are the Challenges of Implementing Community Support for Work?**

The experiences of the demonstration sites also highlight various challenges that employment programs like Jobs-Plus are likely to face in efforts to engage residents in program outreach and service delivery in public housing developments and other low-income neighborhoods. Some of these issues are common across the Jobs-Plus sites (such as the limits to having residents, rather than professional staff, assume service delivery roles in their communities), and others are specific to certain sites (such as serious crime and safety issues that undermine outreach efforts in Baltimore and Dayton).

### **Limits to Residents' Fulfilling Service Delivery Roles**

The Jobs-Plus staff and residents across the sites agreed that there are tasks that need to be handled by professional staff, and not by the resident outreach workers, in the effort to guarantee confidentiality to those seeking Jobs-Plus's help or to protect the standing of outreach workers in their communities. Although residents generally relied on one another for advice about services to utilize, Jobs-Plus recognized that they would probably hesitate to share information about their employment or personal circumstances with a resident playing an outreach

role. “[T]hey will be reluctant, because they’re scared the information will get out,” observed a court captain in Baltimore; “[P]eople feel uncomfortable speaking to the people they see every-day.”

This was also true in Los Angeles, even though the community coaches were becoming prominent leaders at their housing developments. For instance, when Jobs-Plus at William Mead Homes offered backpacks filled with school supplies to the children as a back-to-school activity, the coaches asked the Jobs-Plus staff to distribute them, since some residents automatically accuse those who are entrusted with distribution responsibilities of favoring their own friends. Nor do all residents at either development in Los Angeles go to the coaches for help with such serious personal problems as drug and alcohol addiction, mental illness, or domestic violence, fearing that the coaches — as fellow residents — might spread gossip about them. A community coach at William Mead Homes said: “They wouldn’t tell us if they were doing drugs or alcohol.” Jobs-Plus has instead sponsored workshops about such sensitive issues and has brought on-site staff from agencies that specialize in addressing these problems, such as the East Los Angeles Women’s Center for battered women. The coaches help such agencies recruit residents by conducting outreach about their services.

### **Autonomy from the Housing Authority**

Contributing to the problems that resident outreach workers have encountered in building trust and credibility among their neighbors has been the belief among some residents that the outreach workers are in collusion with the housing authority. As an extension of Jobs-Plus, the outreach workers initially were met with some of the skepticism that the program itself encountered, in that it is supported by housing authority funds. In public housing developments, the housing authority is the landlord and has the authority to sanction those who commit lease infractions. Residents’ sentiments toward the agency and on-site management staff typically range from appreciation to suspicion, wariness, and outright hostility. Residents are likely to hesitate to discuss their problems and concerns freely with anyone who they believe is associated with the landlord. At Mt. Airy Homes in St. Paul, the situation is further complicated by the fact that the community outreach workers are officially under the auspices of both Jobs-Plus and the housing management office. Some Jobs-Plus staff have expressed concerns about this arrangement, given the residents’ reservations about the housing authority. As one observed: “I have issues with that. I don’t want the residents to think that when the community outreach workers come to them, it’s PHA.”

The community coaches in Los Angeles have taken various steps to maintain an appearance of autonomy from the housing authority and the on-site management office. For in-

stance, they agreed that applicants for coach positions must not be employed by the housing authority in any capacity.<sup>29</sup> A Jobs-Plus staff member at Imperial Courts noted that the coaches developed this requirement to ensure that the group remains at liberty to support community efforts that could potentially pit them against the housing authority. Moreover, even though the funds for the coaches' stipends come from the housing authority, it is Jobs-Plus that issues the checks. A Jobs-Plus staff member observed that using checks instead of rent credits to pay the coaches also requires less coordination with the housing management office: "If we had a problem, you know, this would be just too much. To try and figure out why and what happened and who got what for which month. No. It's easier for us to just request a check from housing. It takes about three weeks before they get it, which is long, but it's still better."

### **Political Conflict with the Resident Advisory Council**

Efforts to cultivate new community institutions are likely to come into conflict with existing institutions, which may perceive newcomers like the Jobs-Plus resident outreach workers as a threat to their power and prerogatives. In Los Angeles, for instance, the resident advisory councils at both housing developments have periodically viewed the growing prominence of the community coaches with suspicion and resentment. Historically, the council and its elected officers have served as the official and sole vehicle for resident leadership and representation in public housing communities. However, a Jobs-Plus staff member at William Mead Homes observed: "The residents are looking at the coaches as their leaders, because they see them more. . . . At every event, they're there helping. Cleaning up. Serving the food. Setting up. They're there. [The residents] can always get them." A coach at Imperial Courts observed that, in contrast, the officers of the resident advisory council are not as visible and accessible. Indeed, he said that the community coaches end up playing a "liaison role" with the residents, both for the council and for Jobs-Plus. The coaches at Imperial Courts also include residents who represent a younger generation than the council's officers — in terms of age or length of stay at the development — and they therefore bring a fresh outlook to community affairs.

On several occasions, the resident advisory councils at both developments in Los Angeles have hindered the community coaches' efforts to bring services into their communities. For instance, the coaches at Imperial Courts tried to open a food pantry in the office space next door to Jobs-Plus, but the council members expressed their unhappiness with the coaches for having initiated this project without consulting them first, and then they refused to sign a space-use agreement that agencies must have in order to provide services on-site. At William Mead Homes, the coaches tried to bring on-site a purified-water vending machine, since the nearest

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<sup>29</sup>To avoid the appearance of nepotism, applicants for coach positions must also *not* be related to a Jobs-Plus staff member or a current community coach.

one was miles away and inaccessible to residents without cars. However, in order to contract with a commercial provider, the coaches were required to partner with the resident advisory council, which has official 501(c)3 tax-exempt status to engage in such commercial ventures, whereas the coaches do not. The negotiations with the council were exceedingly complicated and lengthy. Some coaches expressed resentment that they would have to share the profits with the council, since it was they who had initiated the project and done all the legwork; they are considering the idea of applying for tax-exempt status themselves, in order to undertake projects independently of the council.<sup>30</sup>

### **Problems with Negative Peer Pressure and Crime**

The community support for work component of Jobs-Plus seeks to build on and strengthen existing social networks and norms among public housing residents in ways that support and promote work. However, the social capital literature acknowledges that the norms and networks that exist in some low-income communities can sometimes be liabilities for advancement, rather than assets, by perpetuating values and activities that ultimately undercut the community's well-being or that benefit only certain subgroups. "[W]here communities or networks are isolated, parochial, or working at cross-purposes to society's collective interests . . . productive social capital is replaced by . . . 'perverse social capital,' which greatly hinders development."<sup>31</sup> For instance, the same norms that foster social solidarity in poor communities can also heap ridicule on the efforts of some members to study or to work hard.<sup>32</sup> A working mother at Imperial Courts observed: "It is weird here. You know, people are competitive, but in a strange way. It's like they want what you have, like a job or school or a car or whatever, but they want to make you feel real bad for having gotten it, and it's like they want to take it away. . . . It's just pressure, you know. Pressure to be like them, doing nothing or not going anywhere. It's almost like they don't want you to succeed, because then you'll be better than them, and if you go somewhere, they won't be able to relate to you. So it's hard . . . to succeed in that [kind of environment]." An employed young man at Imperial Courts agreed: "People don't want to see you accomplish anything. When I first got [a job], people would say stuff to me, negative stuff like I was better than them. When I am leaving to go to school, people say stuff."

At some Jobs-Plus sites, some of the most cohesive social networks and most binding group norms existed among those residents who were substance abusers or who were involved

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<sup>30</sup>Some resident advisory councils have secured funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (for example, grants under the Tenant Opportunity Program, or TOPS) and from private foundations or contracts from the housing authority to undertake various management activities, such as ground maintenance. In order to administer such funds or contracts, however, the council must approve a Resident Management Corporation (RMC) that is legally incorporated as a nonprofit organization.

<sup>31</sup>Woolcock and Narayan, 2000, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup>Rubio, 1997; Venkatesh, 1997a, 1997b; Verma, 2002.

in such criminal activities as drug dealing, fraud, theft, fencing stolen goods, gambling, and prostitution. Local gangs often controlled the drug trade and other criminal activities in these housing developments, and they were a powerful attraction in drawing youth away from school and gainful employment to pursue the false promises of camaraderie, fast money, and adventure. Indeed, 80 percent of baseline survey respondents at Gilmor Homes in Baltimore and 71 percent at DeSoto Bass Courts in Dayton reported that selling or using drugs in public was a “pretty big” or “very big” problem at these developments.

### Deterrents to Neighbor-to-Neighbor Exchanges

In Baltimore and Dayton, residents who were interested in working and staying out of trouble said that the criminal activity discouraged them from interacting with other residents, for fear that their neighbors might be complicit. A Dayton resident who was on parole said that she resolutely avoided her neighbors at DeSoto Bass Courts in order to keep from getting into further trouble: “I need to stay by myself until I get my business taken care of.” Similarly, a hard-working resident in Baltimore said: “I go to work, stay in the house, just mind my business, no matter what anybody is doing out there. I speak to my neighbors, [but] I don’t get involved with [anybody].” Sentiments like these undercut Jobs-Plus’s efforts at these sites to cultivate resident networks and to circulate information about program services and job openings. The operations site representative in Baltimore observed: “A lot of times you don’t talk to your neighbor, because your neighbor may be a crack addict. So you don’t want to tell your neighbor about the job, because you don’t want to talk to your neighbor. And then, too, you wouldn’t want them working or coming to your job. So a lot of times you don’t want to talk to people.”

### Deterrents to Outreach Activities

The court captains in Baltimore, during their door-to-door rounds, avoided those sections of Gilmor Homes where “things you don’t want to be caught seeing” — such as drug use and dealing, domestic violence, shootings — were reputed to be particularly likely to occur, even during daytime hours. In the face of such illicit activity, residents generally abided by a “Don’t ask, don’t tell” policy, and retaliation for breaking the silence could be deadly. “You are not supposed to be in other people’s business,” observed a field researcher. This was an understandable but unfortunate response, since Jobs-Plus in Baltimore looked to the court captains to connect with troubled, “hard-to-serve” residents who stayed away from the program office and staff. The Jobs-Plus staff in Baltimore acknowledged that anyone conducting outreach and home visits after 4 P.M. would certainly have to be accompanied by security police — an approach that would hardly encourage residents to open their doors and speak honestly about their circumstances and problems.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

This report has examined the experiences of the Jobs-Plus demonstration sites in implementing a social capital-building component — namely, community support for work — as part of an initiative to raise employment levels in public housing communities. It describes how the Jobs-Plus sites took this somewhat vague, wide-ranging concept and operationalized it in program efforts to engage residents as community outreach workers to publicize employment activities and in collaborative efforts to change local institutional policies and practices to better support residents' employment. The report highlights practices that are critical for ensuring that the community outreach workers are productive and contribute to the program's employment goals. This concluding section offers recommendations of measures to take and challenges to anticipate in replicating the resident outreach program as the social capital-building element of Jobs-Plus or other community employment initiatives.

- **Clearly specify from the outset the community outreach worker's role and responsibilities.**

In recruiting and maintaining residents to be community outreach workers, the employment program needs to clearly specify from the outset the purpose of outreach work as *promoting the program's employment goals* and to spell out the role's responsibilities, terms of compensation, and eligibility requirements. Early efforts of the Jobs-Plus sites to entrust to ill-equipped residents the task of defining their roles in community support for work were premature and failed to promote employment in a consistent and concerted manner.

- **Select the right residents for the job.**

The employment program needs to be judicious and strategic in selecting residents for outreach work. In addition to having the time to carry out their duties, the candidates need to have adequate communications skills — or the capacity to develop these — and sufficient knowledge of their community so that residents will likely open the door and listen to what they have to say. Moreover, because the outreach workers represent the program to the residents, they should be respected members of the community who personify the program's employment message — ideally, by being employed or in training or studies, even part time, or by having some work experience, even if retired or disabled. Programs in multiethnic communities should recruit outreach workers who are familiar with the various languages and cultural backgrounds of the residents. All programs should be careful to screen out applicants who might discredit the program — for instance, public housing residents who engage in illicit activities or who do not comply with the provisions of their lease.

- **Ensure that the outreach workers receive compensation.**

Material compensation is critical for recruiting outreach workers and maintaining their commitment to the program, and it acknowledges their importance in advancing the program's employment goals. Most of the Jobs-Plus programs offered their resident outreach workers a stipend for performing a certain number of specified activities each month.

- **Make the program staff ultimately accountable for the performance of the outreach workers.**

Because the outreach workers are extensions of the employment program and are under the staff's supervision, staff time needs to be dedicated to coordinating the workers' training and activities. Certainly, none of the outreach programs at the Jobs-Plus sites has achieved the status of being a civic association directed and sustained solely by the residents. Formal staff support, including regular check-in meetings, is important for communicating assignments to the outreach workers and following up to ensure that they have fulfilled their responsibilities. Staff support is critical for helping the outreach workers address problems that arise with residents or with fellow outreach workers and for monitoring the outreach workers' time sheets and monthly compensation. Ultimately, the ongoing guidance of program staff is essential for keeping the outreach workers and their activities aligned with the program's employment goals.

The outreach workers need task-specific training and program information to carry out their responsibilities, which primarily involve outreach and staging community activities. The workers need the skills to go door to door and listen to and communicate with people of various cultural backgrounds, and they need to maintain the confidentiality of these interactions. They can also learn to help the program make outreach materials, such as flyers, posters, and newsletters. The outreach workers need continuously updated information about program activities and other services to which they can refer residents who ask for help during their rounds. Finally, they may need guidance about how to cooperate with one another as a team in planning and carrying out assigned activities. Staff and outreach workers at several Jobs-Plus sites noted that training is most effective when it is concrete and hands-on — for instance, as in Los Angeles, where new community coaches “learn the ropes” by shadowing seasoned coaches during their rounds. More generic training in community organizing and economic development, which several Jobs-Plus sites initially offered, was deemed informative about local conditions but is not particularly helpful in meeting the actual demands of outreach work.

- **Retain certain program responsibilities with the professional staff.**

Public housing residents may feel more comfortable discussing certain personal information and sensitive service needs (for example, about job losses, domestic abuse, or juvenile offenses in their families) with program staff rather than with resident outreach workers, whom



they encounter daily in the neighborhood. The outreach workers should not be asked to solicit such information for the program. Resident outreach workers may also be accused of nepotism and cronyism if they are entrusted with the distribution of program benefits, such as door prizes and free tickets.

- **Maintain an appropriate distance from the housing authority, and cultivate the support of the resident advisory council.**

It is important for the outreach workers in public housing communities to be seen by the other residents as independent of their landlord, the housing authority, and therefore as unlikely to relay their personal information to the housing management staff. The outreach workers should be directly accountable to, and paid by, the employment program, not the management office, even if the funding for their positions ultimately comes from the housing authority. At the same time, resident outreach workers would be wise to cultivate good relations with the resident advisory council, which is the primary resident leadership body in the housing developments and whose support the outreach workers need, to bring services on-site or to undertake financial ventures. If, however, it becomes necessary to secure independent authority from the resident advisory council for these purposes, the outreach workers should apply for 501(c)3 tax-exempt status.

- **Address crime and safety problems jointly with efforts to deploy outreach workers.**

Some low-income communities that have high unemployment are beset with serious crime and safety problems, including drug trafficking, gang violence, and widespread substance abuse. In such a setting, the employment program's efforts to cultivate social networks and infuse them with an employment message must compete with the powerful lure of drugs on hapless users and the claims of gangs on their members. Furthermore, these problems may discourage residents from going freely about the community to conduct door-to-door outreach. Indeed, efforts to make inroads in the face of such problems may need to be made concurrently with program's efforts to deploy residents in an outreach capacity to promote employment.



Appendix

## **The Jobs-Plus Approach**

Jobs-Plus has been under way in the following public housing developments in six cities (or demonstration “sites”) around the nation:

- Gilmor Homes in Baltimore, Maryland
- Harriet Tubman Homes in Chattanooga, Tennessee
- DeSoto Bass Courts in Dayton, Ohio
- Imperial Courts and William Mead Homes, both in Los Angeles, California
- Mt. Airy Homes in St. Paul, Minnesota
- Rainier Vista Garden Community in Seattle, Washington

In Seattle, however, the housing authority received a federal HOPE VI grant in 1999, and this is being used to tear down and rebuild the Rainier Vista development. Because demolition and reconstruction have entailed the temporary dislocation of residents, Seattle’s program is no longer in the national demonstration. However, because a Jobs-Plus program continues to operate at Rainier Vista (under the name “HOPE-Plus,” as part of the HOPE VI community and supportive services plan), this report includes research on Seattle’s program.<sup>1</sup>

In Chattanooga, the housing authority, MDRC, and the lead demonstration funders mutually agreed in April 2002 to transition Jobs-Plus in Chattanooga into a financial-incentives-only program that would remain in the national demonstration but would no longer offer the other Jobs-Plus components (employment-related services and community support for work).<sup>2</sup>

Each of the Jobs-Plus programs was designed and implemented under the auspices of a local collaborative consisting of the housing authority as the lead agency, the welfare agency, a Workforce Investment Act (WIA) entity, and resident leaders as mandatory partners; other local service providers and employers have been recruited in response to the needs of individual sites.<sup>3</sup>

The Jobs-Plus programs are structured in a similar way across the sites. The staff and activities are located in converted housing units, community centers, or other facilities at the developments. Although staffing varies by site, the programs typically include the following staff positions:

- A *project director* manages the program’s daily operations.

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<sup>1</sup>For an extensive examination of resident participation in HOPE-Plus at Rainier Vista Garden Community, see Liebow et al. (2004).

<sup>2</sup>This agreement was prompted by a number of factors, including the Chattanooga Housing Authority’s decision to bring its housing developments under the management of a private contractor. The demands of implementing this privatization initiative would have limited the attention that the housing authority could give to Jobs-Plus. This transition of Jobs-Plus in Chattanooga to a financial-incentives-only program was completed by the late summer of 2002. For more details, see Bowie in Kato (2003).

<sup>3</sup>For details about the role of collaboratives in the Jobs-Plus demonstration, see Kato and Riccio (2001).

- *Case managers* guide and monitor residents' efforts to prepare for, seek, and retain jobs.
- *Job developers* build program links with employers and locate job openings.
- *Resident outreach workers* tell residents about Jobs-Plus and get them involved in the program.

MDRC is responsible for providing technical assistance to the Jobs-Plus sites. An MDRC employee or consultant was assigned to each site, to be its "operations site representative," who was responsible for providing ongoing guidance and coaching to the Jobs-Plus staff and collaborative. The operations site representatives played a key role in helping the sites design and implement the program components, including community support for work.



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## **EARLIER MDRC PUBLICATIONS ON THE JOBS-PLUS INITIATIVE**

For many low-income families, taking a low-wage job was once a route to deeper poverty, since doing so usually led to loss of welfare payments, Medicaid, and other benefits. More than most poor families, public housing residents knew that work did not pay because, on top of these other losses and new expenses, increases in income would lead, under traditional public housing rules, to higher rents that would consume a substantial part of what they earned.

Policymakers have enacted a series of measures over the past decade designed to make work pay. The Jobs-Plus Community Revitalization Initiative for Public Housing Families goes even further. This ambitious place-based effort builds on those policy innovations by changing traditional public housing rent rules so that tenants' rents do not rise as quickly when their earnings grow. In addition to this financial work incentive, Jobs-Plus offers employment-related assistance, on-site case management, and job-related information sharing through resident networks.

Participating in a Place-Based Employment Initiative  
Lessons from the Jobs-Plus Demonstration in Public Housing  
2003. Linda Kato

Jobs-Plus Site-by-Site  
Key Features of Mature Employment Programs in Seven Public Housing  
Communities 2003. Linda Kato

Staying or Leaving  
Lessons from Jobs-Plus About the Mobility of Public Housing Residents and  
Implications for Place-Based Initiatives  
2003. Nandita Verma

Making Work Pay for Public Housing Residents  
Financial-Incentive Designs at Six Jobs-Plus Demonstration Sites  
2002. Cynthia Miller, James Riccio

The Special Challenges of Offering Employment Programs in Culturally  
Diverse Communities  
The Jobs-Plus Experience in Public Housing Developments  
2002. Linda Kato

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Note: For works not published by MDRC, the publisher's name is shown in parentheses. With a few exceptions, this list includes reports published by MDRC since 1999. A complete publications list is available from MDRC and on its Web site ([www.mdrc.org](http://www.mdrc.org)), from which copies of MDRC's publications can also be downloaded.

The Employment Experiences of Public Housing Residents:  
Findings from the Jobs-Plus Baseline Survey  
2002. John Martinez

Children in Public Housing Developments  
An Examination of the Children at the Beginning of the Jobs-Plus Demonstration  
2002. Pamela Morris, Stephanie Jones

Building New Partnerships for Employment  
Collaboration Among Agencies and Public Housing Residents in the Jobs-Plus  
Demonstration  
2001. Linda Kato, James Riccio

Jobs-Plus Site-by-Site  
An Early Look at Program Implementation  
2000. Edited by Susan Philipson Bloom with Susan Blank

Mobilizing Public Housing Communities for Work  
Origins and Early Accomplishments of the Jobs-Plus Demonstration  
1999. James Riccio

Building a Convincing Test of a Public Housing Employment Program Using  
Non-Experimental Methods  
Planning for the Jobs-Plus Demonstration  
1999. Howard Bloom

## About MDRC

MDRC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan social policy research organization. We are dedicated to learning what works to improve the well-being of low-income people. Through our research and the active communication of our findings, we seek to enhance the effectiveness of social policies and programs. MDRC was founded in 1974 and is located in New York City and Oakland, California.

MDRC's current projects focus on welfare and economic security, education, and employment and community initiatives. Complementing our evaluations of a wide range of welfare reforms are new studies of supports for the working poor and emerging analyses of how programs affect children's development and their families' well-being. In the field of education, we are testing reforms aimed at improving the performance of public schools, especially in urban areas. Finally, our community projects are using innovative approaches to increase employment in low-income neighborhoods.

Our projects are a mix of demonstrations — field tests of promising program models — and evaluations of government and community initiatives, and we employ a wide range of methods to determine a program's effects, including large-scale studies, surveys, case studies, and ethnographies of individuals and families. We share the findings and lessons from our work — including best practices for program operators — with a broad audience within the policy and practitioner community, as well as the general public and the media.

Over the past quarter century, MDRC has worked in almost every state, all of the nation's largest cities, and Canada. We conduct our projects in partnership with state and local governments, the federal government, public school systems, community organizations, and numerous private philanthropies.