



SECURE JOBS for Homeless Families: PHASE ONE & TWO PARTICIPATION & EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

*Sara Chaganti
Erika Krajcovicova
Tatjana Meschede*

In its first two phases, the Secure Jobs Initiative in Massachusetts helped well over 900 homeless parents to enter employment while they worked to stabilize their housing. Designed to demonstrate a service model that integrates housing and employment supports into one service package, Secure Jobs helps families to begin the journey toward self-sufficiency more efficiently and comprehensively. Phase One of Secure Jobs, launched in the spring of 2013 for families in the HomeBASE program in five regions of Massachusetts, saw widespread success: Over two-thirds of participants entered new employment, with wages on average over \$10 an hour.

In Phase Two, in order to connect homeless families to employment as close to the beginning of their homelessness as possible, the state and the Fireman Foundation expanded the model to provide services to families in from additional housing programs. And they opened the program to two additional regions in the state. Secure Jobs is now in its third Phase, and will enroll over 1500 participants in total by the end of June 2016.

This brief explores this change in implementation and the outcomes for families from the first two Phases, coming from different housing programs, in terms of their engagement in the program and employment attainment. We find that completing vocational training significantly improves employment attainment, and that there are no significant differences in participation or employment outcomes between those families living in shelter or motel and those living in their own apartments with a rental subsidy. This latter finding suggests that although living in shelter might seem to present barriers to engagement and employment that do not exist in independent living, the Secure Jobs model may provide the right supports to overcome these barriers.

Key Findings:

- Expanding a model can require significant changes to implementation practice, so planning up front is critical
- Completing a vocational training program increases the likelihood of getting a job
- Parents living in shelter and motel achieve the same employment outcomes as those living in their own apartments with rental supports

Expanding the Reach

In the summer of 2014, the seven Secure Jobs sites began recruiting and enrolling and employing families living in shelters, scattered site units, motels, Emergency Assistance entry (or “Front Door”) and receiving Rental Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT), a state rental support for families facing homelessness. This expansion of the model immediately introduced new challenges in implementation. Secure Jobs sites struggled with recruitment, enrollment and employment. Recruitment from the new housing sources proved to be particularly difficult.

In the first few months of Phase One, Secure Jobs sites worked to establish communication with HomeBASE Stabilization Workers in order to streamline recruitment and referral. In Phase Two, expanding eligibility meant building new channels of communication with a new set of housing workers. Beginning outreach and education to shelter, motel and scattered site workers earlier in the process would have helped to streamline the transition.

Recruitment from these new sources also posed the following issues that were not present in working with families in HomeBASE:

- Participants in shelter and motel often are newcomers to an area, having been referred there from elsewhere in the state. They may be reluctant to find work near their temporary housing site because they hope to return to their region of origin.
- Motels holding state contracts for housing homeless families are often located in the suburbs, away from central business districts and public transportation. It is difficult motel residents to get to Secure Jobs sites or to jobs.
- Shelters and motel residents must adhere to strict rules regarding when they can and cannot leave the building. Finding a job with a schedule that conforms to these rules can be difficult.
- RAFT recipients only have one point of contact with case management staff, when they apply for the support. Because there is no ongoing communication, it is difficult to maintain their interest in Secure Jobs. Furthermore, in order to qualify for RAFT, families must have some source of income, so many are already employed and cannot leave these jobs to attend Secure Jobs programming.

Innovative Practice
 To support recruitment efforts, one site organized information sessions at shelters and motels, and brought Phase One program graduates to these events to speak about their experience in Secure Jobs and what distinguishes it from other programs. The speakers enjoyed the opportunity to share their stories and make a difference in other families' lives, and their testimonials proved to be an effective recruitment tool.

Future data analysis, on employment entry and retention, will offer insight into whether or not certain housing programs are better suited than others for Secure Jobs or similar initiatives.

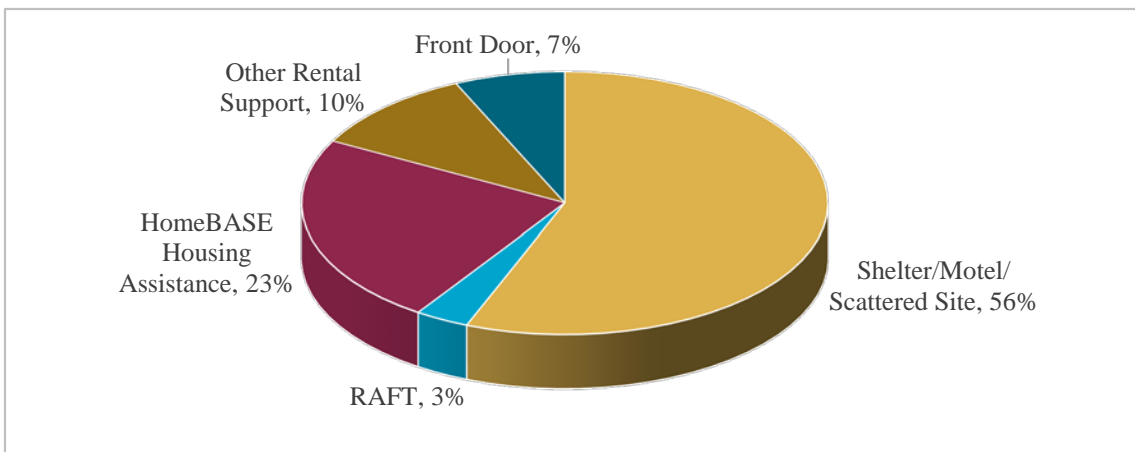
In recruiting the RAFT population, because they are not attached to other service providers we are receiving many referrals who set up appointments but then don't follow through. We are developing strategies with the RAFT team to increase the number of referrals (to cast a wider net since so many don't pan out).

-Secure Jobs Site Coordinator

Participation & Employment Outcomes

In spite of these challenges, Secure Jobs sites enrolled a total of 724 participants in Phase Two, or an average of 103 per site – only slightly fewer than the 118 per site in Phase One. The majority (56%) of Secure Jobs participants in Phase Two came from shelters, motels and scattered sites, although there was some variation between regions. This stands in contrast to Phase One, in which over three-quarters (77%)

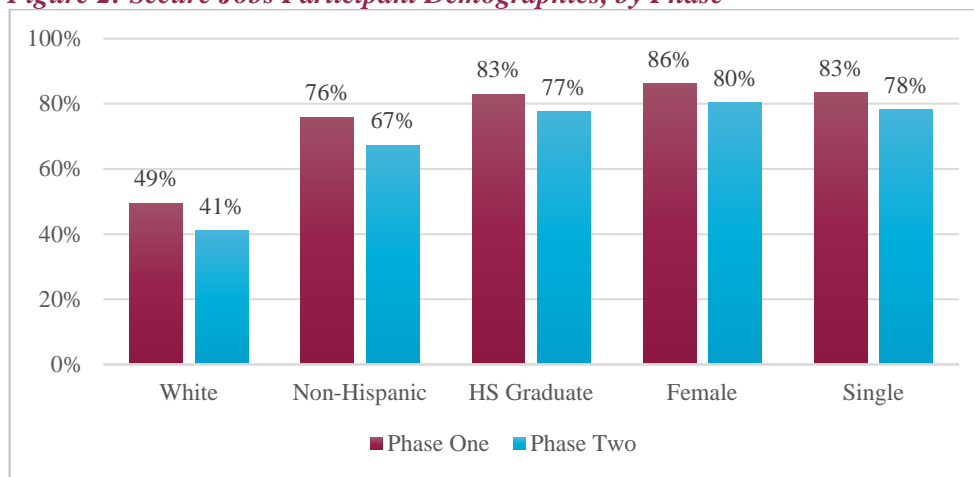
Figure 1: Phase Two Housing Program Referral Sources



were referred from the HomeBASE Rental Assistance program, in which they were living in their own apartments with rental support. And the rate of premature exit from the program remained the same as in Phase One, at only 7%.

Families in the shelter, motel and scattered sites face more challenges to employment than those in HomeBASE due to **ascribed characteristics and level of education**. These families are significantly less likely to be white or to have a high school diploma or equivalent than Phase One families ($p < 0.05$). These characteristics disadvantage job seekers in the labor market^[1; 2]. Phase Two participants are also slightly less likely to be single and female ($p < 0.05$). On all other characteristics, families in Phases One and Two are similar: They are, on average, 32 years old (median 30) and have 2 children (range 0 to 7).ⁱ

Figure 2: Secure Jobs Participant Demographics, by Phase



Secure Jobs participants in shelter and motel showed no difference in employment attainment, wage, hours or benefits from those in independent housing. Overall, two-thirds of participants in Phases One and Two entered new employment through Secure Jobs (Phase One: 68%; Phase Two: 66%; no significant difference.)ⁱⁱ Just over half (53%) of these jobs are full-time (32+hours). Participants are earning about \$11 an hour (median \$10.50) and working about 31.5 hours per week (median 32). Participants’ average hourly wage is slightly higher in Phase Two, climbing from \$10.83 to \$11.28 ($p < 0.05$). Massachusetts’ recovery from the Great Recession may have contributed to this increase.

Key Finding

Homeless adults, even those living in shelters and motels and raising children, can work, with the right supports in place. Therefore, starting employment services further upstream may help families to recover from homelessness faster.

It took participants between three and four months to start working (mean 104 days, median 69.) Participants in Phase Two entered employment significantly faster (Phase Two: 89 days to employment, Phase One: 130 days, $p < 0.01$). This difference may in part be attributed to the higher use of vocational training in Phase One. Following job readiness training, significantly more participants in Phase One entered vocational training (26%) than did Phase Two participants (17%, $p < 0.01$).

Vocational training can delay employment, as participants have to complete their training courses before starting their job search. Indeed, participants who entered training took significantly longer to get jobs (158 days) than did those who did not (94 days, $p < 0.01$). Completing a training course increased the

ⁱ Demographics reflect entire Secure Jobs population, including those who exited the program before completion.

ⁱⁱ Employment-related statistics are for the population that completed the programs. Those who exited prematurely (7.44%, no difference between Phases) are not included in this calculation.

likelihood of getting a first job significantly ($p < 0.01$), so the extra time was worth it.ⁱⁱⁱ But it had no effect on hours worked or wage in the first job attained, compared to those who did not attend this training.

For those who gained employment, about a third receive paid vacation (30%) and paid sick (34%) time, about a quarter receive health insurance (26%), and about one in eight receives a retirement benefit (12%). Unlike the hourly wage, these receipt of benefits did not change between Phases One and Two. The vast majority of these benefits (75-80%) are associated with full-time jobs. These numbers are fairly consistent with national averages.^[3; 4; 5]^{iv}

Well over half of Secure Jobs participants had worked at some point prior to program entry. In their new jobs, they are receiving about \$0.75 to \$1.00 more per hour and about two more hours per week than in their old jobs ($p < 0.05$). The difference in hours is largely due to a more dramatic increase in hours for Phase One participants. Phase Two participants on average saw no increase in hours between prior employment and first Secure Job employment.

Secure Jobs participants had maintained their first jobs for around seven months at the time of data collection (median 213 days), with a few in their first workplace for up to two and a half years. About one in seven employed Secure Jobs participants (14%) moved onto second jobs. Just under half of this group (49%) ended their first employment, and other half (51%) added a second job onto their existing job. With an average wage in their second jobs of \$11.47 (median \$11), Phase Two participants earn about \$1.25 more per hour in their second jobs than in their first ($p < 0.01$). Phase One participants saw no difference in wages. Hours worked in second jobs are about the same for all participants: 49% of these jobs are full-time (mean 32 hours per week, median 30).

Key Finding

Phase Two Participants increase their earnings when they move onto second jobs.

Secure Jobs participants move onto second jobs for many reasons, including to advance in their careers and because a barrier made it impossible to stay in their first jobs. The Secure Jobs model includes twelve months of retention services because entry into a first job does not always guarantee ongoing success or advancement, and participants often need continuing support once employed.

A month after enrolling in Secure Jobs, Corinna got a full-time job with benefits doing administrative work in a nursing home. Although she enjoyed the work, she often was scheduled for evening shifts, and struggled to find after-school child care for her children. After nine months, she decided to leave. Corinna persevered, and met regularly with her Employment Specialist for the next two months. Soon after, she got a short-term contract job with a private bus company, and was hired from here into their Human Resources department as a full-time benefitted employee. Her new job includes a tuition benefit, and she has enrolled in the local community college to pursue a degree in Human Services.

Future research will explore Secure Jobs participants' career pathways and the ongoing barriers that they face, and examine variations in the ability to advance for groups facing different challenges.

ⁱⁱⁱ If those who entered training but did not complete it are included in the sample, then entering training had no effect on the likelihood of gaining employment. Training completion is, therefore, essential to improving employment attainment.

^{iv} Retirement benefit access is considerably lower than the national average, but this may be in part due to the fact that these are new jobs, and access to retirement accounts is often delayed for six to twelve months after initial employment.

Conclusion

In order to reach a larger and more diverse population, Secure Jobs launched Phase Two in 2014 and tapped into housing supports beyond HomeBASE. Expanding the pool of Secure Jobs participants meant including parents who faced more barriers to employment because they tended to have lower levels of education and to be non-White and, therefore, subject to discrimination. Although the seven Secure Jobs sites struggled initially to establish mechanisms for recruiting from these additional housing programs, ultimately Phase Two showed similar successes to Phase One. The rates of employment and job characteristics between the two phases are the same. And Phase Two participants who moved onto second jobs saw a significant increase in their earning. A subset of participants in Phases One and Two attended vocational training in addition to their core Secure Jobs services. While training delays employment, Secure Jobs participants who completed training were more likely to get jobs. The first two Phases of Secure Jobs show that in spite of the many barriers they face, parents living in shelters and motels can work, and in spite of the initial cost of time, completing vocational training pays off with increased employment attainment. Future research will explore retention and advancement in more detail, and elaborate on Secure Jobs sites engagement with vocational training programs. Data from the three full Phases of Secure Jobs will offer a complete view of participants' progress and outcomes.

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Institute on Assets and Social Policy ▪ The Heller School for Social Policy and Management
Brandeis University ▪ 415 South Street, MS035 ▪ Waltham, MA 02454-9110
Phone (781)736-8685 ▪ Fax (781)736-3925

