



SKILLS TRAINING *for* Homeless Families: HUMAN CAPITAL INVESTMENTS IN SUPPORT OF EMPLOYMENT AND HOUSING

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Short-term vocational skills (or hard skills) training courses have been a critical element of the Secure Jobs model since its inception. Having little work history or no post-secondary education can make it very difficult to enter employment. Having skills specific to a trade, along with certification, can help to overcome this barrier and improve employability. Secure Jobs is based on a model of collaborative partnerships that combine to form a service *network* to address the various needs that homeless families¹ face to access employment and housing.¹² Skills training partners are important members of this network.⁷ In its 3.5 year pilot period, almost one in four (23%) Secure Jobs participants enrolled in skills training programs with program partner training providers including community colleges, vocational high schools, non-profit and for-profit training organizations.

This report uses data on Secure Jobs participants who entered skills training to explain how Secure Jobs sites use short-term skills training programs for their participants and key findings related to training. Research on Secure Jobs can inform the growing field of employment and training services for homeless families.

Secure Jobs participants who enroll in short-term skills training programs are comparable to those who do not, and they show moderate employment gains. They are less likely to have a prior work history and are more likely to have a high school diploma or equivalent than those who did not go to training. While skills training has no effect on entering employment, wages earned or hours worked in first employment, those who entered training and then found work are less likely to see this job end within the first year. Secure Jobs participants choose training programs in subjects ranging from health care to manufacturing. About half have chosen training in healthcare-related fields. Participants who enter training in traditionally female-dominated fields, including healthcare, sales and service, are more likely to find employment than those in traditionally male-dominated fields such as construction and manufacturing.

Background

Policymakers and service providers have promoted skills training as a solution to unemployment for almost a century, since the major workforce programs of the New Deal.² Skills training contributes to

Secure Jobs training participants have

- No previous work history
- High school diploma

Training participants who get jobs

- Maintain employment for 12 months or longer

Entering training benefits

- Women, or participants going into traditionally female jobs such as nursing assistant

¹Of the almost 2000 participants enrolled in the three phases of the Secure Jobs pilot, 47% are referred from Massachusetts' HomeBASE program, 37% from shelter programs (congregate housing, motels, scattered site units), 6% from long-term subsidy programs (Section 8, MRVP, public housing), 2% from Massachusetts' Rental Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) and the remaining 8% from other sources including when they enter the system requesting Emergency Assistance (EA).

human capital gains which in turn can be leveraged for greater gains in the labor market.¹ Hard skills are one form of human capital, which also includes traditional education and skills learned in the workplace.

Job seekers have attained hard skills for many decades, through vocational high schools, college courses, apprenticeships, and government-sponsored programs. However, short-term skills training programs have gained popularity as an intervention for hard-to-employ people only in the past two decades. The passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) in 1996 marked a significant change in the national approach to social welfare that had far-reaching consequences including a change in investments in skills training. PRWORA established the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, which emphasizes moving recipients into work quickly and limits the amount of time that families can receive benefits, so they are required to find jobs as soon as possible. In this context, short-term skills training programs are a much more practical solution than longer-term investments in human capital such as associate's or bachelor's degrees. As a result, many skills training programs emerged with the goal of giving participants the skills they need for entry-level jobs, and the assumption that once they have their foot in the door, they can continue up the career ladder.

Today, short-term skills training programs continue to be a popular strategy to move low-income job seekers into jobs. The Workforce Innovation Act (WIA) and subsequent Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) make funds available for short-term training through Individual Training Accounts (ITAs), which job seekers access through One-Stop Career Centers if they meet certain eligibility requirements.⁹ Research suggests that while the availability of short-term training increases job seekers' education and skills attainment, an effect on earnings may take several years to appear, or there might be no effect.⁸ In Massachusetts, there is some evidence that training may increase earnings and decrease benefits use.¹¹ Further research is needed to understand this relationship more clearly.

Secure Jobs and Skills Training

All seven Secure Jobs sites leverage local skills training resources to help improve participants' employability – participants both receiving and not receiving TANF support. During the first three phases of this pilot, just over one in five Secure Jobs participants has enrolled in short-term skills training courses (21%, N=406).ⁱⁱ Over half of those who attend training are from twoⁱⁱⁱ of the seven Secure Jobs sites, and these sites have worked closely with training partners to establish courses of study specifically for Secure Jobs participants. Training participants are less likely to have prior work experience and are more likely to have completed high school than those in Secure Jobs who did not attend training ($p<0.05$).^{iv} In other characteristics, they resemble those Secure Jobs participants who are not enrolled in training.

If someone comes in and they have work experience and education, I'm much less likely to support them through a training [course], because they're ready to go. They're able to get a job. They may just need some flexible funding to get certain things out of the way. We try to use the training for people who that's their barrier, that they don't have the education or a credential, and that's what they need to get employment.

-Secure Jobs Site Coordinator

ⁱⁱ Data quality on training program completion are insufficient to provide an exact estimate, but they suggest a very high rate of completion: it is most likely that between one and five percent of training participants did not complete their courses.

ⁱⁱⁱ Community Teamwork Inc., serving the Merrimack Valley and Father Bill's MainSpring, serving the South Shore.

^{iv} There is no difference in employment attainment between Secure Jobs participants who had prior work experience and those who did not. In other words, attending training does not appear to be offsetting an underlying disadvantage among training participants.

Training partners include community colleges, vocational high schools, local service providers and non-profit organizations. Most Secure Jobs sites use the local Red Cross to provide CNA training and some add-on certificate courses such as phlebotomy. Community colleges prove particularly eager and useful partners because their mission aligns with that of Secure Jobs sites. Some have organized cohort programs exclusively for Secure Jobs participants, and others have adapted their programming to accommodate the specific barriers that homeless families face (for more on this idea, see the first report in this series, *Secure Jobs, Secure Homes, Secure Families: Process Evaluation of the Massachusetts Secure Jobs Pilot* (2013), p. 13.⁷). However, the academic schedule limits when participants can begin training, and this limitation created a barrier for participants.

Because the college knows that we are a shelter, or that our families are located here at shelter, and know that part of the job of a shelter is to move families out, we have asked that if someone had to interrupt their training so that they could deal with the move, and then re-enroll the next session, they told us that we can do that. We haven't had to do that so far, but they told us that we could for these particular folks.

-Secure Jobs Site Coordinator

**INNOVATIVE
APPROACH**

Vocational schools also have proven to be a useful and under-utilized resource. Many vocational schools offer adult education classes in the evening, after the school day is over. One site has forged connections with five area vocational schools, granting their participants access to a wide variety of course offerings, and they have also organized cohort programs exclusively for Secure Jobs participants. These relationships took some time to build (for more on this, see the fifth report in this series, *Systems Change in Service Delivery for Homeless Families: Building and Leveraging Networks to Improve Service Provision* (2015), p. 6.¹²)

All site coordinators state that participants choose their training programs based on their interests, skills and experience, and staff allows participants to guide the decision-making process, similar to practice in One-Stop Career Centers.⁹ Some sites use skills and interest assessment tools to help determine training paths. As a result, participants enroll in training programs in a variety of fields, including health care, administrative, and manufacturing. Secure Jobs staff leverage existing resources to gain access to desired training programs.

Almost two-thirds (64%) of those who have entered training choose courses in healthcare-related industries (see Figure 1).^v Participants who seek certificates in health care vastly favor the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) course (63%) and also choose courses to prepare them for jobs as a Home Health Aide, Dental Assistant and Phlebotomist (see Table 1).^{vi}

Two-thirds of those who enroll in training choose programs in healthcare fields, primarily Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA).

However, the percentage of participants who choose training in healthcare varies widely by site, from 94% at a site that has strong connections with healthcare training providers and employers to only 28% at a site with stronger connections in other areas such as administrative or secretarial training. For those

CNA is a huge one right now because there is a huge demand for that here in our region. A large majority of our people are going through the CNA training and then are walking out immediately placed into a position.

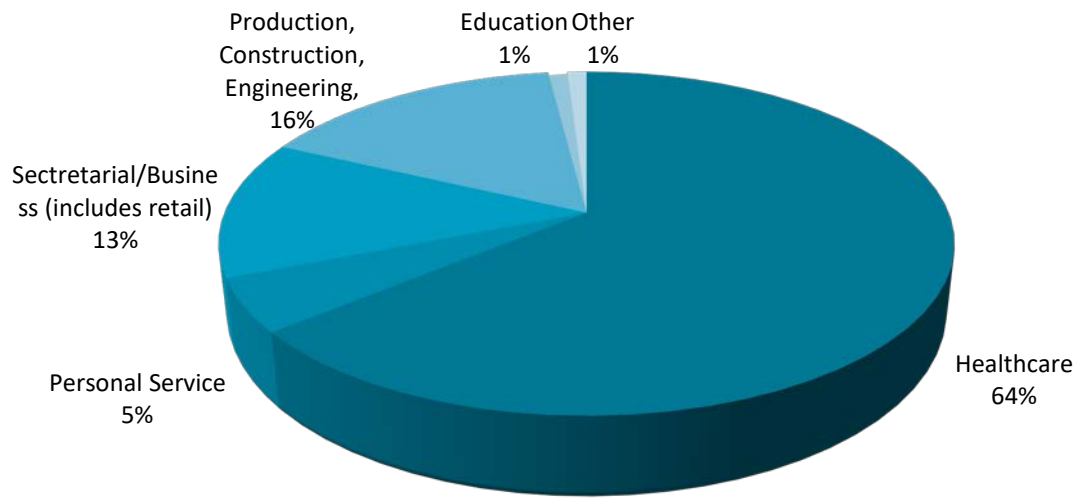
-Secure Jobs Site Coordinator

^v Data on type of training program are missing for one-fifth of training participants.

^{vi} Training program categories and titles reflect National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) 2010 (<http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/cipcode/default.aspx?y=55>).

who have entered healthcare training programs, Secure Jobs funds also cover the cost of state licensing exams, a cost that can be prohibitively high.

Figure 1: Categories of Training Programs Which Secure Jobs Participants Have Attended



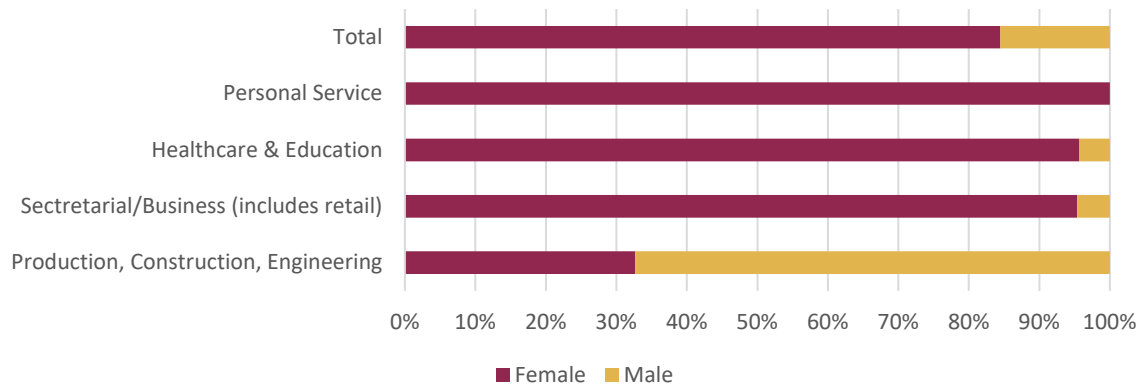
Entry-level healthcare jobs (or healthcare support jobs) are in high demand in Massachusetts and nationwide. In Massachusetts, the median hourly wage for all healthcare support positions is \$14.90 and for CNAs specifically is \$14.00.³ These jobs pay several dollars more per hour than do most entry-level jobs in retail and food service, but several dollars less, on average, than jobs in production, construction and assembly.

Table 1: Healthcare Training Courses which Secure Jobs Participants Have Attended

Training Course	% Attend
Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)	63%
Home Health Aide (HHA)	9%
Medical Office Assistant	6%
Emergency Care (EMT Ambulance)	5%
Dental Assistant	4%
Phlebotomist	3%
Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)	2%
Pharmacy Technician/Assistant	1%
Licensed Practical/Vocational Nurse	1%
Medical Assistant	1%
Registered Nurse	1%
Other Medical	4%
Total	100.00%

Almost all participants (96%) who have entered training programs in healthcare-related fields are female. By contrast, two-thirds of participants (67%) in production, construction and engineering-related training programs are male. This distribution reflects the well-documented trend of occupational gender segregation, which contributes to a persistent wage gap between men and women.^{5:10}

Figure 2: Participants in Training Fields by Gender



While these myriad options have created many new career pathways for participants, Secure Jobs staff report several gaps in the available offerings. Most notably, staff cite a wish for computer skills training. They state that improving participants’ basic computer literacy, Microsoft Office knowledge and expertise in accounting software such as QuickBooks would improve their employability, particularly in office and administrative jobs.

Training Wish list

- Computer skills
- ESOL/Spanish-Language skills training
- Funds for longer-term training

Staff also cite a critical need for more programs in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). In particular, they report long waiting lists for ESOL programs beyond the most basic level. However, the basic level is insufficient for participants to get through a job interview. Alternately, staff state that trainings held in Spanish would satisfy this need, particularly in areas in which English is not necessary to perform the job.

One site has developed a Vocational English Language Training (VELT) program specifically for Secure Jobs participants. This program offers English language training within a customer service training program that had been designed with an employer partner, so that participants learn the specific English vocabulary that they need to work in cashier or retail jobs. This is a particularly effective intervention for families who need to enter the workforce quickly in order to increase their incomes, and do not have time to engage in full-time ESOL classes. (For more on this program, see the first report in this series, *Secure Jobs, Secure Homes, Secure Families: Process Evaluation of the Massachusetts Secure Jobs Pilot* (2013), pp. 26-27.⁷)

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I guess one thing that I haven’t really been able to do money-wise is support someone through – there’s a training [nearby] for folks that are Spanish-speaking because they are learning ESOL at the same time as other trainings, or maybe it’s consecutive, and that’s really expensive, like \$5000, and that’s out of reach right now, for one person to go through a \$5000 training, I really wish we had more bilingual options.

-Secure Jobs Site Coordinator

Finally, staff would like to be able to support participants in longer-term training programs such as Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) and Medical Assistant training. With limited funds and the requirement to place participants in employment as quickly as possible, these programs are not feasible, although having these certifications would qualify participants for jobs with higher wages. Likewise, staff express the wish to support participants through at least one year of college.

We do employment goal plans with everyone. We talk about short-term and long-term goals. If they're going into pharm tech, their goal is to be in healthcare somewhere, and this is the starting point. They want to be able to move up within a hospital setting... But the main barrier is accessing the education they need to go further. CNA is similar: What do you want to do with CNA? I want to start with CNA and hopefully I'll be able save some money... and maybe start working on an associate's degree in one of the healthcare fields, or do an RN, do the prereqs for RN or LPN... Throughout the year we follow up on the job and say "have you done anything about education." And they say "it hasn't been that long, so I haven't done anything, I've just been working and trying to save money." It takes longer than 12 months to see a person gain stability through employment, get on the path of whatever career goals they have, get the education they need for it, or at least to even enroll, because enrolling in a college is a big deal for any of us.

It is worth noting that in the first two Phases of Secure Jobs, the seven sites had access to considerably more flexible funds than in the third year. As leadership and funding changed, Secure Jobs sites have been able to reallocate funds to maintain staffing in Phase Three, but their funds to pay for off-site skills training have diminished significantly. As a result, staff have had to help participants through the extra step of applying for federal Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA) training grants through their local One-Stop Career Centers. Receipt of these grants is not guaranteed, and the Career Centers often distribute all available grants well before the year is over, so some participants are denied training because there are no funds. Staff express frustration at this limit on their capacity to provide immediate assistance for families in crisis.

Secure Jobs participants who enter skills training show high rates of completion because staff work with them before and during training to anticipate and address barriers to attendance. Secure Jobs staff state that before enrolling a participant in training, they work with the participant to establish reliable childcare and transportation, and to help the participant to plan for fact that they will have no income while in training. Disruptions in housing are a key barrier to training completion, and Secure Jobs staff work with housing staff to try to maintain housing stability during the training period. Staff state that communication with participants and training instructors throughout the training program is critical to program completion.

Lack of childcare, transportation and stable housing all hinder participants' ability to complete training programs. Addressing these barriers up front can help to ensure training program success.

Training & Employment

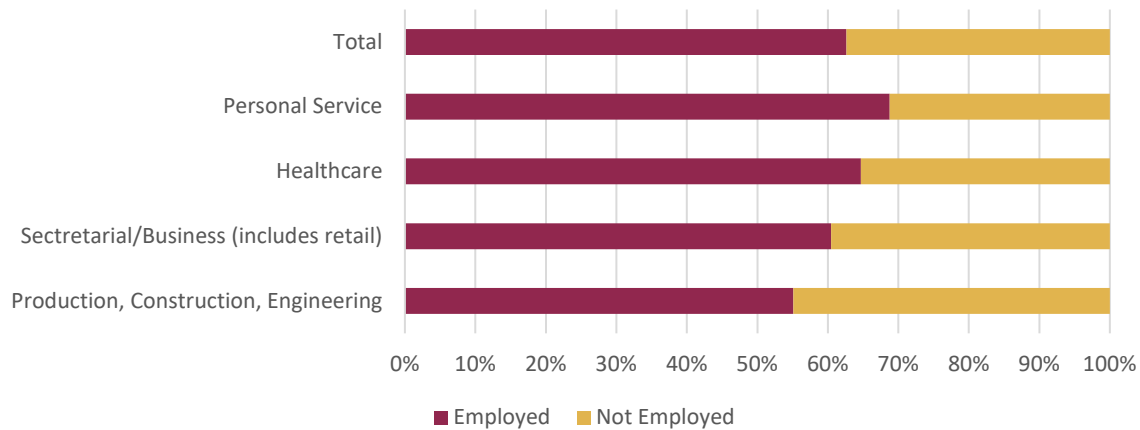
Participation in short-term skills training programs should improve participants' employability. However, statistical analysis shows that those Secure Jobs participants who go to training are no more likely to enter new employment than are those who do not go through training.^{vii} Among those Secure Jobs participants who gained new employment while in the program, those who have gone through training do not earn more or work more hours than those who did. Those who have through training are, however, more likely to retain the first job past the twelve-month Secure Jobs retention period and are more likely to attain a second job. Attending training also extends the time it takes participants to gain first employment by almost two months ($p < 0.01$), most likely due to the time participants spent in training.

Those who attend training programs in traditionally women's fields, such as service, sales and healthcare, are more likely to enter employment than those who go through training in production, construction and

^{vii} It is worth noting that among the Phase 1 and 2 cohorts, participation in training did improve employment outcomes.⁴ Sites reported having more funds for training and retention support in Phases 1 and 2, and these additional resources may have helped to leverage the training programs for better employment outcomes.

engineering. While 65% of those who attended healthcare trainings have found new work, only 55% of those who went through trainings in male-dominated fields have found new work.

Figure 3: Skills Training Participants Attain First Employment, by Training Field



Among those who have entered employment after training, about a third (33%) are in healthcare professions, and another quarter (28%) are in sales or administrative positions including cashier, customer service administrative assistant jobs. Of those who entered healthcare-related trainings and then entered employment, almost half (48%) are working in healthcare fields. Another third work in jobs in food preparation and service (13%), sales (15%) and secretarial or administrative (9%) fields. The vast majority (91%) of those who entered healthcare-related training and then entered a healthcare field are working as Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs) or Home Health Aides (HHAs). It is worth noting that the hourly wage for Secure Jobs participants in these fields is just over \$12, almost a dollar higher than the average wage in all other occupations that Secure Jobs participants have entered.

By contrast, of those who entered training in traditionally male fields including production, construction and engineering, 70% have jobs in those fields. Another 23% work in office administration. The average wage for participants who went through these training programs and then entered employment is \$12.35, which is not significantly higher than the hourly wage that those who attended other types of training earn in their first jobs. While jobs in traditionally male fields have higher earning potential,³ among Secure Jobs participants, those who work in production, construction and engineering do not earn significantly more than their counterparts in healthcare and service jobs.

Internships & Temporary Staffing Agencies: An Alternative to Training

Skills training programs are not the only short-term intermediary to improve employability. Secure Jobs sites also make use of two other important institutions: internships and staffing agencies. For those with little work experience, internships can be a useful pathway into the work world. Interns can gain valuable skills, experience and connections while on the job. Staffing agencies are an increasingly popular way for employers to try out prospective employees while mitigating risk, and for workers with little work history to get some experience. And many entry-level positions, particularly in healthcare industries, can only be accessed through staffing agencies as employers use them with greater frequency to fill these openings instead of hiring staff directly. Both internships and temping come with considerable risk for the worker because the ambiguity of the employment relationship can lead to employers violating worker protection regulations, and the reduced commitment from the employer can make it easier to alter or terminate the employment unexpectedly.^{6;13} However, with proper monitoring in place, they can show promising returns.

Secure Jobs sites have sent a total of 56 participants (3%) into internships before starting to look for a permanent job. Three-quarters (75%) of those who went through internships went on to enter employment in Secure Jobs, suggesting that internships significantly improve the chances of getting a job ($p < 0.1$).^{viii} Participants whose first jobs are through temporary staffing agencies ($N=46$) work about three more hours per week, making them more likely to be full-time workers ($p < 0.05$). While these resources should be used carefully because of the added vulnerability to workers, under the right circumstances, they can provide another pathway to employment, if short-term skills training is not possible.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Short-term skills training has been an important tool to improve Secure Jobs participants' employability, particularly for those participants with little or no work history. Secure Jobs participants tend to enter training along traditionally gendered lines, with women going into healthcare and service trainings while men attend training in production and construction. However, those who attend training in female-dominated fields are more likely to get jobs.

Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) and Home Health Aide (HHA) are by far the most popular trainings among Secure Jobs participants. These trainings lead to jobs in healthcare about half the time. CNA and HHA jobs pay slightly more than the average first Secure Jobs job, but still only around \$12 an hour, which is not enough to support a family. Supporting participants in retention and advancement is, therefore, critical.

The findings from this research suggest the following recommendations for program and policy:

For housing stabilization services

- Use flexible stabilization funds to support short-term training and wraparound employment services
- Work with participants to manage their finances and benefits so that they can delay starting work and go through short-term training

For education and training providers

- Improve year-round training options, particularly at community colleges
- Add intensive computer literacy and Microsoft training to regular Job Readiness Training curricula
- Increase availability of higher-level ESOL classes and bilingual or vocational English skills training classes

For state-level policymakers

- Increase flexible funds in housing stabilization contracts to allow housing service providers to offer employment and training services
- Extend childcare and transportation support for the duration of a training program
- Offer longer-term support for participants to move beyond entry-level positions by accumulating additional certifications and college credits

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^{viii} Statistics related to internships are significant at the 0.10 level, not at the 0.05 level, most likely due to the small sample size. However, internships are predicted to improve employability, so the 0.10 level is appropriate.

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About IASP

The Institute on Assets and Social Policy (IASP), a research institute at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University, is dedicated to the economic well-being and social mobility of individuals and families, particularly to those traditionally left out of the economic mainstream. Working in close partnership with constituencies, state and federal policy makers, grassroots advocates, private philanthropies, and the media, IASP bridges the worlds of academic research, organizational practice, and government policy-making. IASP works to strengthen the leadership of lawmakers, practitioners, researchers and others by linking the intellectual and program components of asset-building policies.

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