

# SECURE JOBS, SECURE HOMES, SECURE FAMILIES

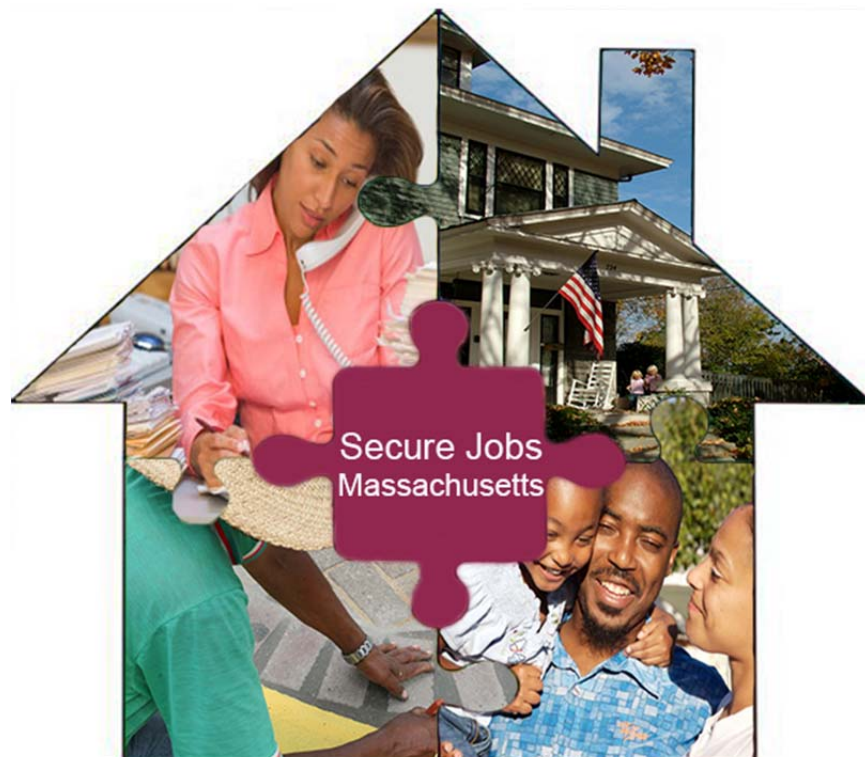
## Summary Report Massachusetts' Secure Jobs Initiative Phase One

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Submitted to the Paul & Phyllis Fireman Foundation

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## About The Institute on Assets and Social Policy

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. For more information, visit [www.iasp.brandeis.edu](http://www.iasp.brandeis.edu) or follow us on twitter @IASP\_Heller.

## Acknowledgments

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Second, we are indebted to Ana and Sue from the Fireman Foundation for sharing so much information regarding the Secure Jobs Initiative.

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Finally, we are grateful to the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) for their partnership in data collection and their commitment to this evaluation project.

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## **Jenny and Secure Jobs**

Jenny is a 28-year old single mother with a four-year-old son named Max. In September 2011, Jenny and Max became homeless after a dispute with Max's father forced her to leave the home that they had shared. Jenny and Max were placed in a motel and from there they were given a HomeBASE-funded apartment. A year later, despite searching, Jenny still had not found work. A criminal record (or CORI) from 2006 and no long-term work history made it extremely difficult for her to get a job. Knowing that her time on HomeBASE was limited, Jenny feared having to go back to a shelter.

Then, in February 2013, Jenny's HomeBASE Stabilization Worker arrived for her monthly visit with news of a new program, Secure Jobs, which could help Jenny find work. The Stabilization Worker told Jenny that she was being referred to the program because she was motivated to work but was struggling to get hired. Jenny was skeptical at first because she had been to the career center and could not see what else this program would have to offer. She went to the intake session anyway, where she met a Secure Jobs Employment Specialist named Mary. Jenny told Mary that she was interested in a career as a nursing aide and that in 2006 she had started a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) training course but had never finished it. Knowing that her CORI would prevent Jenny from working in most health care facilities and that the odd hours required by nursing jobs would make it hard to find child care, Mary told Jenny that nursing might not be the best option.

Jenny was frustrated by Mary's response because she knew that nursing was a field that offered steady jobs with good pay and she had already started the training. She decided not to go back to this program. Over the next three weeks, Mary called Jenny several times inviting her to come back. She also emailed Jenny job postings that she thought might interest Jenny. Finally, Jenny decided to give Mary another chance, returned to the office and sat down with Mary, telling her that she would do whatever it took to get a job right away. Mary and Jenny started to put together Jenny's resume and Mary showed Jenny how to filter online job postings to focus specifically on positions that would interest her. Meanwhile, they applied to Department for Transitional Assistance (DTA) for a childcare voucher. A week later, the voucher was approved and Mary helped Jenny find daycare sites for her son.

Jenny sent out four cover letters and resumes each day for the next two weeks. One was to Move It, a local packing and shipping business that was a Secure Jobs program partner. Mary called the manager of Move It and told him that she thought Jenny would be a great addition to their team, asking him to give Jenny a chance despite concerns he may have about Jenny's CORI. The manager agreed to meet with Jenny for an interview.

Mary coached Jenny for the interview, gave her mock interview questions, and then provided feedback on how Jenny presented herself. She told Jenny to make eye contact, sit up straight, be confident, and come prepared with questions because that showed that she understood what the business was about. Then, Mary took Jenny to Dress for Success, a non-profit organization that assists economically disadvantaged women with business attire, and they selected an outfit for the interview. The following Monday, Mary picked Jenny up and took her to the interview. They arrived early and went through some of the potential interview questions again in the car. When Jenny went in to meet the manager she was nervous but also confident. The first question she was asked was one of the questions Mary had asked her in the mock interview so Jenny was prepared with an answer. When the manager asked her where she saw herself in five years Jenny replied that she wanted to move up in the business and become an expert in the field and that she hoped to go back to school and get an associate's degree while working. The manager was impressed by Jenny's poise, her confidence, and her ambition. Later that day, he offered her the job.

Jenny has now been working for four months at her new job. She learned quickly and enjoyed getting to know her co-workers. Compared to six months ago, Jenny feels much more hopeful and excited about her future.

## Introduction

Low-wages in low-skilled employment and lack of affordable housing are among the major reasons that families enter homelessness, and they provide great obstacles for families to leave their homelessness behind. In turn, siloed approaches to addressing homelessness tend to focus on just one aspect of the many challenges homeless families face and are often insufficient for families to exit from homelessness. Facing diminishing public funds to attend to the rise of family homelessness in Massachusetts, public-private partnerships are needed to fill the gap left behind.

*An innovative model that supports families in every part of their lives*

The Paul and Phyllis Fireman Foundation spearheaded a \$1.5 million demonstration project (leveraging over \$600,000 in additional funds for the pilot year), the Secure Jobs Initiative, which is designed to link homeless families who were participating in Massachusetts' HomeBASE program<sup>1</sup> to the resources and services they needed to enter and sustain employment before their housing subsidies ran out. Since February 2013, this Initiative, in partnership with state agencies and housing and employment providers, has made possible the creation of an innovative service delivery approach in five regions across the state. The goal of Secure Jobs is to bridge the gap between housing and employment services, to offer a holistic set of services that supports families on their path to employment and addresses every barrier they face in moving forward. Setting the ambitious goal of 80% of enrolled participants in employment within a year (much higher than the industry's standard of 60% for most low-income families), the Fireman Foundation set a high bar at the outset of this new initiative.

*Bridging the gap between housing and employment services*

*Removing barriers by developing cross-system and public-private partnerships*

The Secure Jobs model has received widespread support from stakeholders including legislators, homeless advocates, service providers, and participants. Through a combination of state, foundation and private funding, the initiative has expanded in Massachusetts, and inspired the recent launch of Secure Jobs Connecticut. The model has also received national attention and praise.

*[The Western Mass Secure Jobs site is] one of the best examples of integrating the homeless assistance system with the workforce system.*

-Barbara Poppe, former Executive Director of the US Interagency Council on Homelessness

This summary report combines process and outcome data to depict major findings of the Phase One of Secure Jobs. The first section details the innovative approaches that constitute the holistic Secure Jobs package of services. The second section introduces the families and offers a picture of their employment outcomes a year into program participation. The third section highlights participants' assessment of the program. And finally this report offers recommendations for program and policy based on what has been learned in this pilot initiative.

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<sup>1</sup> In its first year, Secure Jobs was open only to Massachusetts families in the HomeBASE program, a state-administered program for families facing homelessness, that offers either two years of rental assistance (no longer available) or a lump sum of up to \$4,000 in household assistance. All families in HomeBASE also receive two years of Housing Stabilization case management, regardless of type of support received.

## Critical Secure Jobs Elements

The Secure Jobs Initiative is a unique program model that offers support to create lasting change in homeless families' lives. This section highlights the model's distinctive elements and offers a more detailed look at those that made the biggest difference in participants' lives.

*Secure Jobs [is] a way of bringing [together] entities that were pretty much siloed. Before, you know, [it was each agency saying] we're the 'housers', we're the shelter-providers, we're the daycare people, and basically saying 'Ok, we're really all together and we're going to try to find a way of ensuring all the pieces that a family needs in order to be successful and stay out of the homeless system are threaded together' ...And the learning is, what's the best practice to ensure that as we move forward? I think that would be the ideal thing that we're looking to come out of Secure Jobs.*

-Staff Member, State Agency Partner

## Initiative Leadership

- **Leadership by the Fireman Foundation:** Strong leadership by the Fireman Foundation has been critical to establishing this Initiative, convening service provider agencies together with local and state government partners in quarterly Learning Labs and monthly phone conference calls, and sharing model elements nationally, including a presentation at the annual meeting of the National Alliance to End Homelessness.
- **Designated State Agency Contacts** to assist with accessing state benefits programs and addressing barriers to employment.
- **Regional Legislative Engagement** to document program success to a wider audience and expand the reach of the Secure Jobs model.

*Active leadership and a flexible program model create service delivery that is supportive and responds quickly to families'*

## At the program level:

- **Recruitment and Referral** by HomeBASE Stabilization Workers of the HomeBASE recipients who are most "ready, willing, and able" to work.
- **Intake and Assessment** by Secure Jobs staff, including testing for skills and career assessment, and development of an *Individual Employment Plan* (IEP) for each participant.
- **Enrollment** in services identified as necessary, including job readiness training, skills training, job search assistance, and, for those who need it, Vocational English Language Training (VELT).

*Sometimes I feel like we've enlightened [the employment staff] about all the other stuff that the clients are bringing with them: The baggage from being in a homeless shelter, like trauma, anxiety depression, what have you.*

-HomeBASE Stabilization Worker

*Secure Jobs is a partnership by design, not just a service or program we've heard about and are referring people to... It's easier to refer people when you know you can follow up in the next meeting... In other programs we feel like we send a referral into the abyss and just hope for the best. [Also, with dedicated employment staff,] I can focus on other important issues with them like housing, because I don't have to focus on the job search.*

-HomeBASE Stabilization Worker



- **Continued Communication across Services** between Employment Specialists, HomeBASE Stabilization Workers and other service providers (e.g., skills training instructors, VELT instructors, etc.) Effective service delivery depends on having a *system in place for communication between housing and employment* service providers, especially during the *recruitment* process.
- **Holistic Support to Enable Consistent Attendance.** Secure Jobs is *voluntary, flexible, and individualized*, but consistent attendance is essential—it is the primary determinant of enrollment and success in the program
- **Job Readiness Training:** Each site created a *curriculum for Job Readiness Training* that best suited its participants.
- **Career counseling** with the Employment Specialist is a key element of Secure Jobs; without it, homeless parents may choose careers without knowing much about them and that might not be good options for them.
- **Job Development** each site is constantly engaged in making connections with regional employers to facilitate introductions with Secure Jobs job applicants.
- **Flexible Funds** to pay small expenses that can act as large barriers, such as, licensing tests, RMV fees, MBTA passes, career wear for interviews, and uniforms for jobs.
- **Trusting Relationships** between Secure Jobs staff and participants, in which staff show participants sympathy and respect, listen to participants’ aspirations for the future, and offer continued, consistent support.
- **Retention Services** up to one year post employment placement.
- **Multi-method Evaluation** by the Institute on Assets and Social Policy at Brandeis University’s Heller School for Social Policy, drawing on individual-level data on all participants in the initiative, as well as qualitative data from multiple sources.

*Data inform program design and practice to maximize the effectiveness of the model.*

*Juliet, a single mom with a four-year-old daughter, had worked at Dunkin’ Donuts for three years before getting laid off. She desperately wanted to work again in an administrative position where she could sit down at her job. With only nine months left on her HomeBASE Rental Assistance, she was worried about how she would keep a stable home for her daughter. She tried using the services available through her local Career Center and TANF to find a new job, but the self-directed model that these resources offer did not give her enough support. These programs did not help her to strategize her job search to find a position that she really wanted. Secure Jobs gave her that individualized attention that she needed. With the help of her Secure Jobs Employment Specialist, Juliet found a job listing for a full-time administrative job at a catering company, applied and got the job, and has been very happily employed ever since. She says that the Secure Jobs staff “stayed on top of me” throughout the process. This intensive support is what she needed to succeed, and what no other program had offered her before.*

## **Transcending Boundaries: Communication between Housing and Employment**

In order to build a successful Initiative, it was critical that each site connect housing and employment services effectively from the start. As each site started with different resources in-house, this process differed across program sites. After some initial challenges with communication between new housing and workforce development partners, all five sites have created and institutionalized these partnerships effectively.

## **Flexible Funds: Big Impacts at a Small Price**

The flexible nature of the Secure Jobs grants allowed all five sites to allocate small amounts of money to meet unexpected costs related to entry into employment that are not covered by any benefits program, but add up to more than a family living on a very limited budget can afford. Because the Secure Jobs grant was not stipulated for specific purposes, staff could fill in these gaps with grant money. Below are some of the most frequently noted uses of flexible funds:

**Table 1: Flexible Funds Uses and Costs**

<b>Expense</b>	<b>\$ Amount</b>
CNA, CMA, LPM, EMT etc. Licensure Exam	\$93-\$300
Scrubs, shoes and watch for health care job	\$50
Steel-toed boots for warehouse job	\$47
Textbooks for Home Health Aide training course	\$117-\$197
RMV fee to reinstate driver's license	\$50-\$95
Gas card to get to work for first 2 weeks	\$40
Driving lessons	\$125-\$160
Massachusetts ID	\$40
Hair styling for interview	\$25
MBTA pass (up to 1 month)	\$18-\$70
TB test to enroll in CNA course	\$25

## Strong Leadership to Achieve Ambitious Goals

The key to an effective partnership model is strong leadership.<sup>3,4</sup> The Fireman Foundation's active leadership has facilitated communication between the five sites and with state agencies; this communication has allowed for sharing of best practices, streamlined service delivery, and state agencies' quick response to issues as they arise. Monthly conference calls with the five sites, evaluation team and state agencies provide a regular opportunity for public-private coordination around some of Secure Jobs' greatest challenges, such as childcare. Monthly reports from the Fireman Foundation not only share up-to-date placement numbers for all five sites, but also participant stories that reflect effective cross-organizational cooperation and streamlining of services.

*Sharing best practices and hearing how others prioritized program structure was beneficial. It was nice to know there was constant support from the Fireman Foundation as well.*

-Secure Jobs Site Coordinator

In addition, Fireman facilitated quarterly learning labs. Led by well-known social entrepreneur Alan Khazei, these events bring together Secure Jobs staff from all five sites with state department partners to share successes, challenges and work together towards solutions to the barriers experienced by Secure Jobs participants. Secure Jobs participants have also attended these meetings, sharing their experience with the program and the success they have achieved through the support of a Secure Jobs site. At the most recent quarterly meeting, attendees looked at the future of Secure Jobs, discussing how to best continue the Initiative's successful, innovative practices. Feedback from the five sites about these activities has been positive, reaffirming in particular that these facilitated opportunities allowed for quick identification of those barriers that have been most prevalent and challenging, leading to focused efforts on public-private coordination around these challenges.

Finally, Secure Jobs has engaged a national audience in its success. The Fireman Foundation's Acting Executive Director Susanne Beaton was invited to present the Secure Jobs model at the National Alliance to End Homelessness' annual meeting. The Western Massachusetts site was invited to the *Partnership for Opening Doors* summit in Washington DC, sponsored by the US Interagency Council on Homelessness, the US Department of Labor, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Butler Family Fund. And representatives from several Secure Jobs sites were invited to present the Initiative to a group of stakeholders in Connecticut convened by the Melville Trust, to inform Connecticut's adoption of the model. In sum, Fireman has formed a public-private partnership that functions efficiently and effectively, and is at the table to inform policy debates on issues related to homelessness.

*The Secure Jobs model is receiving national attention.*



## Employer Partners & Internships

Employer partnerships have been an integral part of Secure Jobs' successes. Employment Specialists leveraged relationships with employer partners not only to find placements for participants, but also to offer mock interview practice and informational interviews for participants getting ready to enter the workforce. And these relationships allow Employment Specialists to have ongoing information about how participants are doing on the job. Sites have partnered with a variety of employers, primarily in the service sectors. The largest group of employer partners is in the health care industry.

*I just encourage other organizations [i.e. employers] to really get involved. I think they would find that they'd be really happy, really happy with the level of applicant that they receive. [Secure Jobs applicants] do come very well prepared. They have a story to tell, they have set goals...and they want to achieve certain goals. I would encourage other [employers] to get involved. I think the hesitation, and this is my opinion, why people tend to hesitate, is they just, they get overwhelmed because they assume, "I'm going to have to do more work [if I choose to work with homeless people]...and it's going to be a headache for me." It's not any of that. It truly isn't.*

-Employer Partner

In addition, four sites arranged for employer partners to provide internships (both paid and unpaid) to 44 Secure Jobs participants. This strategy was particularly useful for participants who had not worked for several years or who wanted to change career paths. Internships gave these participants a foot in the door and the opportunity to learn new skills. Employer partners and program staff agree that these partnerships are tremendously valuable to the Secure Jobs model.

## Legislative Engagement

Several Secure Jobs sites reached out to their state legislators to educate them about the Secure Jobs model and the importance of providing integrated services to support homeless families who are ready to start their journeys toward self-sufficiency. Each Secure Jobs site has an Advisory Committee of program staff and community partners, and several sites include

*Engaging state legislators from the start led to a Secure Jobs line item in the FY14 state budget.*

legislators on their Advisory Committees. In addition, two sites held large events to thank community partners and legislators for their commitment to Secure Jobs. At these events, representatives from every stakeholder group spoke, including participants who told their stories of how the program helped them to turn their lives around. Both these events had extensive media coverage in both newspapers and the television news.

As a result, several state legislators have spearheaded efforts to increase support for homeless families and for the Secure Jobs model specifically. Funding for the first five Secure Jobs sites was written into the current state budget – a remarkable accomplishment for such a new initiative.

## Secure Jobs Families: Demographics and Employment Outcomes

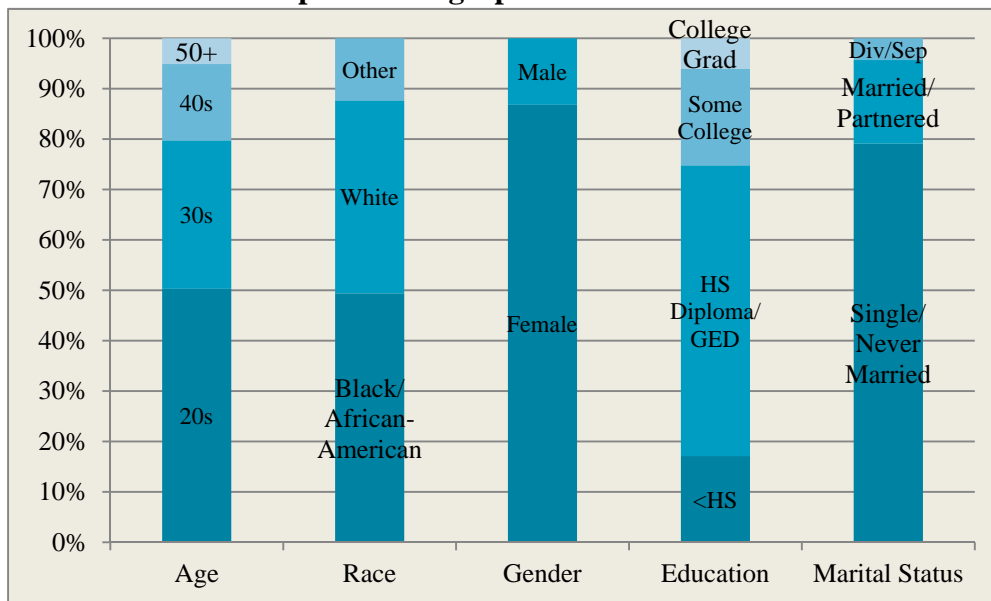
This report presents data on the families enrolled in Phase One of the Secure Jobs Initiative for their first year in the program. The evaluation team received data from the five sites on 588 individuals who were referred and enrolled from HomeBASE (either the Rental Assistance or Household Assistance program). These families receive program support for one year following their first placement into a new job, and the five sites will continue to provide data on their housing and employment situations for this entire period. The following sections offer a picture of who the families are, their employment history before becoming homeless, and their first jobs in the Secure Jobs program. While many participants are expected to take second jobs, advance in their workplaces or move to better jobs, data on subsequent employment are not included in this report. Longer-term outcomes will be presented in a later report at the end of Phase Two.

*The five Secure Jobs sites enrolled  
588 individuals in the first year*

### Who Are the Families?

Families in the first phase of Secure Jobs resembled, for the most part, other local and national homeless families,<sup>1-3</sup> headed by a single mother mostly in her late twenties (see Figure 1). The vast majority (89%) were heads of household and x female (87%). Over a third (35%) were in their late twenties (25-29 years old). Educational attainment was higher than that of the typical homeless family parent: only 17% of the participants did not complete high school.

**Figure 1: Secure Jobs Participant Demographics**



The families in Secure Jobs tended to have one or two children at program entry with. Over four in ten (42%) of them under the age of six needing full-time daycare at their parents' program entry. Close to another 40 percent were between the ages of six and twelve and would need after-school care, and only 19% were over twelve years old and, therefore, old enough to stay home alone. These statistics indicate the need for child care planning right at when families entered Secure Jobs.

## Employment Prior to Secure Jobs

Although less than a third were working at program entry, almost two-thirds (64%) had worked for 30 days or more at some point prior to entering Secure Jobs.<sup>2</sup> On the whole, Secure Jobs participants had a range work experience, and previous employment varied in both tenure and occupation.

*On one end of the spectrum people have very sporadic, spotty work history, maybe without GED or high school diploma, having worked at Dunkin Donuts, Wendy's. Others [who] have bachelor's degrees... fell on hard times and are now trying to find job.*

-HomeBASE Stabilization Worker

Most of the jobs they held before becoming homeless were in low-wage jobs, earning between \$2.15 and \$26 an hour at an average of about \$9.00 an hour. The typical participant worked 30 hours per week. Participants cited several reasons for leaving prior employment. The most frequently-cited reasons were being laid off or the job ending (including temporary jobs) (29%). Barriers to employment, such as insufficient childcare, transportation, or health issues, also caused many participants (20%) to have to leave their jobs. Secure Jobs participants discussed the fact that not one reason alone but a combination of different factors contributed to their having left past employment -- factors that are typical challenges for single mothers in low wage employment that does not provide flexibility or sick leave.

*I had two jobs [before Secure Jobs] and I lost both of the jobs, being stressed out, not having childcare, not having someone to pick up my child. I did lose two full-time jobs that I got on my own, before I even got to Secure Jobs. And not having the resources to say, "Well this is what we can do for your child. This is what we can do for you to help you as a single parent." And you don't have that person you can go to, to say "okay, my child is having school issues, I got to leave work." And you lose the jobs, and then you have to start all over. So you don't have the resources, you don't know what to do! And then you're back at square one, and that's pretty much where I am. And I almost lost it.*

-Secure Jobs Participant

## Employment Outcomes a Year into Secure Jobs

A year into Secure Jobs, many<sup>3</sup> Secure Jobs enrollees have found new employment, significantly more than were working at HomeBASE entry. Data are reported here on the *first* job that participants received while in Secure Jobs. In their first jobs, employed participants made on average \$10.76 per hour (ranging from \$8.00 to \$18.90), and worked 32.7 hours per week on average (median 35 hours per week). The vast majority (85% earned wages above minimum wage (\$8 per hour in Massachusetts) but less than \$14 per hour.

*Participants are working more hours in their new jobs, and one in five newly employed participants has access to paid sick leave, paid vacation and employer-provided health insurance.*

<sup>2</sup> Of these, 22.3% still had these jobs at entry to Secure Jobs

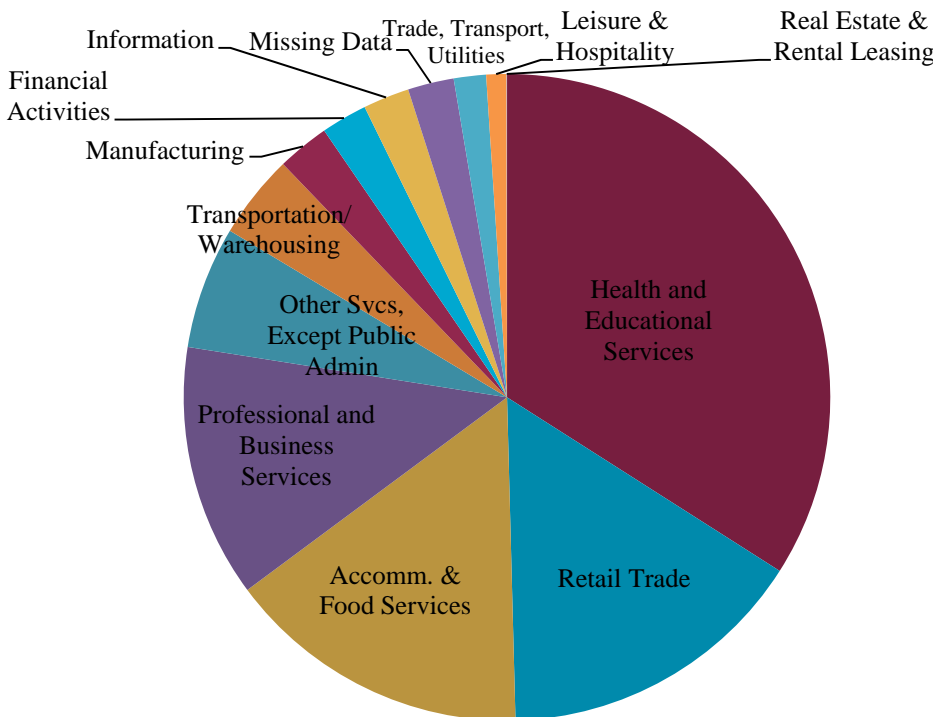
<sup>3</sup> This number represents the percentage of those *still enrolled* in Secure Jobs who have found new employment. Those who exited Secure Jobs prematurely are not included in this percentage.

About 6% made \$14 and up. A fifth of all working Secure Jobs families had access to sick leave and paid vacation in these first jobs. Health insurance access was provided to 22% of Secure Jobs workers, overall, and access to retirement benefits was lowest, at 7%. Paid sick leave and comprehensive health insurance are critical for these parents, many of whom are caring for young children on their own. As stated earlier, these data only reflect individual wages from the first job. As a result, they do not give an accurate picture of household income. Several households have more than one wage-earner, and many participants take on additional work to increase their household incomes.

Access to new jobs and retention in them was high: At the end of Phase 1, 75% of those enrolled six months or more, and for whom we have employment data, were employed and had retained employment for three months or more.<sup>4</sup> Retention bonuses provided by each site at various 3-month intervals may have added to these employment tenures.

Participants' first jobs in Secure Jobs tended to be in service industries, similar to the industries in which they held jobs prior to program entry (see Figure 2). About a third of those employed entered jobs in the health care industry, in firms such as nursing homes, hospitals, nursing services, medical, and dental offices. Another third worked in retail and hospitality industries, including clothing, grocery and housewares stores, as well as restaurants, cafes, and hotels. Most of the rest are in professional services including security, employment, and personal assistance.

**Figure 2: Secure Jobs Participants' New Employers**



<sup>4</sup> Job tenure is impacted by length of time in Secure Jobs: Those who entered the program later will have shorter tenure.

## Housing Status a Year into Secure Jobs

A key goal of Secure Jobs was to help those with limited housing subsidies to maintain housing stability through steady employment. Housing supports via the HomeBASE program rolled out in August 2011. While eligible for one of two options, either short-term Rental Assistance for up to two years or a one-time Household Assistance payment of up to \$4,000, the vast majority of HomeBASE participants (79%) enrolled in the Rental Assistance program. Due to the timing of HomeBASE and Secure Jobs, most Secure Jobs participants on Rental Assistance faced the end of their housing support during the Secure Jobs pilot year. This threat of housing instability caused great stress for participants.

To address this major disruption in Secure Jobs families' lives, in early August 2013, DHCD made an additional form of support available to those who had engaged fully in Secure Jobs and were making progress toward employment. These families had the option to transition to HomeBASE Household Assistance, in which they would receive an additional \$4,000 (to be disbursed in whatever way was most useful) as well as continued HomeBASE Stabilization Services.<sup>5</sup> This stop-gap measure was extremely helpful to many families, as it allowed them either to stay in their apartments for one more year with some subsidy or to pay moving costs to move to a less expensive apartment. Half of all Secure Jobs participants moved from Rental to Household Assistance since the beginning of the fall of 2013.<sup>6</sup>

*My [HomeBASE] ends at the end of April, and so I'm kind of pushed to find something, because the place where I'm living, I can't afford it. My husband and I wouldn't be able to afford it at all... But it's like, I don't have any time for saving money, and I don't have time to go to school... I said "listen, if this doesn't work, I'll go to Dunkin' Donuts [to work]."*

-Secure Jobs Participant

In addition to extending the rental subsidy with the possibility of transitioning to Household Assistance and/or RAFT, staff identified several policy and programmatic supports that could help families transitioning off of HomeBASE Rental Assistance to maintain stable housing for their families and continue without interruption in their work towards family-sustaining employment. These include:

- **Financial literacy** to help families budget for their increased rent payments
- **Work with landlords to negotiate shorter leases.** Some participants reported that their landlords were unwilling to renew their leases when they transitioned to Household Assistance because they were not guaranteed a full year's rent subsidy.
- **Maintain contact with participants.** If families have to move, it can be difficult for program staff to maintain contact, but it is essential that families continue to have staff support in this time of transition. Setting up a plan for regular contact prior to the move can help to ensure that families receive this support.
- **Continue TAFDC, SNAP and other benefits.** These income supports can be crucial to families as their rent increases. Working with DTA to make sure that benefits are not interrupted is critical.

<sup>5</sup> The only two requirements for accessing HB Household Assistance at the end of Rental Assistance were that the family 1) have a household income below 50% AMI and 2) be in good standing with the HomeBASE program (defined as not terminated or in the process of being terminated).

<sup>6</sup> Participant focus groups were conducted before most participants timed out of HomeBASE Rental Assistance, so we were unable to capture participants' assessment of these rental subsidy extensions.

## **Secure Job's Families' Assessment of Secure Jobs**

Overall, Secure Jobs participants valued Secure Jobs highly, citing program staff's consistent attention and support, and their comprehensive help with all barriers, especially childcare and transportation as the most helpful program elements.

### **Staff Support: Consistent and Holistic**

Participants consistently reported the exceptional involvement of Secure Jobs staff that went "above-and-beyond" to help them. The staff's clear commitment helped build trusting staff-client relationships, and modeled the motivation and determination that Secure Jobs staff expected participants to provide in return.

In the face of multiple barriers, the ending of HomeBASE, and a slow-growing job market, Secure Jobs participants were sometimes discouraged. When feeling overwhelmed, some participants would stop attending the Secure Jobs program without letting staff know. When this happened, Secure Jobs staff responded by reaching out and calling the participant and expressing genuine interest in the participants' well-being. This response helped participants to feel more open to returning and helped establish a strong staff-participant bond.

*Every day when you call them [Secure Jobs staff] and you're down and out, all you can hear yourself say is 'I can't. I can't. I can't find a babysitter. I can't get a car. I can't get to a computer.' They said 'Yes, you can do this' and 'Yes, you can do that.*

-Secure Jobs Participant

*I had given up. I was like 'I'm not going back over there.' And [the Secure Jobs coordinator] called me and left a message on my phone. And I'm just like 'Wow.' So I called her back. And I'm sitting there listening to her and she's like, 'Let's forget about the job search. Let's forget about all of that. What's going on with [you]?' And I'm like, 'Wow, she cares.' And she was just listening. It wasn't anything about work, it wasn't about [Secure Jobs], it was about me. And it made me comfortable and made me want to come back.*

-Secure Jobs Participant

*And [you] see how much [the Employment Specialist] cares. A few times I've gone to the DMV and they tried to give me a hard time about getting my license. She [the Employment Specialist] goes... 'I will drive you, I will go by myself, I'll go with you, they have to give it to you... I'll go with you, we're getting it today.*

-Secure Jobs Participant

### **Tackling Barriers: The Secure Jobs Edge**

Staff helped participants overcome barriers which arose in every part of their lives participants that impeded their ability to work. From setting up hair styling services to picking up kids from school in an emergency, staff stepped in wherever they could to keep participants on the path to employment. One particularly stubborn barrier is the Criminal Offender Record (CORI). Employers can run CORI checks and if they find that an applicant has a record, they often choose to reject the applicant before giving the applicant an interview. About 13.5% of Secure



Jobs participants have outstanding CORIs.<sup>7</sup> Staff helped them to identify occupations that would not hold this against them, and to work on sealing the records so that future employers would not see them.

*Secure Jobs supports participants in addressing all their barriers to employment, including child care, transportation, CORI issues and anything else they are dealing with.*

These instances where staff have gone the extra mile to engage and support participants set Secure Jobs apart from many other traditional employment programs. A number of Secure Jobs participants had been in other employment programs prior to joining Secure Jobs but still were not able to find and retain employment successfully. As with Secure Jobs, some participants disengaged from previous programs partway through but did not have concerned staff reach out to them. Therefore, unlike with Secure Jobs, they did not go back to these programs.

In addition to the centrality of the staff-participant bond, Secure Jobs' comprehensive approach to employment also stood out in comparison to other programs. In particular, unrestricted funds were available to address the cost of removing barriers in each participant's unique situation, as well as pay for skills training.

*I went missing for about a month or so...I was dealing with my own personal problems. So I didn't call. I felt like they [Secure Jobs staff] were probably going to go ahead and drop me out of the program, because they didn't hear from me...Like usually, I've been in programs where when I disappeared they just thought I didn't want to do the program anymore...I've been in programs where I went missing and...they wouldn't even call to find out. But she [the Secure Jobs Coordinator] called me to see what was going on and that made me instill more trust in her.*

-Secure Jobs Participant

*I think they help you more realistically than those [other employment] programs do. Whereas, as far as like, a lot of programs will just help you build up your resume and give you interview skills, they [Secure Jobs] will actually fund towards something that you want to do. Like they funded my [certification] test, they funded your test. They'll actually fund those things. And they'll help you with transportation, like giving you bus passes and stuff like that. I feel like it's a more realistic approach.*

-Secure Jobs Participant

## Child Care

Before a participant can commit fully to job readiness training, jobs skills training, or work, childcare and transportation barriers, at the least, must be addressed. Child care is a key barrier for all low-income families. While vouchers for child care are available, it can take time to navigate the bureaucratic procedures required to secure one, and this wait can delay employment.

Through partnership with the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) regional offices, local Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies, and the Department of Early

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<sup>7</sup> Data are only reported from four sites. Among those four sites, between 7.4% and 15.5% report having CORIs, for a total of 59 participants with CORIs in those four sites.

Education and Care (EEC), Secure Jobs staff could expedite receipt of child care vouchers. 85 participants were able to secure new child care subsidies quickly.<sup>8</sup>

*They try to secure where your kids are first [i.e. childcare]. And that took forever because you know we have to wait on those [childcare] vouchers. And then [afterwards] that's when you get to come in and really sit in the program and job search, computer search, do your resumes and stuff like that.*

-Secure Jobs Participant

While the state's involvement was enormously helpful to participants needing a child care voucher, many participants still relied on family and friends to help, either by watching the children or by helping to pay for daycare. This was largely due to the limited number of approved childcare slots, and the lack of public benefit support for after-hours childcare.

### Transportation

Adequate and reliable transportation is another requirement to be able to get to and from work and to take children to and from childcare. For participants in more urban areas, Secure Jobs sites were able to provide bus passes as a quick, though temporary, solution to this challenge. In contrast, limited bus route and hours in Western Massachusetts and the South Coastal region meant that some participants needed access to a car in order for this to be possible. Some participants were able to reinstate their license, many by paying off overdue fines with help of Secure Jobs' unrestricted funds. In other cases, participants didn't know how to drive and had to learn.

David, a young father of two sons, joined Secure Jobs at the beginning of the program. When he first got his job, David had to walk 3 ½ miles each way to get to work, because there was not transportation from the city where he was living to his new work location, and he didn't have a driver's license. David explained, "So I used to get up at 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning [and] get to work by 8 o'clock. From 8 to 5 I'm at work. I'd get out at 5 o'clock. Mind you, I'm on my feet all day. 8 to 5 [at work], [then] I get out at 5 and walk all the way home...but like I said, when you've got family and stuff to do—I'm not like some guys out there. I got to do what I got to do for my family." Once he was settled into his new job, his Employment Specialist helped him enroll in driving lessons. Now, not only does he have his driver's license, but he works 40-50 hours a week and receives full benefits for himself and his family.

The high cost of purchasing a car, combined with insurance and gas, has made independent transportation difficult to afford and maintain. As a result, participants had to rely on their social network of friends, family, neighbors to help provide transportation, or, as a last resort, drive to their job interviews in an uninsured car because they were unable to afford insurance.

<sup>8</sup> Data on childcare vouchers were only reported from four sites. The percentage of participants who received childcare vouchers varied widely between these four sites, from 2.5% at one site to 40.7% at another.

## **Summary and Recommendations**

This report provides a summary of investments and activities that help link homeless families to employment opportunities during the pilot phase of the Secure Jobs Initiative across five project sites, informing the field of critical elements necessary to help homeless families make the transition to work and short-term outcomes for the participating families. The pilot phase of Secure Jobs has yielded several important lessons about continuing its successful operation and integrating employment and housing services for homeless families. Below we offer a number of specific recommendations based on the wealth of data collected for this project.

### **Recommendations for Initiative Partners**

Secure Jobs' unique model for integrated and individualized service delivery is widely regarded as a success. As such, we recommend continuing and institutionalizing the program elements listed in this report, including frequent communication between all program partners, ensuring availability of flexible funds, and forging and leveraging relationships with regional employers. In addition, we suggest the following:

- **Maintain strong leadership of the new initiative.** Continue monthly calls with all stakeholders, and quarterly Learning Lab meetings which can focus on specific issues emerging from the work, for example: best assessment practices, best retention practices, and state policy.
- **Continue engagement with state agencies.** Participation of state agencies in the pilot has been essential to its success. DHCD takes the lead with housing subsidies and support, DTA supports eligible families with cash assistance and child care vouchers, and EEC helps with child care vouchers for those who do not receive DTA assistance. The partnership should now reach out to the Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DOL) to fund employment programs specifically for homeless people that include the one-on-one services that this population needs, and to the Department of Higher Education to facilitate participants' continuing their education and training in the state's community college system.

### **Programmatic Recommendations**

- **Make use of local One-Stop Career Center resources,** building and expanding partnerships created in the first year of Secure Jobs. Career Centers have both resources to assist people in job search and job readiness and well-developed connections with local employers. However, they may not have the personnel to provide one-on-one support in navigating these resources. Secure Jobs staff can work with participants to make use of the Career Centers' wealth of resources.
- **Standardize the Job Readiness Training curriculum.** Currently, the content of Job Readiness courses varies widely and is largely determined by the trainer's discretion. Research can inform best practices for Job Readiness training, making the course more efficient and effective.
- **Assist skills training and employment programs in developing employer partnerships** and using these partners to inform development of a roster of courses and programs that are directly linked with job opportunities in the region. Employer partners are critical to help applicants stand out from the crowd; Employment Specialists' contact with employers can help applicants get past issues such as CORIs and language barriers.

- **Integrate quality data collection into daily practice.** Without consistent and high quality data, the success of Secure Jobs cannot be demonstrated. Improve data quality by integrating data collection into instructional practices and begin using collected data to improve quality. These data are especially important to inform policies related to family well-being, for the example the impact of cliff effects and housing stability.
- **Expand financial education to include asset-building.** Financial education programs should be expanded beyond credit score counseling and debt reduction. It is critical that families learn how to budget in order to begin to save, and learn to access asset-building programs such as Individual Development Accounts (IDAs). Assets can give a family the boost they need to move out of poverty.

### **Policy Recommendations**

- **Ease access to quality and affordable childcare,** in particular for families not receiving TAFDC. As with any parent of young children, homeless parents can only go to work once they have secured affordable child care for their children. In addition, childcare that conforms to non-traditional working hours is necessary for some of the parents to continue their employment. Existing models of such care are rare and need to be expanded.
- **Improve transportation options.** Many of the Secure Jobs parents' training and employment choices are limited due to lack of transportation. Increased public transportation and, in rural areas where public transportation is scarce and distances are long, auto loan programs that fund less expensive cars with more generous terms are critical. In addition, small grants to help pay RMV fees and fines can help families to increase their mobility.
- **Reward program participation and work with housing.** The high rents in Massachusetts make it impossible for those in entry-level work to pay market rent. Extending housing subsidies and continuing employment support for those who have participated in Secure Jobs to gain new employment will contribute to family stability and encourage participants to keep working toward self-sufficiency.

### **Secure Jobs Phase 2: Expanding the Model**

The second phase of Secure Jobs launched in July, 2014. This phase is marked by three important changes:

1. **DHCD assumes leadership.** In the second phase, DHCD is administering Secure Jobs, and is funding the initiative, putting over \$1 million toward it. The Fireman Foundation has committed an additional \$1 million, thus doubling the initiative's budget.
2. **Eligibility criteria are broadened.** Secure Jobs is now open to family shelter and motel residents, and recipients of Massachusetts' Rental Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) subsidy. Secure Jobs sites are working with their local housing providers to identify the most ready, willing and able parents from these pools, and enroll them.
3. **Two new sites are added.** In order to serve more geographic areas of the state, the Southern Middlesex Opportunity Council (SMOC) in Framingham and the Worcester Community Action Council (WCAC) in Worcester are now operating Secure Jobs programs.

The evaluation team continues to collect data from all seven sites, and will present the results of the second phase in 2015.

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