



Missing the Mark:

An Examination of NYC's Back to Work Program and Its Effectiveness in Meeting Employment Goals for Welfare Recipients

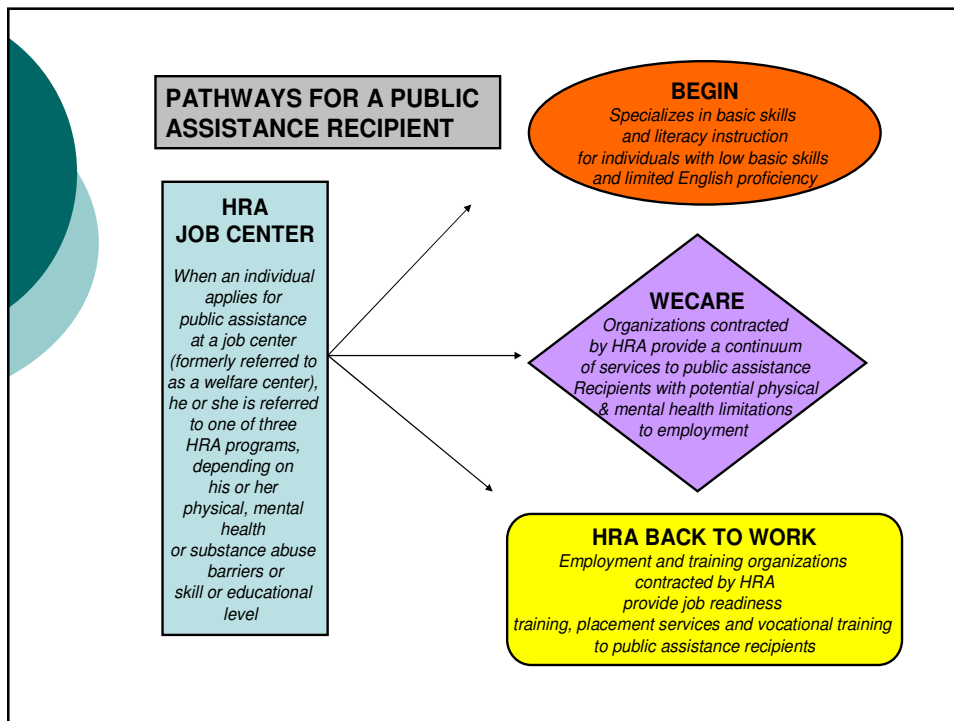
*A Research Project
By Community Voices Heard*



Presentation Format

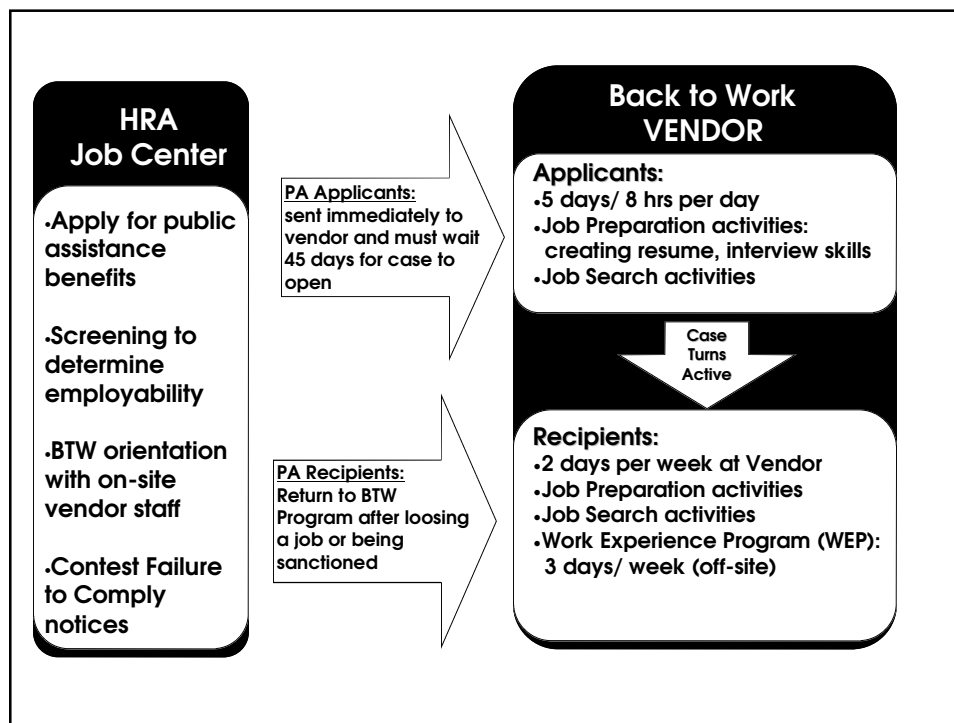
- ◆ **Back to Work Program Overview**
- ◆ **Research Design**
- ◆ **Research Findings**
- ◆ **Back to Work Client Testimonies**
- ◆ **Recommendations**

Back To Work Program Overview



What is Back to Work?

- ◆ HRA program to “*prepare employable individuals to successfully transition from welfare to work and remain self sufficient*”
- ◆ Replaces the Employment Services and Placement (ESP) and Skills Assessment and Job Placement (SAJP) Programs formerly administered by HRA
- ◆ Seven (7) vendors (both for-profit and non-profit) are paid by HRA to administer the BTW Program



Participant Testimony #1

Alisa Pizarro

Overview of Back to Work Program Experience

Differences between ESP and BTW

	ESP Program	BTW Program
Clients Served	Recipients Only	Applicants & Recipients
Assignment to Vendor	Random	Geographic
Referrals from HRA to Vendor	Every Two Weeks	Daily
Connection to HRA Job Center	Refers to Multiple Vendors	Refers to One Vendor
Vendor Role at Job Center	None	Conducts Orientation; Has On-Site Staff
HRA Role at Vendor Site	None	Outstationed Worker Refers Clients for Services
Work Experience Program (WEP) Assignment	By HRA at Job Center	By Vendor

Payment Milestone Differences

ESP Program	BTW Program
	Pre-Employment Plan
Job Placement	Job Placement (30 days)
Job Retention (90 days)	Job Retention (90 days)
Job Retention (180 days)	Job Retention (180 days)
High Wage Employment	Sanction Removal
	Job Retention & Career Plan
	Wage Increase Bonus

Why Pay Attention to BTW?

- ◆ **High Cost:** \$ 159.6 million over 3 yrs
- ◆ **Large Population:** Serves about 13,000 people monthly
- ◆ **Economic Crisis:** important to ensure that city is spending its money wisely when so many people will be jobless and city is facing a budget crisis



Research Design

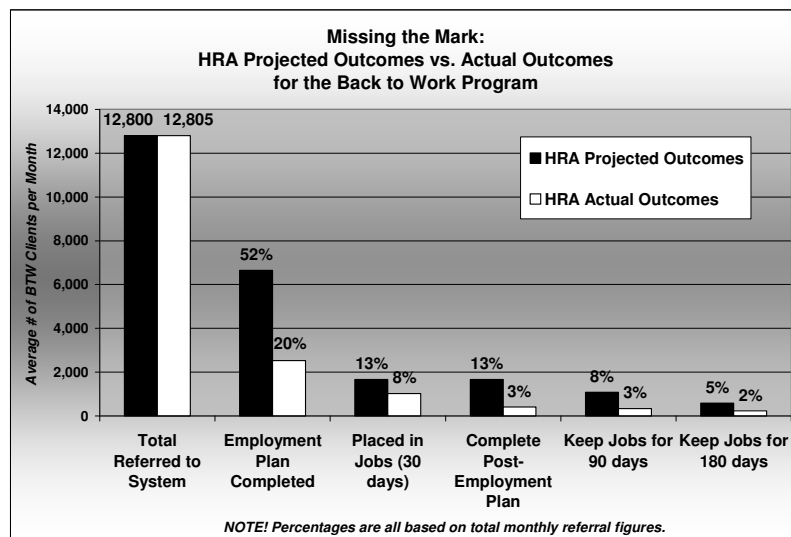


Data Source Categories

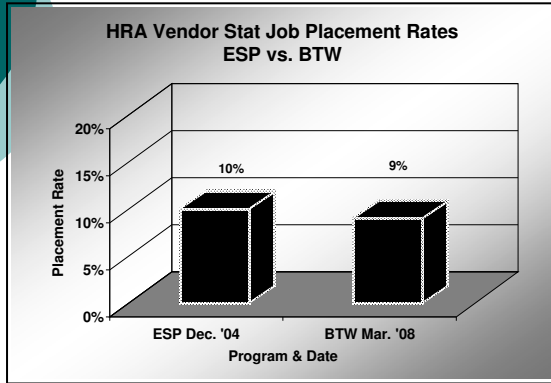
- **HRA Documents and Data**
Policy Directives, Contracts, Vendor Stat Reports, Site Visit Summaries
- **Client Conversations**
Outreach workers held 7-10 minute conversations with 954 clients at all the BTW sites across 5 boroughs
- **Focus Groups**
Eight 2.5 hour sessions, 50 participants
- **Vendor Staff Interviews**
In-depth interviews conducted with staff from 10 of the organizations that serve as BTW contractors or subs
- **Phone Surveys**
Conducted with 152 BTW participants

Research Findings

HRA is not meeting its goals in moving public assistance recipients from welfare to work.



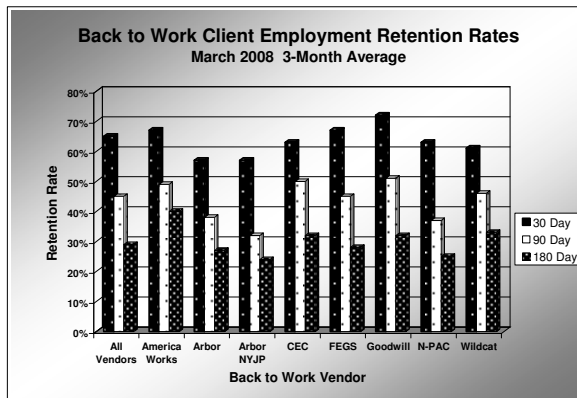
Job Placement



9 percent of those clients who begin the BTW Program get jobs through the Program.

Job Retention

3 out of 4 Back to Work participants that get jobs through the program, lose them after six months.





Job Retention (cont.)

- Over 60% of BTW clients surveyed said that job retention services were poor, bad or not provided.
- Only 10% of BTW vendor sites fully met or exceeded HRA's requirements in presenting Transitional Benefits to clients.
- Of those that started working while in BTW, only 5% said that anyone at BTW helped them to apply for Transitional Benefits.



Recidivism

50% of former Back to Work participants are back on public assistance and must re-start the BTW Program within 9 months of leaving the program for employment.

“Recidivism is definitely creeping up as an issue for the city. We are definitely seeing a different client population—more people with mental health issues, more issues with education, more criminal backgrounds and the work-first model is not working for this population.”

- BTW Vendor

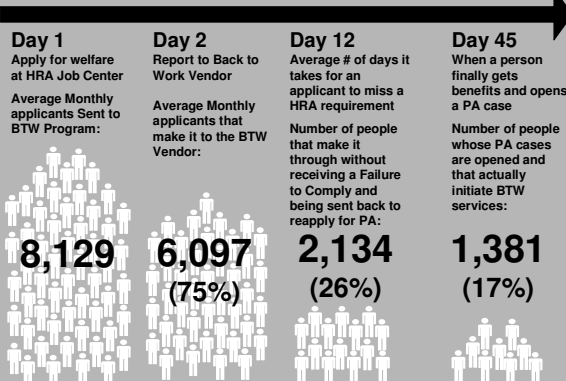
Participant Testimony #2

Janet Rivera

Doing it All Over Again
& Mandates for
Public Assistance
Applicants

Falling Through the Cracks

45 Days with Program Mandate and Without Benefits:
Applying for Welfare and Starting the Back to Work (BTW) Program



*Figures are monthly averages calculated from HRA Vendor Stat Reports for March 2008. 1 figure=150 participants

One out of four (1:4) people that are referred to the Back to Work Program do not initiate services.



Education and Training

- **1.7%:** *Percent of HRA cash assistance recipients enrolled in education and training as of 8/31/08.*
- **72%:** *Percent of BTW clients surveyed that were never told about Individual Training Account (ITA) Vouchers.*
- **618:** *Number of ITA Vouchers issued by HRA in 2007.*
- **100:** *Number of ITA Vouchers issued by HRA in 2008, as of May 2008.*



Failure to Comply & Sanctions

“They bully you. They try to put pressure on you and their three favorite letters are F-T-C. They use that like a gangster would use a gun. They use that word like a bank robber going into a bank and it’s for real. Everybody knows. They will use that F.T.C., they are quick... They’ve made so many mistakes.”

- BTW Participant



“Failure to Comply” and Sanctions

- **1 out of 4 HRA clients is in a process of being sanctioned or had a sanction in effect.**
- **68% of applicants and 28% of recipients are given a Failure to Comply while in the Back to Work Program.**
- **60% of Failure to Comply notices are found to be issued in error after a review at a conciliation hearing.**



Barriers to Employment

“We have to spend a lot less time actually helping to get employment and providing clients with the case management they need to address barriers to get employment and instead we have to spend time doing data entry and collecting time sheets and calling places to make sure absences are excused.”

- BTW Vendor



Barriers to Employment

- **76.7% of participants identified a barrier to employment.**
- **Childcare, housing and re-entry issues for the formerly incarcerated are prevalent.**
- **75% of participants with barriers said that BTW has not helped to address barriers.**



Participant Testimony #3

Anita Walton

**Barriers to Employment
& Sanctions Rather
than Help**



Conclusion

The BTW Program is characterized by:

- Poor Job Placement
- Weak Job Retention
- High Rates of Recidivism
- Limited Access to Education & Training
- Punitive Sanction Policies
- People Falling through the Cracks



Conclusion (cont.)

- **Work-first model is a poor match for current welfare caseload.**
- **Approach prevents HRA from connecting clients to good, long-term jobs.**
- **HRA is more stringent in implementing federal regulations than is required.**
- **The program needs a major overhaul in the next contracting cycle.**



Recommendations

The report includes detailed recommendations to address limitations with:

- program design,
- job placement services,
- education & training access,
- job retention services,
- sanction policies, and
- barrier removal services.



Industry & Sector Hubs

In order to provide more focused job placement services and training connections...

- HRA should invest in creating industry and sector focused Back to Work sites rather than just general geographically based sites.



Paid Transitional Jobs

In order to help prepare the long-term unemployed for jobs...

- HRA should invest in expanding its subsidized jobs programs - *like the Parks Opportunity Program* - to multiple city agencies and job types.



Career Ladder Training

In order to steer participants on the path to careers rather than dead-end jobs...

- HRA should invest in expanding career ladder training opportunities and ensure that BTW participants can access these opportunities.

And, we recommend some ways to improve HRA contracting...



Monitoring & Transparency

HRA & the City should improve the monitoring and transparency of their contracts and create mechanisms for increased public input into the contracting process by:

- hiring external groups to monitor contracts, build capacity of vendors, and conduct long-term evaluation of the impact of programs, and
- establishing a public-private commission that includes government, advocates, and HRA clients that has the power to approve and suggest changes to the renewal of all HRA contracts.



Questions & Answers