

DESIGN AND PERFORMANCE OF DISPLACED HOMEMAKER PROJECTS

Displaced homemakers entering the job market need all the same services as workers displaced from paid jobs, and often more. Generally, these women lack the long stable work history of displaced workers, and some have no work experience at all outside the home. A substantial number (about 15 percent) are mothers receiving public assistance who are about to lose their eligibility because their last child is nearing the age of 18. Some of these women are seriously handicapped in getting a job because of lack of skills or education. Other displaced homemakers have held good jobs or had an excellent education, but their skills may be rusty or obsolete, or they may lack confidence after a long spell out of the job market. Many who have developed valuable skills in volunteer jobs need help in exploiting those skills for a paid job. In addition to the practical difficulties of finding work, many displaced homemakers must struggle with feelings of abandonment and personal inadequacy. The majority have gone through divorce or separation, or are widowed.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the displaced homemaker projects of the last 10 years have helped many of these women gain confidence, learn job search skills, get training, and find jobs. Because systematic studies of the project results are lacking, this kind of evidence is the best we have. Likewise, knowledge about what program elements are most important and successful in assisting displaced homemakers comes mostly from accounts of women who went through the programs and observations of project directors. The national Displaced Homemakers Network, which is in touch with hundreds of individual projects throughout the country, has distilled information on what constitutes a comprehensive program of services to displaced homemakers (see box A). State officials dealing with displaced homemaker programs (often the Sex Equity Coordinators in the States' vocational education systems) are also sources of information on what works best in helping these women find adequate jobs.

OTA has added some recent informed observations to these accounts. In 1984, an OTA contractor interviewed by telephone 20 directors of selected local displaced homemaker projects throughout the country, discussing the kinds of services the projects offer and their effectiveness. Although they were not a true statistical sample, the projects were of different types and sizes in a variety of geographic locations. OTA's contractor also conducted brief telephone interviews with the person responsible for overseeing displaced homemaker programs (usually the Sex Equity Coordinator) in each of 16 States. Another source of information about the operation of displaced homemaker projects is the 1984 survey conducted by the Displaced Homemaker Network and analyzed by OTA.

From these various sources it is possible to draw a few conclusions, at least tentative ones, concerning displaced homemakers and the programs designed to serve them.

Characteristics of Displaced Homemaker Projects

In size and structure, the projects vary a great deal. The range of funding among programs in the Network's survey is from \$2,000 a year to \$862,000, and clients served range from 14 to 3,800. In some States (e.g., Texas and Oklahoma) services are offered mostly through the State vocational-technical school systems. Others fund programs in many kinds of organizations, including women's groups and YWCAs. Some, like New York and New Jersey, encourage the development of special purpose projects targeted to such groups as Hispanics, Haitians, rural women, and older women. Some concentrate on outreach. For example, Wisconsin makes special efforts to reach women on Indian reservations and in black neighborhoods. Washington State has a toll-free number where women can call for help.

The greatest points of similarity among these projects are in defining the clients they wish

**Box A.—Comprehensive Services to Displaced Homemakers:
A Policy Statement by the Displaced Homemakers Network**

People who have worked in displaced homemaker programs over the last 10 years agree that the best programs offer a wide range of services, tailored to the special needs of displaced homemakers and putting foremost the goal of job placement. In the absence of systematic evaluations, the observations of experienced project directors are the best guide to what works in these programs, and what is less effective. The national Displaced Homemaker Network, through its contacts with hundreds of projects and its familiarity with their experience, has compiled a comprehensive list of the elements an outstanding program should include. OTA's research confirms that most of these elements are necessary for a well-rounded program: many of them are discussed in the text of this report. There follows the program policy statement of the Network:

The Displaced Homemakers Network believes that a comprehensive displaced homemaker program provides or secures the following component services that have been identified as meeting the unique needs of displaced homemakers. While every program may not have all of these components, it is an ideal to be worked toward. Job placement is a top priority and ultimate goal of program services:

- **Outreach.** Adequate outreach that specifically targets displaced homemakers, and is matched to the racial/ethnic/age distribution of the displaced homemakers in the geographic area being served; in rural areas, may require itinerant programming [periodic delivery of services to displaced homemaker in remote, scattered areas].
- **Intake/Orientation.** Procedures that recognize the lack of confidence common to displaced homemakers and the need for an immediate positive experience; orientation procedures that provide displaced homemakers with an introduction to the program and especially to other participants.
- **Personal Counseling.** Individual personal counseling, guided support groups, crisis intervention services, ongoing counseling both on a regular and as-needed basis, and appropriate referrals to mental health professionals and alcohol/drug abuse programs.
- **Assessment and Testing.** A balanced use of interest inventories, skill testing, work samples, educational assessments, employability development plans, and other instruments and activities useful to adult women, with an emphasis on self-assessment and personal decisionmaking, and the identification and transfer of skills developed in homemaking, child-rearing, and volunteer work to the paid labor force.
- **Career/Educational Counseling.** Activities and resources presenting a broad range of career and educational options in the context of local labor market data, and including information about nontraditional jobs, vocational training, basic education, high school equivalency, financial aid, and short-term as well as traditional programs.
- **Life Skill Development.** Workshops on assertiveness training, single parenting, short- and long-range planning and goal setting, financial management, dressing for the labor force, health concerns of mature women, and other requested topics.
- **Skills Training.** Access to skill training programs (including classroom training, internships, and on-the-job training) in both traditional and nontraditional areas.
- **Pre-Employment Preparation.** Activities to prepare for finding and keeping a job, such as preparing a resume, filling out job applications, taking tests, handling interviews, and negotiating salary; discussions of rights and responsibilities on the job.
- **Supportive Services.** Needed services such as stipends, transportation allowances, books, arrangements for child care, emergency loan fund, clothes, tuition, equipment, and tutoring.
- **Referrals.** Initial referrals and follow-up advocacy for such services as legal aid, health care, housing, debt management, and vocational rehabilitation.
- **Job Development/Placement.** Outreach to potential employers, advocacy with employment services, direct program placement, guided job clubs, assisted self-placement; adequate follow-up and continued support.
- **Program Management.** Staffing that reflects the racial/ethnic composition of the geographic area served and that includes former displaced homemakers at all levels; appropriate management information systems that include up-to-date client files and monthly compilation of data on client characteristics and program results; public information activities to educate potential employers and the general public on displaced homemakers' needs and skills; appropriate linkages with other agencies; and fiscal accountability.

to serve—women whose main job has been homemaker but must now take on the role of family provider— and in providing the special help that their clients need to bridge the gap between home and work.

Location of Project

Half of the projects in the survey were located in educational institutions—community colleges or vocational-technical schools—where they could draw directly on the educational and training programs of the host institution. Community-based organizations such as women’s centers or YWCAs housed approximately one-quarter of the projects. The rest described themselves as “independent” or “other” (e.g., a university counseling program, or a State agency).

Characteristics of Clients

The population is quite diverse. The 20 directors of local projects reported in interviews that the age of their clients ranges from 16 to 67, with the majority between 35 and 55. The average age tends to be lower in the south and in rural areas, where women tend to marry younger. According to half of the project directors, their typical client has a high school education. Others reported a wide range of education, some serving clients who mostly have some college or a degree, and others serving disadvantaged women, half of whom have not completed high school. The clients also come from all kinds of economic backgrounds, from poverty to affluence. However, at the time these women come to the projects for assistance, most are trying to survive on very low incomes. The affluence is usually former, not current.

Project directors consider it important to offer services that are comprehensive and flexible enough to meet the needs of many types of clients; most do not offer separate program components for different subgroups. There are exceptions however. Three projects have set up separate counseling and support groups for widows and for divorced or separated women. The groups did not work well together. Widows

were offended by the other women’s negative attitudes about their former husbands, and tended to drop out of the program, until they were given a group to themselves.

A few projects have recently begun special programs, usually supported by State funds, for women who are receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC, or welfare). One center in Texas is providing intensive pre-vocational and job training for AFDC mothers. Another in Massachusetts is sponsoring a program for welfare mothers who never completed high school which combines personal and job-related counseling with classroom instruction in general educational development (GED), leading to a high school diploma.

Most of the project directors felt the need to reach out more effectively to groups of displaced homemakers who are not being adequately served, especially rural and minority women. A project in Connecticut was able to involve Hispanic women in project activities through a Hispanic outreach counselor. Other project directors expressed a desire for bilingual counselors, and also for staff who can reach black and other minority women who might not know about the projects, or might be reluctant to go for help to a white, suburban college campus.

Rural women are not only hard to reach, but have special needs for service. Many have no local public transportation and few if any local job opportunities. Some may benefit from special assistance in creating their own jobs or businesses.

Eligibility

Most of the project directors interviewed reported that their eligibility requirements for clients are informal. The Network’s survey underscored the point: only about half the respondents reported any eligibility requirements. If limitations existed, the ones most frequently cited were that the client had spent some years primarily as a homemaker, and had lost her main source of income support. Some projects responded that participants had to

meet either a definition laid down by a State law, or requirements of a funding source.

As discussed previously, clients of projects funded under JTPA usually have to meet the economically disadvantaged criterion which applies to Title 11A programs. Several of the project directors who receive funding from JTPA expressed concern because they have to turn away displaced homemakers in need of assistance who do not fit the definition. Despite the exceptions under JTPA to the income limitations, projects that have JTPA funding are bound by the terms of their individual contracts, which may not make any exceptions. Under the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act, Federal funding to displaced homemakers has no income limitations, although States in their vocational education plans must provide assurance that they are serving displaced homemakers who are in financial need.

Services Offered and Their Effectiveness

The range of services provided by different displaced homemaker projects varies from counseling and referral only to comprehensive multi-component programs which cover all aspects of the home-to-work transition, from intake and assessment to follow-up after placement in a job. As a guide to project managers, the national Displaced Homemakers Network has compiled a comprehensive list of the services that it considers to meet the unique needs of displaced homemakers (see box A).

Services provided in displaced homemaker programs overlap and interconnect, but for the sake of simplicity can be grouped as follows:

- *Personal counseling*: includes one-to-one or group counseling, peer support groups, and workshops on self-awareness and assessment.
- *Job readiness*: includes skills and aptitude assessments, job counseling, academic counseling, provision of labor market information, referrals to other local job search agencies, assistance in preparing resumes and filling out job applications, and mock interviews.

- *Education and training*: includes courses in brush-up on the basics, GED preparation, English as a second language, onsite skills training, on-the-job training, work experience, career internships, and referral to educational or training programs.
- *Job placement*: includes maintenance of job banks, job development, job matching and referrals to local job openings, and follow-up.
- *Support services*: includes seminars on topics of practical interest (e.g., money management, taxes, insurance), child care, transportation assistance, emergency loans, training stipends (if any are available) and scholarship funds,

Most of the 20 project directors agreed that a comprehensive program including everything but onsite training is ideal, but the majority had neither the staff nor funding to do it all. They had to save their efforts for what they could do best, and what they believed to be most successful. Most did not claim to know what works best for their clients. In the absence of any national full-scale program evaluations, they rely on their own experience (the majority of the projects are 5 or 6 years old) and the experience of others, which they share through regional conferences and through the Displaced Homemaker Network.

There follow some notes on how services to displaced homemakers may be delivered most effectively, based on the observations of these experienced project directors plus the findings of a few studies²⁸ and year-end reports from a few States with displaced homemaker programs of their own.

Personal Counseling

Nearly all of the program directors emphasized the importance of this component; all of them offer it. The Berkeley Planning Associates study of the national demonstration displaced homemaker projects especially noted

²⁸See especially Kogan, et al., op. cit., the descriptive study of the 47-project national demonstration displaced homemaker program.

the need of displaced homemakers for restoration of a sense of self-worth and confidence building.

Peer support is almost universally considered a highly effective form of counseling. Most of the directors observed that peer support or other forms of counseling need to be continued throughout the program, in conjunction with other services such as job readiness and skills training. A very few program directors disagreed; they believed that the most urgent requirement for displaced homemakers is to find a job, after which other problems tend to take care of themselves. The majority, however, considered it essential to provide continuing emotional support.

An example of a successful program based on continuing support is the Safety in Numbers program sponsored by the Displaced Homemaker Program at the Mississippi Gulf Coast Junior College. Designed for students 25 and older, the program's classes are composed entirely of beginning adult students of similar age so they can help one another with the necessary home and school adjustments. Included in the basic curriculum are English, math, reading and study skills, and the psychology of personal adjustment.

Job Readiness

This is another essential service, provided by all 20 projects. Small, modestly funded projects may not be able to do their own job development or job matching, but they all help to prepare their inexperienced clients for the world of paid work. Offering job readiness training in a classroom format appears to be very successful. It is not only an efficient use of staff resources, but also draws on the benefits of peer support. Further, the organized instruction—having a class to go to—helps give many displaced homemakers a sense of purpose, countering feelings of helplessness and isolation.

Education and Training

Most displaced homemaker centers do not offer skills training or education, but refer their

clients to the appropriate educational institution. A few (5 of 20) have offered skills training for such jobs as word processor, clerk-typist, nurse's aide, and food manager, and brush-up courses for nurses and secretaries.

Referring clients to other institutions for training has not always worked well. Berkeley Planning Associates found that more than half of the projects in the national demonstration program experienced serious difficulty in getting displaced homemakers into CETA training programs, despite their own CETA sponsorship. There were two problems: CETA had few training slots not reserved for other target groups; and many displaced homemakers were confused by the red tape and delays during the CETA intake process. The red tape problem may also arise with referrals of displaced homemaker clients to larger JTPA projects, especially around questions of income-eligibility.

Project directors would like to offer more training themselves, or have more influence on design of training courses. One director mentioned the need for short-term or refresher training in clerical skills; many displaced homemakers have far too little income support to undertake a 6- or 8-month course. Scheduling of courses to meet the needs of displaced homemakers is also important. For example, the Safety in Numbers course for displaced homemakers at the Mississippi Gulf Coast Junior College offered the core curriculum in classes 2 days a week, freeing the student for family responsibilities on the remaining days.

Many project directors expressed a desire to encourage or offer more training in nontraditional fields; in fact two projects recently sponsored training courses in electronics and in plastics mold injection. Needs for remedial education were stressed; some displaced homemakers must upgrade reading and math competencies before they can enter any kind of skills training, or even look for a job.

Five projects that were able to establish on-the-job training, work experience, or career internships were impressed with their effectiveness. Short-term work experience was especially important for women who had either

never had a paid job, or had not had one for years.

Job Placement

The Displaced Homemakers Network, and project directors in general, consider job placement “a top priority and ultimate goal of program service.” Nonetheless, limited staff and funds make it difficult for many projects to provide all the placement services that they see as desirable.

The majority of project directors interviewed (17 out of 20) said their projects do some kind of placement work, even if only informally. Several maintain job banks and keep in close touch with local employers or employment agencies about possible openings. Only four have staff job developers, who work on turning up job openings that have not been advertised or listed. Several directors indicated the need for more staff in job development and coordination of job placement, especially for older clients. Projects that are able to get additional funding, either from Perkins Act grants or from other sources, may choose to add staff job developers or to obtain the service for their clients by contract. A number of JTPA projects have contracts with the local Employment Service (ES), under which ES staff develop jobs specifically for the project’s clients. The typical displaced homemaker project does not have the funds to offer this special service to its clients,

The kind of jobs that clients of displaced homemaker projects find are varied, but on the whole are weighted toward traditionally female, generally low-paid jobs in the clerical, retail sales, and service fields. For example, a fact sheet from the State of Minnesota indicates that of the displaced homemaker program clients who are placed, 42 percent are in service jobs, 30 percent in clerical work, and 14 percent in sales. This particular group actually had better average pay than other working women in Minnesota: the median wage was \$5 per hour for former program participants, compared to a median wage of \$3.38 per hour for other Minnesota women. Very little other in-

formation exists on wage rates for participants in displaced homemaker programs compared to other groups. One study of a past program in Massachusetts found that wage gains achieved through the program were minimal; most clients who worked before entering the program received the minimum wage, and so did most who completed the program. Of the project directors interviewed, most reported that their clients’ wages were generally low, hovering around minimum wage.

The most obvious explanation for displaced homemakers taking traditional women’s jobs at low pay is that these are easy jobs to fill, with few skill requirements and frequent openings. As one director acknowledged, it is not clear that these are the right jobs for the project’s clients, but at least they do get placed.

Another explanation is that many displaced homemakers seem to gravitate toward traditional jobs when asked their preferences. Few older women are interested in nontraditional jobs, and they generally reject training because they believe they will not be able to compete with younger, better-educated women even after training. In any case, displaced homemakers often have little choice. Many need a source of income immediately. Without training stipends or loans, they are forced to accept low-paid jobs with little prospect of advancement. For women at very low income levels, public assistance may be the best choice financially, although many resist going on welfare.

On the other hand, some of the placements are in a variety of nontraditional occupations. Some women have been helped to start their own businesses, sometimes unusual ones; for example, a group of women developed a cab service in an area that did not have one. One director reported that women used to heavy work at home were not afraid of competing with men in physically demanding, nontraditional occupations—for instance, one woman took a job as a UPS delivery person.

One of the best auguries for successful placement is a sympathetic employer, familiar with the needs of displaced homemakers and able to provide feedback to an inexperienced work-

er on her performance. Previous acquaintance with an employer through on-the-job training, work experience, or an internship often results in a permanent job.

Support Services

Many projects provide specialized workshops or counseling on matters not directly related to job search—e.g., money management, taxes, insurance, housing and mortgages, legal rights of women, health care, single parenting, even automobile repair and maintenance. Few are able to offer substantial help in the forms most needed by many displaced homemakers—child care, transportation, and financial assistance. Some women who could most benefit from training are unable to take classes without some form of financial assistance—possibly loans, if not grants. Unlike displaced workers, most displaced homemakers have no unemployment insurance. Few can rely on other family members for support.

A few project directors said they have some resources, mostly through grants and private donations, to provide limited financial assistance to their clients. Four programs offer transportation assistance; three, scholarship programs; three, limited emergency loans; two, limited training stipends; and two, child care at the displaced homemaker centers. In addition, some referred clients to local community colleges for financial aid, and to the community colleges or social service agencies for child care available to low-income women.

The Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984 promises assistance in some of these areas. Under the previous Voc Ed law, child care, transportation assistance, and even training stipends in limited situations were authorized for displaced homemakers. It appears they were rarely made available, possibly because Federal Voc Ed funds for displaced homemakers were limited, and State administrators did not choose to use them in this way. With the increases in funds targeted to homemakers in the 1984 act, support services might be more feasible. The new law specifically allows funds to be used for child care and transportation

assistance. It also authorizes training stipends for Voc Ed students in general (not single parents and homemakers in particular) but only in cases of “acute economic needs which cannot be met under work-study programs.” The consensus so far among Sex Equity Coordinators is that little if any Voc Ed grant money will be used to provide training stipends.

JTPA is no more promising as a source of income support for displaced homemakers undertaking training or education in search of a job. In passing JTPA in 1982, Congress put limits on supportive services (e. g., child care, transportation allowances, and health care) and any form of income payment (including needs-based payments, under Title 11A, and training allowances or stipends, under Title III). Spending for these purposes, plus administrative spending, was generally limited to 30 percent of JTPA funding. Administrative expenses, in turn, were limited to 15 percent which, in effect, kept spending for income support and supportive services to no more than 15 percent. Private industry councils and JTPA program directors have generally kept a still tighter rein on supportive services and income payments than the law requires. In the JTPA transition year (October 1983-June 1984), spending for supportive services and needs-based payments in Title 11A was 10 percent, and for similar services in Title III, 6 percent. Nothing is known of how much of these payments went to displaced homemakers, but since JTPA spending overall for this group is limited, the amount was certainly very small.

A possible source of income for displaced homemakers during education or training is one of the Federal aid programs for post-secondary students. As chapter 7 of the full report discusses, these programs are designed primarily for financially dependent young people, not for adults—even low-income adults. Some changes that have been proposed in the student aid programs (discussed in chs. 2 and 7 of the full report) might make this source of income more easily accessible to displaced homemakers. However, the competition for student aid is extremely keen; whatever goes to a displaced homemaker would be subtracted from the pool

available to young students (unless, as seems unlikely, the program were enlarged).

Another possibility for some displaced homemakers is part-time studies at night. The Perkins Act offers funds to allow scheduling of vocational education courses to make them more accessible to single parents and homemakers. Night studies may be a useful option for some, especially those without young children at home. On-the-job training, even though it often does not offer genuine transferable training but rather is a placement device (see ch. 6 of the full report), may still be very useful to some displaced homemakers.

The problem of income support for people who need 'training to get a decent job with

chances of advancement is not an easy one. There were abuses under CETA, with some people signing up for courses mainly for the purpose of collecting training allowances. Yet the dilemma of a woman who has no source of support but what she can earn, yet with too little preparation for work to get better than a marginal job, is a painful one. Many of these women cannot undertake the triple job of earning a living, caring for a child, and training for a better job. It may be in the interest of society, as well as the personal interest of women such as these to make use of programs which already exist for income support of serious adult students, or to develop ones which fit their needs.

