



# **PIVOT Program**

**(Placing Individuals in Vital Opportunity Training)**

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In September of 2000, Erie County Department of Social Services (ECDSS) implemented a unique wage subsidy initiative designed to bridge the gap between the local business community and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) recipients. The goal of Placing Individuals in Vital Opportunity Training (PIVOT) Program is to provide incentives to employers to hire TANF clients, some with multiple barriers or the need for more time for on- the-job training. PIVOT provides quality job opportunities for the employable TANF population while serving as a resource for the hiring needs of local employers. Since its inception, the PIVOT Program has contracted with over 300 employers throughout the Western New York region.

PIVOT employer benefits include a wage reimbursement for 6 months at 100% of the clients' gross wages. The employer can also request a 50% advance on the clients' wages. The advance will cover expenses incurred by hiring costs and the need to provide additional training. Employers participating in the program are from a variety of industries including manufacturing, hospitality, health care, retail, professional services and nonprofits. Positions that individuals have been hired for under the program include machine operators, forklift operators, housekeepers, cleaners, porters, cooks, CNA's, LPN's, dietary aides, cashiers, customer service representatives, security guards, legal assistants, and day care assistants.

Eligible employers must be an existing company with permanent long term positions. The employer provides on – the – job training and the Department of Social Services provides supportive services in the form of day care, transportation and case management to support the transition to work. These supports assist in the successful shift from Temporary Assistance to permanent employment and self-sufficiency.

TANF clients are pre-screened for job compatibility. This includes matching skills, abilities and education with the specifications of the job to assist employers with locating suitable candidates for available positions in their company. The employer is involved in the hiring process and provided an opportunity to select from multiple candidates. In addition, monthly Job Fairs are conducted by the Department of Social Services which affords employers the opportunity to interview and recruit perspective employees.

We have learned from employer feedback that perspective employees lack soft skills needed to be successful in jobs. Soft skills that are important to employers include communication, accountability, coping skills, conflict resolution and motivation. The lack of these soft skills creates a high turnover in positions. In an effort to address this need and broaden the base of PIVOT eligible candidates, the PIVOT program works hand in hand with the Work Experience program to achieve long term successful employment placements. Work Experience is work performed at public or nonprofit organizations by individuals in receipt of Temporary Assistance to enable the participant to improve his or

her work skills and soft skills; and thus employability. TANF recipients are required to be engaged in a countable core work activity for up to 35 hours per week (25 hours for a TANF client with a child less than 6 years). A collaborative effort was developed between Erie County Department of Social Services Employment Division and community agencies to create the neighborhood hub site model. The hub sites are where clients perform their Work Experience and are located in neighborhoods where large numbers of Temporary Assistance recipients reside. In addition to enhancing the participants' work skills and soft skills, they are able to combine Work Experience with educational programs such as High School Equivalency (HSE), English as a Second Language (ESL) and Computer Skills on site. The clients combine 20 hours per week of work experience with 10 to 15 hours of educational training to meet their 35 hours per week work requirement.

Work site supervisors work exclusively with TANF recipients and provide individualized help to learn basic work habits, strengthen their job skills, as well as learning the coping skills to balance work, personal and family challenges. Participants may also access the wrap around services available within the Work Experience site, such as child care, preschool, after-school, mentoring programs, housing, financial literacy, health and wellness, and nutritional education. Several of the supervisors are former TANF clients who can demonstrate successful strategies to become self-sufficient. Supervisors work with clients daily and observe their work ethic, problem solving skills, motivation, and work place relationships. Participants who perform well at their work experience placements and demonstrate work readiness are linked with a Department of Social Services Job Developer to identify opportunities for competitive employment.

This model empowers clients through opportunities and the prospect of success. The client is provided the opportunity to acquire the skills and education that will enhance their employability and thereby, increasing our pool of PIVOT eligible candidates. These hub sites give clients a foundation to effectively function in a competitive work environment. The model also results in increased participation in federally countable work activities by making worksites more accessible. Additionally, Erie County's strategy of using Work Experience in local communities expands services available at local community centers and encourages individuals to invest in and connect with the community.

In addition to screening potential PIVOT candidates from work experience hub sites, the Job Developers also have working relationships with local providers of vocational training programs to link graduates with PIVOT employers. This stepwise movement from Work Experience - to individualized supports - to assessment of work skills and soft skills for PIVOT readiness and then finally, placement with a PIVOT employer increases the likelihood of successful transition to sustainable, private employment for the individuals served.

The PIVOT program is funded by the Flexible Fund for Family Services (FFFS) allocation. Approximately 5.5% of FFFS allocation is budgeted to the PIVOT program. The budget for fiscal year 2014 is \$2,541,411. A monthly average of 30 PIVOT contracts are executed with an average contract cost of \$7,800.00.

The Erie County Department of Social Services PIVOT Program is a component of our TANF program model. The model is based on core components of work activities, supports, and assessments that create a win-win situation for TANF participants and employers. Local businesses get pre-screened workers at little cost and TANF participants get the necessary education, training and experience to succeed at work.

The impact from Work Experience plus PIVOT is over 400 individuals each year, moving from Work Experience to competitive employment. A follow-up review two years ago identified some 72% of PIVOT placements were not receiving public benefits one year later. We are proud of the success of the PIVOT Program and the ability to assist individuals to empowerment and ultimately, self-sufficiency.

## PIVOT Program success stories:

- A single mother of two, receiving Temporary Assistance, expressed an interest in working in the child care field and in obtaining her GED. She was enrolled in the work experience program at a community center where she worked in the day care center and attended GED classes. After working in the day care center for a period of 9 months and obtaining the necessary skills for employment, she was offered a fulltime position as a day care assistant. With the assistance of the PIVOT program and supportive services, she has since successfully transitioned into an unsubsidized job and is no longer in need of cash assistance.
- After a 46 year old single mother completed treatment to overcome the barriers and challenges of substance abuse, she transitioned into the work experience program at one of the hub sites. There she obtained the necessary soft skills to transition into competitive employment. She was hired through a PIVOT contract at a local manufacturing company as a Production Laborer and is now self-sufficient and no longer reliant on cash assistance.
- A father in a two parent household, with 9 children, arrived in the United States in 2010, unable to speak English. He was hired through a PIVOT contract with a local manufacturing company in December of 2012. His employment continues and the employer submitted a letter of praise for his job performance. Although the Temporary Assistance case remains active, the benefits have been reduced due to the individual gaining employment.