

# Secure Jobs Connecticut

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

July 1, 2015 through September 30, 2018

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*December 2018*



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Thanks to Secure Jobs clients who shared their experiences and insights on both the Secure Jobs pilot and progress in pursuing their goals. Finally, thanks to the Melville Charitable Trust, CWEALF CCEH, and Secure Jobs funders for supporting the evaluation and helping address the many data and evaluation challenges.

## 1. Introduction

**Background.** According to the Point-in-Time Count, 3,383 people were experiencing homelessness in Connecticut on the night of January 23, 2018. This included a total of 1,180 people in families: 436 adults and 683 children.<sup>1</sup> These numbers are similar to the 2017 Point-in-Time Count numbers, and represent a decrease in homelessness compared to prior years. Many Connecticut families, however, still face significant challenges to maintaining their housing. The Connecticut United Way's 2018 "ALICE" report found that the percentage of Connecticut households that struggle to afford basic household necessities ranges from a low of 32% in Middlesex County to a high of 44% in New Haven County. The ALICE Report calculated the "Household Survival Budget" for **a family with two parents, one infant, and one preschooler at \$77,832 – one parent working full-time and earning almost \$39/hour or both parents working full-time at \$19.46/hour.**<sup>2</sup>

**Secure Jobs.** Secure Jobs Connecticut (SJ) was a three-year pilot designed to increase the income of families transitioning from homelessness to housing by connecting them to the education, training, and the supports they needed to secure and maintain stable, family-wage employment. SJ sought to accomplish this by better integrating and coordinating the efforts of the homeless service and public workforce sectors to effectively serve families participating in the Connecticut Rapid Re-Housing Program (CTRRP). In Spring 2015, the Melville Charitable Trust, in partnership with 25 private funders, awarded grants to implement Secure Jobs in five regions: Northwest (Waterbury/Torrington region), Southwest (Fairfield County), North Central (Greater Hartford), South Central (Greater New Haven), and Southeastern Connecticut.<sup>3</sup> Funders set the following outcome targets: (1) 70%+ of CTRRP families enroll in Secure Jobs; (2) 80%+ of enrolled families obtain full-time employment; (3) 80%+ retain employment for at least one year; and (4) 90%+ of enrolled families maintain stable housing for two years. (See Secure Jobs Year 1 and Year 2 Evaluation Reports for details on the model.)

**Evaluation.** The Melville Charitable Trust contracted with Cross Sector Consulting to conduct a formative and summative evaluation of Secure Jobs. Evaluation activities included: (1) documentation of regional and statewide meetings; (2) collection of quarterly report data from regions, and production of quarterly, regional data dashboards; (3) interviews and focus groups with SJ staff, regional leadership teams, case conference teams, and SJ clients; (4) client surveys; and (5) feedback and reflection sessions with statewide and regional teams.

It is important to note **data challenges** that limited the accuracy and completeness of SJ quarterly reports. On the housing side, evaluators relied on reports from Connecticut's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Data challenges included the completeness and accuracy of data, changes to the HMIS database, and report issues. On the workforce side, the transition to the new state workforce data system (CTHires) in December 2015 resulted in the evaluators creating a separate spreadsheet to track workforce data, SJ services and outcomes data. This resulted in tracking only the delivery of workforce services during the quarter for the first two years; the evaluation did collect detailed data in Year 3 on who delivered workforce services, where services were delivered, and the duration or intensity of services.

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<sup>1</sup> *Connecticut Counts: Report on Homelessness in Connecticut*. Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness (CCEH), May 2018. <http://cceh.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/2018Statewide.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> See [http://alice.ctunitedway.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/CT-United-Ways-2018-ALICE-Report-8.13.18\\_Hires-1.pdf](http://alice.ctunitedway.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/CT-United-Ways-2018-ALICE-Report-8.13.18_Hires-1.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Note that the Southeast region withdrew from Secure Jobs in spring 2017 due to low family enrollment, and is not included in this report.

## 2. Evaluation Findings

This section presents final evaluation findings for Secure Jobs – from July 1, 2015 through September 30, 2018. This report presents findings that have been corroborated by multiple sources (e.g., staff, clients, and quarterly reports) and those accomplishments and challenges identified across multiple regions. (For details on each region’s model and population, please see the Year 2 Evaluation Report.)

### a. Regional Models

All four regions utilized the following strategies:

- **Coordination of services across housing and workforce systems.** Housing and workforce staff worked together to develop processes for communicating about clients and sharing client information, facilitate enrollment in workforce services, and engage clients in SJ soon after enrollment in CTRRP.
- **Flexible (flex) funds to address barriers to employment.** Each region designated a pool of flexible funds to address client barriers to employment, and used these funds for a wide range of supports – including child care, bus passes, driver’s licenses, car repairs, car payments, job training, work clothes, and phone bills.
- **Connections to state agencies and local community resources.** Each region engaged partners to support families and problem-solve barriers to employment (see Section 2e for details).

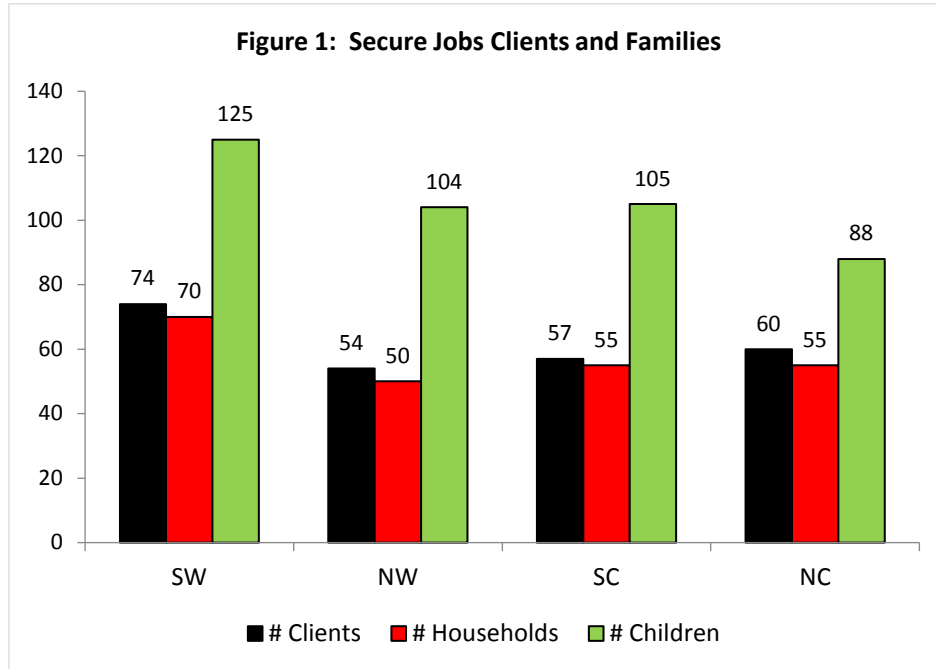
Within this common framework, each region implemented different models in organizing and delivering services. Table 1 summarizes the models for North Central (NC), Northwest (NW), South Central (SC), and Southwest (SW).

**Table 1: Regional Models**

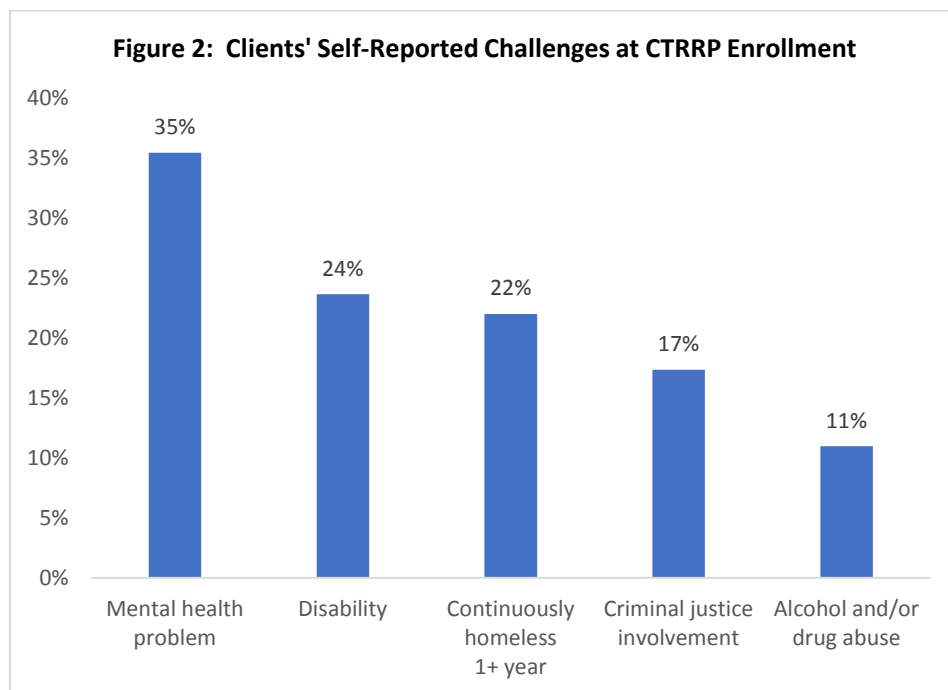
Element	Model	Region(s)
Staffing	Navigator / SJ Liaison at the American Job Center (AJC)	SW, SC
	Navigator outside the AJC	NW, SC
	“Concierge” as liaison between systems	NC
	Peer support specialist at the AJC	SW
Case management & conferencing	Warm handoffs from Rapid Re-Housing (CTRRP)	All Regions
	Case conferences with core SJ agencies	NC
	Case conferences with multiple agencies	NW, SW
Coordination of services	Share documents to streamline AJC enrollment	SC
	Opening Doors events to share information on systems with providers across the region	SW
	Client tracking form for case conferences	NW
	AJC orientation conducted in homeless shelter	NW
	Subsidized employment (Years 2 & 3)	All Regions

**b. Secure Jobs Participants**

Across the 4 regions, Secure Jobs enrolled **245 clients** during the project period. This represented 230 households with a total of 422 children (see Figure 1). Approximately 87% of clients were female, 78% were African-American and/or Latino, and 45% of children were under age 6.



At CTRRP entry, clients’ average monthly income was \$678 and 40% of clients were employed. Clients reported a range of challenges at entry, including mental health problems and disabilities (see Figure 2). Nearly half (46%) reported being homeless 2+ times in the three years prior to enrollment.



Client populations varied by region, including in the areas of employment history, homelessness history, and need for supports (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Secure Jobs Clients at CTRRP Entry**

Client Characteristics	Southwest (SW)	Northwest (NW)	South Central (SC)	North Central (NC)	All Regions
% employed	49%	48%	28%	37%	<b>41%</b>
% homeless 1+ year	32%	22%	16%	14%	<b>22%</b>
Average VI-SPDAT score <sup>4</sup>	7.3	7.3	5.8	7.4	<b>6.9</b>

The **average monthly rent at housing placement** was \$886 per month, ranging for a low average of \$761 per month in Northwest to \$980 per month in Southwest (see Table 3). CTRRP programs generally paid most or all of the rent in the first month, with clients paying only \$85 on average. Rental assistance typically declines over the time, with clients taking on the full rental costs at CTRRP exit. Based on the average rent, a family would need to earn more than \$2,500/month in order to pay 35% or less of their gross income on housing (the ALICE report standard for housing stability).

**Table 3: Monthly Rent at CTRRP Housing Placement**

Housing Placement	SW	NW	SC	NC	All Regions
Average Rent at Placement	\$980	\$761	\$964	\$804	\$886
Average Amount Client Paid in Month 1	\$97	\$0	\$234	\$0	\$85

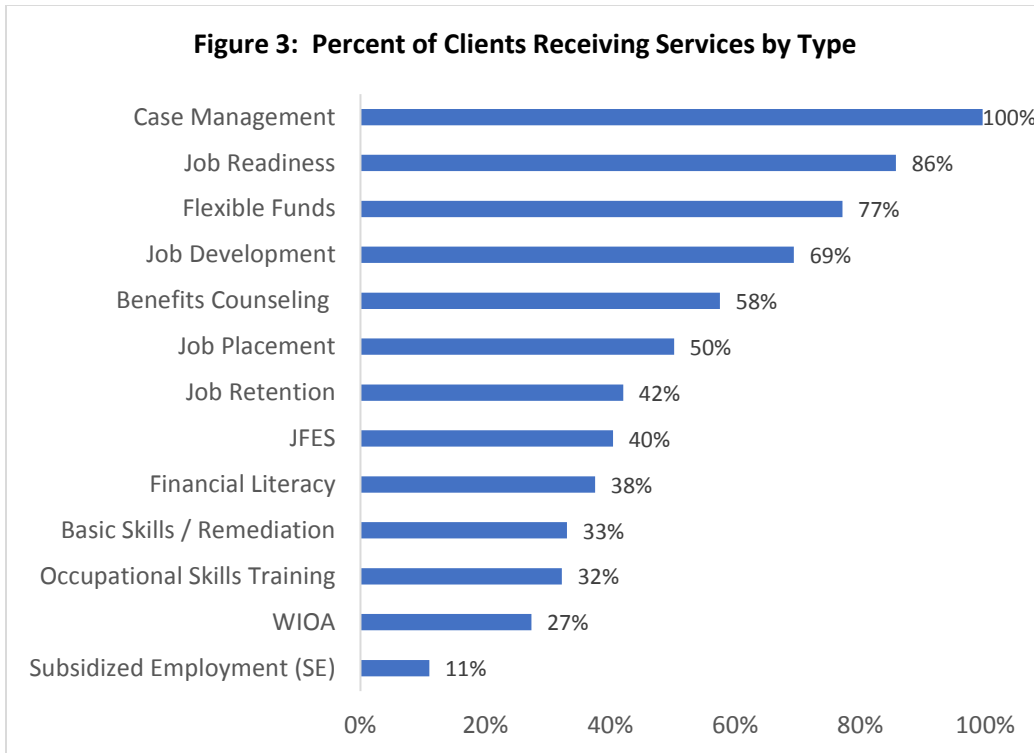
### c. Secure Jobs Services

During the pilot, all clients received case management, with more than half receiving job readiness services, flexible funds (to address barriers to employment or to access training), job development services, benefits counseling, or job placement (see Figure 3 on next page).

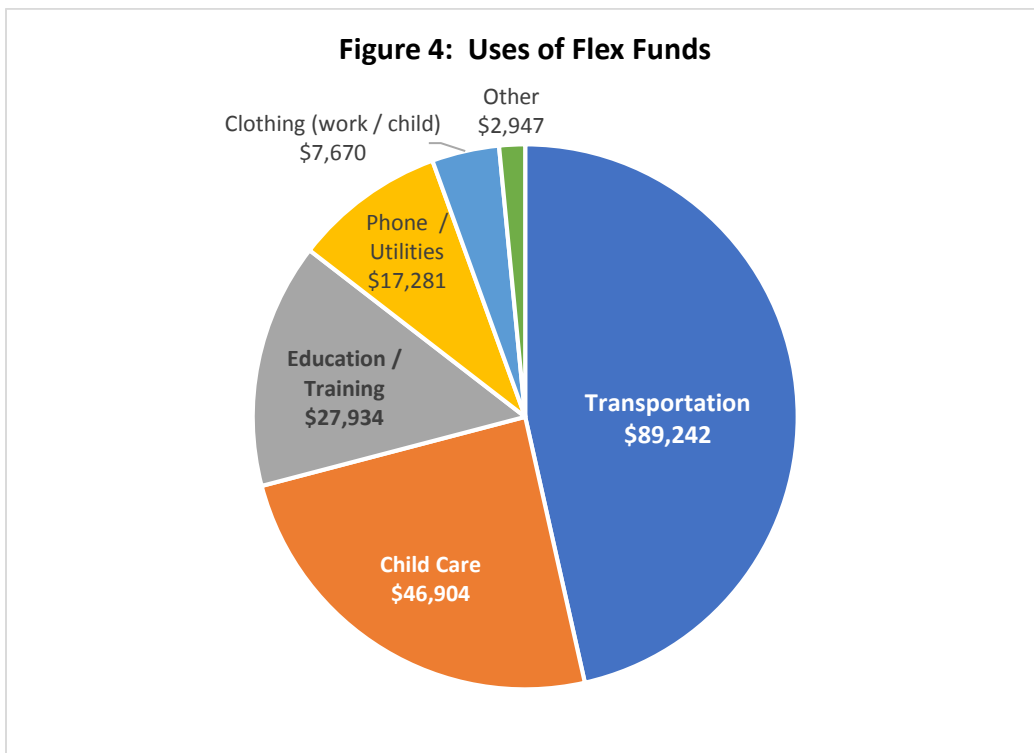
A majority of clients (60%) were enrolled in at least one of the two major funding sources for workforce services: WIOA (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act) and JFES (Jobs First Employment Services). Participation in WIOA varied by region, with several regions utilizing SJ staff to provide services instead of going through the WIOA enrollment process.

Starting in Year 2, regions focused on increasing the number of clients engaged in subsidized employment – in which an employer receives a subsidy to pay for the cost of employing an individual for 6-8 weeks. This can lead to permanent jobs with these employers. Across the regions, only 27 clients (11%) participated in subsidized employment during the project due to different challenges: administrative issues related to how flex funds could be used to pay for subsidized employment for non-JFES clients, engaging employers to participate or continue to participate after a client did not meet work expectations, matching client interests with available work experiences, and subsidized employment not representing a good fit for underemployed clients.

<sup>4</sup> Rapid Re-Housing programs administer the VI-SPDAT (Vulnerability Index – Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Prescreen Tool) to assess clients' need for supports and identify the appropriate housing intervention.



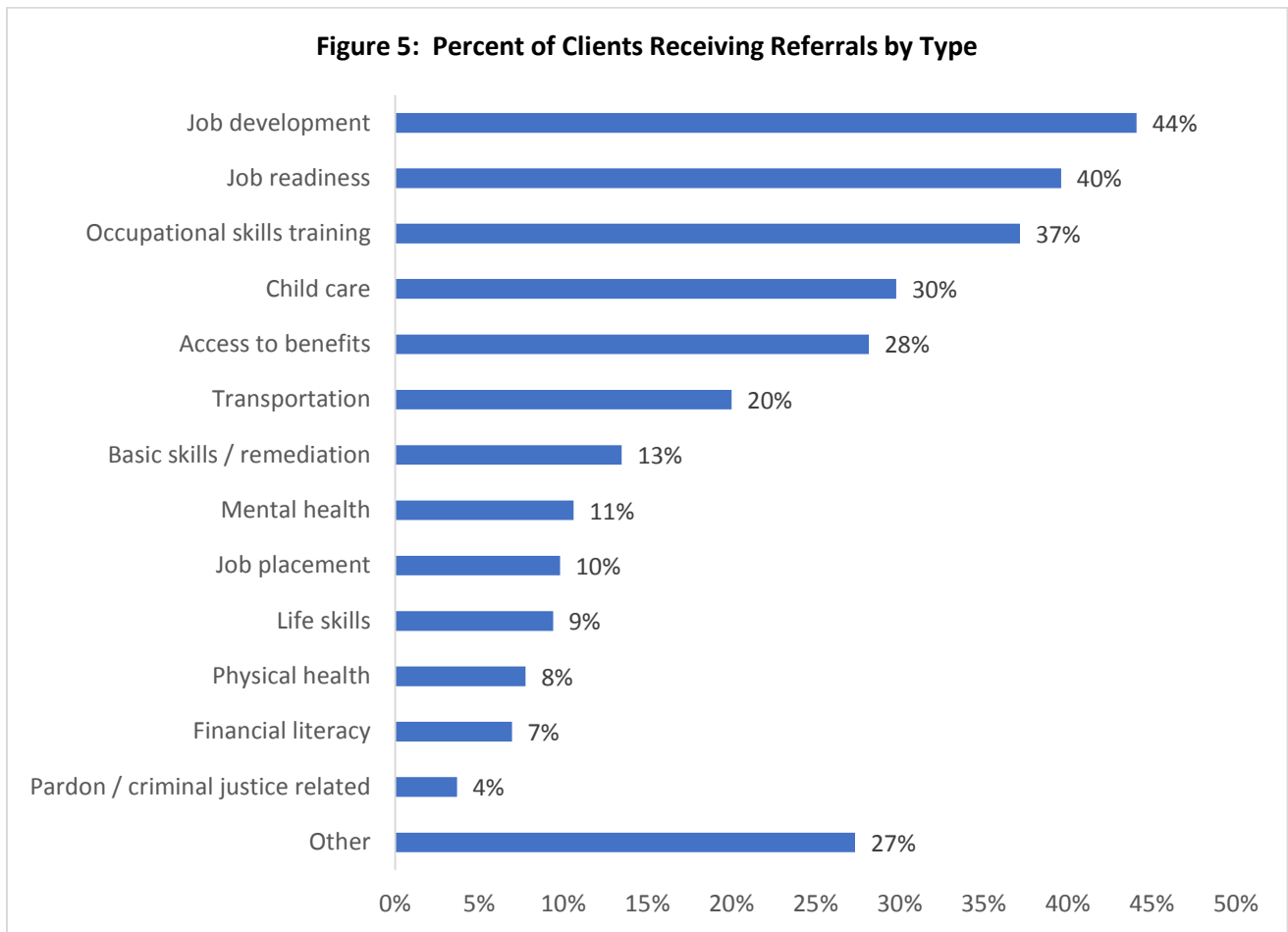
Regions provided more than \$190,000 in flexible funds over the project period – approximately \$780 per client, on average. Figure 4 shows the primary uses of flex funds. Regions varied in how they used flex funds, with South Central using more funds for child care, Southwest and North Central for transportation, and Northwest for occupational skills training.



Cross Sector started tracking detailed data on employment services delivery in Year 3 – tailored to each region’s systems. All regions reported on in-person sessions with core SJ staff (workforce, housing). Key findings included:

- Secure Jobs clients participated in an average of 3.1 individual sessions each quarter with SJ staff, with 20% of clients attending more than half of all sessions.
- The average attendance rate for scheduled appointments was 70%, with a “no show” rate of 14% and 16% of clients cancelling or rescheduling appointments.
- The location of services varied by region, with appointments typically at the AJC in Southwest and North Central, and appointments typically at (or with) the CTRRP provider in Northwest and South Central.
- Employment / income services provided at sessions included: job development (46% of sessions), job readiness (29%), job retention (21%), benefits counseling (17%), financial literacy services (6%), and job placement (4%).

In addition to direct services, most clients (87%) received at least one referral. The most common referrals were for job development, job readiness, occupational skills training, and child care (see Figure 5).





Clients generally rated SJ services and supports favorably. On client surveys, top-rated services included: one-on-one support sessions / case management (92% rated as excellent), help gaining access to child care (79%), job services (77%), and help gaining access to public benefits (74%). Most “strongly agreed” that ‘staff at the program help me succeed’ (74%), ‘the program helps me manage outside barriers to getting a job’ (67%), and ‘staff members are working together to help me get a job’ (67%).

Client interviews and focus groups reinforced these themes.

- Supportive staff.** Numerous clients interviewed expressed appreciation for SJ staff, specifically citing their dedication, skillful use of program resources, and their efforts to boost the spirits of their clients. Illustrative quotes from clients include: “They do any and everything they can to help you. You just have to want the help. I think a lot of people take that for granted.” “Secure Jobs staff do a great job. The program covers everything that needs to be covered.” “They were like my little cheerleaders!” “Anyone can help you on the computer. They really care for you.”
- Secure Jobs as a boost to get clients back on their feet.** In interviews, several SJ clients reported that SJ helped them escape a period of helplessness and hopelessness. Client comments that illustrate this include, “I got so accustomed to falling that I learned to deal with it. I kept trying to lift myself but I kept falling. I finally feel some kind of security.”; “I don’t want to be rich. I just want to be OK. It got to the point where I didn’t even take my clothes out of suitcases. Now I feel like I can finally unpack.”; and “This program put everything in order for me so there’s hope.” Many clients recognized that SJ could only achieve such a powerful impact if the clients themselves were willing to work as partners with SJ staff. One of many quotes illustrating this is, “If candidates are trying to help themselves, the program will help them. If you’re sitting around doing nothing, it’s not going to work. If you give 100%, they’ll give 100%.”
- Flex funds as a useful tool to address barriers to training and employment.** Many SJ clients talked about a range of ways that SJ flex funds were used to address their barriers to training and employment. Client interviews corroborated quarterly report data about uses of flex funds (see page 7), as many clients reported that flex funds were used to help them with transportation challenges (e.g., bus passes, car repairs, driver’s license), child care (e.g., short-term financial assistance), and job training (tuition support), among others.
- Connections to other resources.** In some regions, clients reported that staff successfully connected them to other resources in the community. One client called her SJ navigator “very resourceful,” explaining that the navigator had used SJ flex funds to help her pay for child care, referred her for assistance with her taxes, stood in line with her husband to get his ID, helped her secure energy assistance, and even told her about an event where her husband received a free suit for job interviews.

#### d. Outcomes

As noted in Section 1, SJ funders set ambitious employment and housing outcome targets for the pilot. The regions collectively did not achieve these targets, coming closest in housing retention (see Table 5 on page 12 for a summary). Outcomes through September 30, 2018 are summarized below:

- Program Enrollment.** Across all regions, 52% of CTRRP families enrolled in Secure Jobs, well below the 70% target. Southwest (73%) and Northwest (73%) exceeded the target, North Central (43%) fell below the target and its goal for the number of families served, and South Central (35%) fell well short of the 70% target despite exceeding its goal for the number of families served due to expanding its Rapid Re-Housing program substantially in recent years.

- **Program Completion.** As of September 30, 2018, most clients had either successfully completed Secure Jobs (36%) or were still participating (33%). Approximately 31% dropped out of the program. Clients who dropped out differed from clients who successfully completed SJ and secured employment in the following ways:

Client Characteristic	Dropped Out	Secured employment
Average of Age at enrollment	<b>29.8</b>	34.5
Average of # Children under age 5	<b>0.9</b>	0.6
Average of # times Homeless in last 3 years	<b>1.9</b>	1.5
Percent reporting a Past Felony	11%	<b>24%</b>

- **Securing Employment.** As noted in Section 3b, approximately 40% of clients were working (at least part-time) at enrollment in the program. SJ staff typically worked with employed clients to get better jobs (i.e., full-time, higher wages) and with unemployed clients to secure employment. Through September 30, 2018, 126 clients (51%) either secured employment or got better jobs after enrolling in Secure Jobs, at an average wage of \$11.74/hour. Most of these clients (64%) worked 30+ hours per week, although only 17% reported receiving fringe benefits.

Looking at clients who enrolled in SJ in Years 1 and 2, 95 of 161 (**59%**) secured employment or got better jobs after enrolling. This compares favorably to a 2016 study finding that 32% of families were employed at 20 months after entering a homeless shelter<sup>5</sup>, and is slightly lower than employment outcomes for the Secure Jobs Massachusetts program in its first two phases.<sup>6</sup>

Estimates from quarterly report data indicate that 63% of those employed through Secure Jobs were earning more than \$1,500 per month, but only 9% were earning more than \$2,500 per month. For clients who got new or better jobs, average monthly earned income went from \$462 at CTRRP enrollment to \$1,647 at job placement.

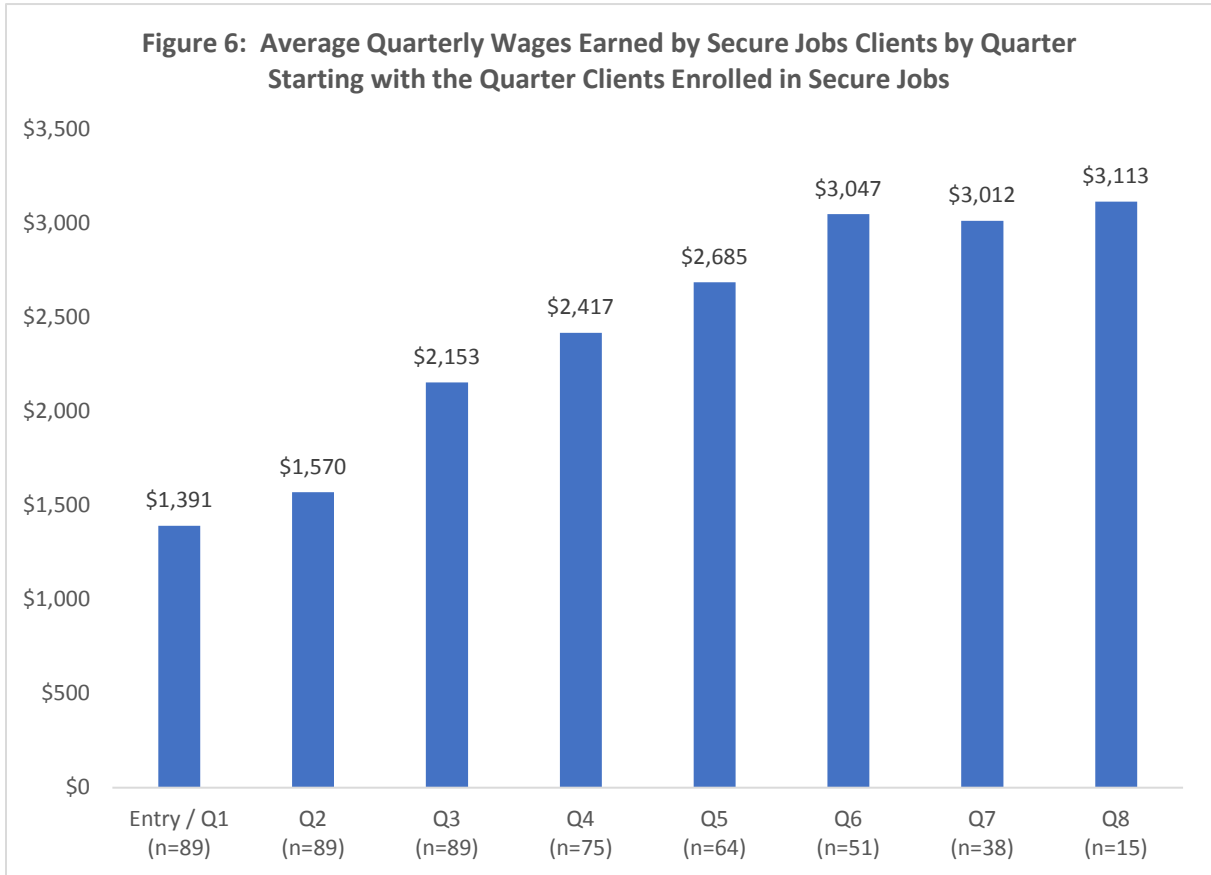
The most common jobs were in the following occupations:

- Office and administrative support (27 clients), including stock clerks and order fillers (14) and customer service representatives (4).
- Sales and related occupations (18 clients), including cashiers (10).
- Food preparation and serving (18 clients).
- Home health aides and nursing assistants (9 clients).
- Personal care and services (9 clients), including personal care aides (5).
- Motor vehicle operators (8 clients).
- Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance (7 clients).
- **Educational Attainment.** Approximately 9% of clients (21) obtained a credential through Secure Jobs, primarily related to occupational credentials (i.e., health fields, child care, culinary). Of note, more than **80%** of the 21 clients who completed training / education secured jobs.
- **Employment Income.** In February 2018, the Connecticut Department of Labor (DOL) extracted Wage File data on 89 SJ clients who enrolled during Year 1. SJ clients, on average, more than

<sup>5</sup> Walton, D., Dastrup, S. & Khadduri, J. *Employment of Families Experiencing Homelessness*. OPRE, May 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Meschede, T., Chaganti, S., & Krajcivcova, E. *Secure Jobs, Secure Homes, Secure Families: Final Report for Massachusetts' Secure Jobs Initiative*. Institute on Assets and Social Policy, Brandies University, April 2017.

doubled their wages 15+ months after enrolling (see Figure 6). However, even after doubling their earnings, Secure Jobs clients, on average, only earned just over \$12,000 per year. (Note that the evaluators will work with DOL to conduct a second analysis of Wage File data through the end of the project period, with this data likely available in February 2019.)



- Total Income.** For the 175 clients with CTRRP exit data, their monthly income increased from \$633 per month at entry to \$877 at exit – a \$244 increase in monthly income. (Note that clients may continue to participate in SJ beyond their CTRRP participation.) Statewide Rapid Re-Housing results for families over the same period show a \$146 increase in income from entry to exit. SJ clients may vary in substantial ways from the general Rapid Re-Housing population (e.g., may be more motivated to find employment), so these comparisons should be viewed with caution.
- Retaining Employment.** While the DOL Wage File data does not track retention in a specific job over time, 26 of 43 (60%) clients who got jobs in 2015-16 maintained their earned income over the next 12 months. However, Wage File data also indicates much **instability** in client wages over time, which could result from losing a job or having work hours cut dramatically over time. For all 89 clients with data:

  - 47% had a 50%+ decrease in wages in at least one quarter, compared with the previous quarter.

- 45% had a \$1,000+ decrease in wages in at least one quarter, compared with the previous quarter.
- 31% lost their job for at least one quarter (i.e., earned \$0 for the quarter after earning wages the previous quarter).

Challenges for SJ clients reflect state and national trends. A recent *New York Times* article noted that nearly a third of the American workforce earn less than \$12 an hour, nearly 40% of full-time hourly workers know their work schedules just a week or less in advance, and half of all new positions are eliminated within the first year.<sup>7</sup> A recent Connecticut Voices for Children report found a long-term “job swap” trend, where low-wage sectors have accounted for most of the job growth during Connecticut’s economic recovery.<sup>8</sup>

- **Housing Retention.** SJ staff collected data on housing retention, with a goal to determine each client’s housing status every 6 months after initial CTRRP placement. For all clients with data, 63 of 68 (93%) were stably housed at 12 months. The Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness (CCEH) also analyzed data on returns to homeless shelters for clients who enrolled in SJ before January 1, 2018. As of October 2018, 11% of clients had returned to homelessness. Looking at clients who enrolled in Secure Jobs more than 2 years ago, 85% had not returned to shelter. Regions also noted that 18 clients have obtained other housing assistance (e.g., Section 8, permanent supportive housing) that will help them sustain their housing.

**Table 5: Secure Jobs Outcomes vs. Targets**

Outcome	Target	Actual	Details
CTRRP families enrolling in SJ	70%	52%	Enrollment by region ranged from 35% to 73%
SJ clients obtaining full-time employment (30+ hours/week)	80%	37%	59% of clients who enrolled in Years 1 and 2 secured jobs, and 37% worked 30+ hours / week
SJ clients retaining employment for 1+ year	80%	60%	Based on consistent earnings each quarter on the DOL Wage File (43 clients)
SJ families maintaining stable housing for 2 years	90%	85%	Based on HMIS “return to shelter” data

#### e. Accomplishments and Challenges

**Accomplishments.** Documentation, interviews, and focus groups revealed several accomplishments:

- **Strengthened housing/workforce partnerships and increased cross-system knowledge and understanding of homeless families.** Partnerships between SJ housing and workforce partners began in earnest during Year 1 of the pilot project, solidified in Year 2, and stabilized in Year 3. Staff from both systems reported that they have learned a great deal about the other system, including processes, programs and acronyms. Workforce staff said they gained a greater appreciation for the challenges facing families that are not stably housed, as well as the level of support that these families need to secure and maintain a job.

<sup>7</sup> Desmond, M. *Americans Want to Believe Jobs Are the Solution to Poverty. They’re Not.* September 11, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/11/magazine/americans-jobs-poverty-homeless.html>

<sup>8</sup> Noonan, R. & Thomas, D. *The State of Working Connecticut 2016*, Connecticut Voices for Children, September 2016. See <http://www.ctvoices.org/sites/default/files/econ16sowctfullreport.pdf>

- **Connections to state agencies and community resources.** Regions engaged additional partners throughout the pilot, including employment services providers, housing agencies, organizations that serve individuals with disabilities, mental health services providers, and state agencies. With Melville Charitable Trust and SJ Advisory Committee assistance, representatives from the Department of Social Services (DSS) and the Department of Children and Families (DCF) were engaged in Secure Jobs meetings starting in Year 2. One SJ navigator said, “I never imagined when I took this job that I would meet so many people from across the community. Our organization has stronger relationships with the United Way, the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), the AJC, and the Salvation Army.”
- **Intensive case management and dedicated navigation services for clients and their families.** While each SJ region took a somewhat different approach to serving clients, SJ staff provided more intensive and comprehensive case management than clients received prior to Secure Jobs. In most regions, this involved an employment navigator who guided clients through the service system in their search for employment and some form of case conferencing where staff from various organizations discussed cases to collectively brainstorm solutions. The universal delivery of more intensive case management served as an acknowledgement that SJ clients need a higher level of services than the typical AJC customer.
- **Use of flex funds to address barriers to employment.** Flex funds represented a component of the SJ model that earned universal acclaim from staff and clients. Flex funds proved to address key gaps that current systems cannot always address quickly, if at all. Regions used flex funds, for example, to enroll SJ clients in training much more quickly than they could enroll by going through the WIOA enrollment process.

**Challenges.** The pilot regions faced the following main challenges in implementing SJ and achieving desired outcomes for SJ clients:

- **Initial assessments may not reflect all barriers to employment.** Staff reported that CTRRP intake data and VI-SPDAT scores often did not reflect all the challenges families face. For example, clients may not disclose mental health conditions or domestic violence experiences at first, only discussing these issues after developing trusting relationships with staff. In one case, a client did not disclose a past felony until it affected their ability to secure a job in the health care field (and after completing a health-related training program).
- **Addressing family barriers to employment.** Despite offering more intensive case management, SJ was often limited in its ability to address all of the issues and challenges faced by clients and their children. Regions struggled to address clients’ and their children’s mental health challenges, for example, as regions reported both a lack of mental health resources and challenges in accessing these resources. While SJ staff and flex funds were sometimes able to help SJ clients identify child care options and provide short-term financial assistance, SJ remained limited in its ability to connect families to the accessible, affordable, high-quality child care they need to maintain stable employment.
- **Building clients’ social and support networks.** To access more affordable housing, many SJ clients had to move to new communities, cutting them off from local support networks of family, friends, and neighbors (see Year 2 report for details). In other cases, clients moved to new communities fleeing domestic violence situations or had “burned bridges” with family and friends.

- **Time to access workforce services vs. urgent needs of SJ families.** While the process varies across regions, many SJ clients and staff describe the length of the process for qualifying for and enrolling in public workforce system services as misaligned with the urgent needs of SJ families. One SJ employment navigator explained that enrolling in WIOA in their region typically took 6-8 weeks because clients have to: a) attend an orientation session; b) meet with a case manager; c) attend a workshop; d) take the CASAS assessment; and e) meet with their case manager again, with orientations, workshops, and CASAS assessments available sporadically and additional delays for clients seeking training who “fail” the CASAS (i.e., do not meet minimum scores for a training program). A SJ client reported that it took him more than two months to get the AJC to help him complete a solid resume because he had to attend orientation and complete an assessment before he could get resume support, and he had to find a babysitter for his children so he could come to all of the required AJC appointments.
- **Limits to effectiveness of employment supports.** Several clients reported that SJ was limited in its ability to address their barriers to employment and help them find and keep good, stable jobs. One client said, “A job developer helped me get a job for 8 or 10 weeks through the subsidized employment program. It was a good job, but the manager said she didn’t have any immediate openings, so I wasn’t hired.” Other clients highlighted child care and unreliable natural supports as two barriers that SJ may not always be able to help clients overcome: “I got some job offers through my own job search, but I haven’t been able to accept any offers because I need child care. I took an overnight job I found through a staffing agency and got trained for it, but the person who was going to watch my kids overnight bailed out so I couldn’t start the job.” “Besides the low pay, it’s flexibility. The jobs are 7 to 3, 3 to 11 or 11 to 7. But when you have kids, it’s tough with day care.”
- **Balancing short-term need for income vs. long-term goal of family self-sufficiency.** Regions struggled to balance clients’ need to get jobs quickly with the goal of securing well-paying, full-time jobs that may require completion of longer-term education and training programs and the development of long-term career pathway plans. Clients recognize that the “clock is ticking” on their rental assistance through CTRRP, and many may not feel that they have the luxury of bypassing a low-wage, part-time job with limited advancement opportunities to wait for a full-time, higher-wage job on a career pathway, or to forego immediate income to pursue the further education they need to land a better job. One client interviewed said frankly, “I don’t have a high school diploma, but I don’t have time to get a GED.” Workforce system staff understand that minimum-wage, part-time jobs will not give clients the stability they desire, but they also must respond to their customers who are asking for help finding a job right away. In addition, client engagement in workforce development activities typically decreases after they start working, resulting in limited ongoing efforts to secure a better job.
- **Limited involvement of SJ leadership teams.** All regions designated SJ Leadership Teams – either as new teams or within Economic Security Workgroups – to provide oversight and address system challenges. In most regions, these teams did not meet regularly during the project period. As a result, most efforts focused on implementation of SJ services and development of the SJ model in each region rather than higher-level system issues.

### 3. Recommendations and Next Steps

**Recommendations.** For this final evaluation report, Cross Sector used a collaborative approach to generating and identifying recommendations. The recommendations below are therefore based on several sources:

- Client data from quarterly reports, DOL Wage File, and workforce services reports.
- Interviews with SJ staff and leaders, and other project stakeholders.
- Interviews and focus groups with SJ clients.
- An end-of-project reflection session on October 1, 2018 involving SJ staff, leaders, evaluators, and other stakeholders (see Appendix C for details).

Based on these sources and a review of research, the following overarching recommendations are presented for all Secure Jobs stakeholders – whether for a planned “Secure Jobs 2.0” or for the ongoing work of all organizations involved in helping homeless families to find and maintain employment that can offer them housing stability.

- **Sustain and expand collaboration.** While collaboration and service integration took different forms in each SJ region, many SJ stakeholders felt strongly that the collaboration SJ sparked should continue and grow. The relationships between the workforce and housing systems greatly increased each system’s understanding of the importance of the other system, increased each system’s appreciation for the housing/employment needs of homeless families, and gave staff from each system at least one “go-to person” at the other system. It will be important to sustain these relationships even in the absence of SJ funding. While many stakeholders acknowledged that sustaining case conferencing at the level that it occurred under SJ will be challenging without a dedicated staff person or consultant to coordinate and facilitate regular case conferences, SJ demonstrated to all parties the value of “comparing notes,” brainstorming solutions, and coordinating efforts for shared clients. SJ organizations should work to figure out ways to sustain these best practices in some form. Many stakeholders also noted the value of collaboration among funders, as well as opportunities for existing SJ funders to pull in additional funders to support SJ priorities. Finally, SJ stakeholders would like to see state agencies build on SJ momentum and continue to increase collaboration and communication across state agencies and between state agencies and the workforce system, housing partners, and other community organizations involved in serving the SJ population.
- **Increase the availability of flex funds.** Flex funds represented a SJ strategy that was universally acclaimed. Federal and state funding rarely allows housing or workforce organizations to spend money on items (e.g., bus passes) or services (e.g., car repairs) that address short-term barriers to employment. State agencies that fund the housing and workforce systems should therefore consider allowing flex funds; private funders should prioritize flex funds as an evidence-based funding mechanism; and housing and workforce agencies should incorporate flex funds into state and private funding proposals as a best practice, as possible.
- **Allow flexibility in time limits for housing assistance.** During Secure Jobs, Connecticut started implementing the Critical Time Intervention (CTI) that set a goal of providing a maximum of 6 months of CTRRP rental assistance. Previously, CTRRP programs could provide up to 12 months of rental assistance. Many SJ stakeholders have noted the disconnect between this compressed time frame for CTRRP families to be able to pay their own rent and the SJ goal of finding family-wage employment for people with significant barriers to employment. To accomplish the goals

of all parties, it is therefore recommended that flexibility be increased in rental assistance provided through CTRRP. For example, extensions or waivers should be available to clients who are enrolled in longer-term education or job training programs, so that clients are not forced to choose between a training program that can help them land a better job that will keep them out of the housing system long-term and a lesser job that can help them pay their rent immediately but may not enable them to achieve long-term housing stability.

“My AJC case manager is good. She gives me job leads. She wants me to further my education, but I need a job *now*.”  
- *SJ client*

- Accelerate the provision of employment services.** As noted in the “challenges” section, the timeline for accessing meaningful workforce services (e.g., job training) through the public workforce system often does not align with SJ families’ urgent need for income. The AJCs should make every effort, therefore, to streamline their enrollment processes by: (a) reducing the number of separate visits clients must make to the AJC to enroll; (b) increasing scheduling flexibility for appointments that are necessary for enrollment; and (c) reducing the amount of paperwork necessary for enrollment (particularly for clients who have already completed similar paperwork for the housing system). The typical duration of the WIOA enrollment process appeared to vary considerably across SJ regions. The slower regions should therefore adopt best practices from the regions where this process occurs more quickly. Other regions should learn from the South Central SJ pilot’s success reducing the paperwork needed for SJ clients to enroll in workforce system programs by having housing system partners share information from the CTRRP intake process. Finally, the Northwest SJ program piloted offering AJC orientation sessions while CTRRP clients were still in shelter to begin the enrollment and employment process earlier in the client’s CTRRP term. This generated significant enthusiasm, and should be expanded in other regions.
- Make AJC services more accessible to higher-need populations.** SJ clients, staff, and other stakeholders generally agree that the AJCs are designed to serve people with a baseline ability to self-navigate and without certain barriers (e.g., lack of child care). SJ “got around” this misalignment of AJC design and the needs of most SJ clients in several ways: more intensive case management at the AJC, employment navigators outside the AJC, case conferencing, and flex funds to address some barriers to participation at the AJCs. Some regions also made a large number of referrals to employment services providers (e.g., Goodwill) designed to accommodate high-need populations. Building on these SJ practices, the AJCs should consider permanently offering higher-touch services to higher-need populations, including more intensive case management and navigation support, referrals to employment services that offer more navigation support, and more direct connections to employers for hard-to-employ customers. The AJCs may also consider building on South Central’s example of offering “child-friendly” hours by making special accommodations for homeless customers with children to allow them to bring their children to the AJCs so they can more easily attend AJC appointments.

“Workforce case managers mostly seem to prepare clients for their job search instead of supporting the actual job search.”  
- *Housing case manager*

“I sometimes wonder if the AJC makes it so hard to get real services because they are intentionally trying to weed people out who aren’t committed.”  
- *SJ staff person*



- Increase the use of person-centered practices to boost client engagement.** Many SJ staff (and even a few clients) identified a lack of client motivation and engagement as a barrier to the employment success of SJ clients. While some SJ clients may truly lack internal motivation to work, it is also likely that some of the limitations of the employment service system noted above contribute to diminished client engagement in services by discouraging clients. Multiple Connecticut WDBs have in recent years adopted some level of person-centered practice in their AJCs. The Northwest WDB, for example, recently trained all AJC case managers in person-centered practice, changed job titles from “case manager” to “career navigator,” and adjusted work flows to reduce the number of times a client is “handed off” from one staff person to another. SJ built on this momentum and achieved some success moving the housing and employment services systems to a more person-centered approach to case management. Person-centered practices have been shown to increase client engagement.<sup>9</sup> The workforce and housing systems should therefore make person-centered practices more widespread.
- Advocate for state policies that improve the quality of low-skill jobs.** Quarterly report data, Wage File data, and anecdotes from SJ staff and clients indicate that most of the jobs SJ clients landed: a) paid low wages; b) were part-time and/or offered unstable schedules; or c) were temporary or unstable long-term. It is the belief of SJ leaders and stakeholders that people who are willing to work should have opportunities to earn a living wage, to have a relatively stable schedule, and to enjoy some security that their job will still be available to them tomorrow if they perform well. SJ stakeholders should advocate for state policies that support these beliefs. Current labor market conditions (low unemployment) and state government composition make the time right to advocate for policy changes that increase job quality for low-skill workers. Momentum for increased wages for low-skill jobs has also been building across the nation, as major retailers (e.g., Walmart, Target, Amazon) have recently announced plans to increase their minimum wages, and “states covering one-fifth of the U.S. workforce are phasing in \$15 minimum wages.”<sup>10</sup> SJ stakeholders should encourage the Connecticut government to follow suit on minimum wage increases and to take a leadership position in terms of regulating scheduling practices (e.g., tell workers their schedules at least one week in advance, offer workers a stable schedule week-to-week) to protect low-skill workers.
- Increase the quantity of affordable housing options.** The lack of affordable housing in Connecticut remains a significant barrier to housing stability for the SJ population. SJ stakeholders recommended advocating for a range of policies to increase affordable housing options – including increased funding for affordable housing, shared housing models (families sharing a house or apartment), better targeting of existing subsidies, and “deeply” affordable housing and rent subsidies (for people earning 25% to 35% of Area Median Income).

“Find the best in people. Focus on their strengths and not their weaknesses. When you focus on weaknesses, you forget the strengths. Focusing on their strengths changes their mentality about how the system works. It feels like you’re pointing fingers if you focus on barriers. Tell them what they’re good at – they don’t hear that very often.”

- *SJ employment case manager*

“My current job keeps dropping my hours.” “Most of my pay is going for rent now.”

- *SJ clients*

<sup>9</sup> See Tondora J, Pocklington S, Gorges AG, Osher D, Davidson L. *Implementation of person-centered care and planning: from policy and practice to evaluation*. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: Washington, DC; 2005. Institute of Medicine. *Crossing the quality chasm: a new health system for the 21st century*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press; 2001.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2018/01/low-wage-workers-finally-get-a-raise/550487/>

**Next Steps.** The Secure Jobs evaluation collected data and evidence to answer many of the evaluation questions, but was limited in a number of respects (see Section 1). In planning Secure Jobs 2.0, we offer the following considerations for future evaluations:

- **Housing Instability.** Available data in HMIS on “returns to shelter” do not capture the extent of housing instability among SJ families. Interviews and focus groups suggested that a number of families who do not return to shelter face significant housing challenges (e.g., eviction, unsafe housing conditions, frequent moves). Future evaluation should consider methods for recording and assessing housing instability.
- **Workforce Services.** Future evaluations should build on initial efforts in Year 3 to collect data on the types and intensity of workforce services to better assess how different services contribute to employment and self-sufficiency.
- **Barriers to Employment.** Over the course of the pilot, SJ staff and stakeholders noted potential barriers to employment – including domestic violence and child mental health conditions and/or disabilities – that were not included in SJ data reports. This data could provide a more complete picture of the SJ population.
- **Case Studies.** It might be helpful to interview a number of SJ clients over the course of their participation to better tell the stories of clients and their families. These case studies can provide insights that supplement quarterly report data and one-time client interviews.
- **Comparison Study.** As a pilot, the primary focus of the evaluation was documenting implementation and using data in developing and improving SJ models. While initial outcome data indicates that Secure Jobs clients had better employment / income outcomes compared with traditional Rapid Re-Housing clients, Secure Jobs 2.0 could include a more rigorous evaluation of SJ clients vs. a comparison group.

“There’s talk that the landlord may sell. I’ve never met him. I’m not sure what would happen then. We may need to move. That’s happened before.”  
- *SJ client*