Education: Employment Training

CONTEXT

Immigrants keep coming to Santa Clara County in great numbers despite the high cost of living. Many of them need to upgrade or change their job skills in order to get better jobs or to change or advance their careers. Improving job skills for some immigrants is an imperative to be able to support their families. A significant number of immigrants (and native-born population) in Santa Clara County are below the poverty line and becoming a part of "working poor". SJMN 2/28/00

There have been many positive trends in CalWORKs training programs in Santa Clara County including improvements in transportation, childcare, and a greater variety of training programs. Nonetheless, immigrant CalWORKs participants often feel that they do not have enough time to both learn the language and job skills required to escape poverty. In fact, despite the record pace of finding employment by CalWORKs recipients in Santa Clara County, immigrants are the hardest to serve and immigrants are the majority of those remaining on the CalWORKs rolls. Of 29,245 CalWORKs participants on October 1, 2000, 15,567 or 53% reported a primary language other than English.

In order to find work, keep jobs and receive promotions, many immigrants need vocational ESL, professional courses, and assistance finding jobs. There is no doubt that many immigrants, and especially the most recent immigrants, need information about training programs. This includes knowledge about the different programs, requirements, licensing, and costs. Adult education centers, community colleges, universities, private institutions and non-profit agencies provide various training programs, often connected with improving English language skills. The Center for Employment Training (CET) is an example of a locally initiated, nationally recognized employment program that has trained thousands of immigrants using Functional Context English (integrated vocational and English learning). Some of these programs such as adult education and community colleges are low cost and some can be very expensive.

Other positive initiatives that help working people in general, and immigrants in particular, include neighborhood and 'self-formed" agencies (Mayfair Initiative, CMAA) as well as community run computer schools (the Portnov School). In general, whenever employers and companies get involved in workers' training there is a potential to improve the situation of low-paid immigrants.

Projections (1997-2004) of occupations with the most job growth in Santa Clara County include computer engineers, retail salespersons, system analysts, electrical engineers, computer specialists, general and engineering managers, janitors, cashiers, office clerks, computer programmers, registered nurses and truck drivers. SJMN 6/6/00  For many of these occupations either a bachelor's degree or short-term on-the-job training is
necesary. With passage of the new H-1B bill permitting 195,000 new immigrant professionals per year and mandating more training of local residents, it is anticipated that thousands of new professionals, their spouses, and local residents (including immigrants) will need specific programs and classes for their "professional adaptation”.

**FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

*Finding 1: There are insufficient immigrant-specific job training and job placement programs, especially programs that target low-wage immigrant workers to improve their skills for higher paying jobs.*

The focus group with Ethiopian immigrants suggested that training programs are needed that take into account immigrants’ experience and training. The focus group with immigrant professionals indicated that more special training programs for professionals are needed, including bilingual training programs to get used to professional terminology. They emphasized that special professional centers and organizations for immigrants, or existing professional organizations, need to have detailed information about requirements, tests, procedures and additional training programs. Korean immigrants provided strong evidence of the need for a community service center with a diverse selection of bilingual training programs.

Focus groups with Latino immigrants documented the need for programs that provide training for higher wage jobs. Latinas on CalWORKs said that they needed on-going training to find and keep jobs. Participants suggested that they need on-going training programs even after people get off CalWORKs. Latino immigrant youth emphasized in a focus group that low wage jobs were usually offered to immigrants, and they need to break that cycle. Eric, Rhoda, Flor, and Pappy from the Philippines stated: “Unless we get an upgrade or get job training we cannot get better paying jobs.”

Immigrants Building Community (IBC) provided similar evidence. The Bosnian IBC group pointed out that training programs for immigrant professionals were lacking. The group also said that there was a need to assess occupational structure and employment training preferences inside the community. The Latino IBC group emphasized that bilingual training programs were needed in the Latino community. The Vietnamese IBC group repeated the need for bilingual or Vietnamese language programs. The group felt that more evening and weekend classes should be offered. Vietnamese participants thought that there was a lack of information about requirements for training programs and occupations.

The random sample survey showed that immigrants needed help finding jobs more often than the US born (16% versus 6.5% of those who answered the question). Mexican and Filipino immigrants were the most likely to say that they needed help. Although 16% of immigrants said that they needed help, only 4.8% of them had received help in finding jobs. In general, both immigrants and the US born were satisfied with the help received.
Over 17% of immigrants and 5.5% of US-born respondents said they needed employment training, a rate more than three times higher for immigrants. Out of those immigrants who expressed the need, only 5.5% had received employment training.

Research in gaps within existing services and in best practices research documented the need for special training programs that would help immigrants advance and escape from the trap of low paying jobs. The Center for Employment Training is a model national program using bilingual Functional Context Education to provide over a dozen programs to immigrants for over 30 years. The Mayfair Neighborhood Initiative has created networks with Cisco so that residents can prepare for careers and assume better paying jobs. The Portnov Computer School has many immigrant students that will likely gain access to the high tech labor market.

**Recommendations for Finding 1:**

- Create more programs that target low-wage immigrant/workers. Use the Center for Employment Training, the Portnov School, and the Mayfair-Cisco Networking Academy as models.
- Identify or create additional resources for specific employment training and placement programs for immigrants.
- Help smaller and newer immigrant organizations and groups assess the needs of specific immigrant backgrounds for specific training programs. The county should help in this assessment and matching.

**Finding 2: CalWORKs time limits impose serious constraints upon immigrants, especially those who are Limited English Proficient (LEP).**

Focus groups with Latinas and Vietnamese women on CalWORKs documented the need for more time to learn English and obtain job training. Latinas needed on-going training to find and keep jobs. The participants emphasized that the improvement of English skills needs to continue after finding jobs. They demanded on-going training programs, which extend beyond CalWORKs. The Vietnamese women on CalWORKs focus group provided similar feedback. According to the participants of this focus group, CalWORKs does not give enough time to participants to learn English or find well-paid jobs. They needed more help in finding jobs that pay enough to live. They thought that at least two years of full-time job and language training were necessary.

Leslie, a woman from Nicaragua, provided the following observations: "I've observed how the welfare system works where they require everyone to work, and I can say that CalWORKs doesn't work. It doesn't work, first, because the people who are there are Latinos and they don't have the capacity to speak English. So they wind up being laid off after a short time of being on a job. Many times they are required to read English on the
job and they don't know how to speak or read it, so they are laid off or fired. They can't be trained on the job because they don't have enough English.”

**WHAT IMMIGRANTS SAY… VIETNAMESE WOMEN ON CALWORKS**

“I did job search about a year ago and a lot of companies already have my resume but I didn't pass their English requirements. One company hired me on as a temp and fired me after 2 weeks. When they need you, they'll hire you for a short period of time. All of us wanted to work and we were all very disappointed when they fired us. It's always better to work then to be on CalWORKs because the money is much more.”

“I've applied to work in many companies but they didn't accept me because my English was not good. I wanted to take ESL but the people from CalWORKs made me go find a job first. After a while when I still couldn't find work, then they let me go to school. It wasted my time.”

The random sample survey indicated that of CalWORKs recipients, both US-born and immigrant respondents believed that the 5-year limit was not enough for self-sufficiency. Three out of five (60%) of all immigrant respondents said that the time was inadequate. Many immigrants indicated that they had different time periods to complete training, ranging from 0 to 42 months. Most of them (54%) said that they had 6 months or less to complete employment training. For the great majority of immigrants that is not enough time for training. Most of them said that they first needed ESL before going to any training.

There are also cultural restraints which may take years to change or that will never change, providing a barrier to CalWORKs time limits. A Moslem woman stated "Even though I will finish school, due to my Islamic dress and veil I will not be able to be employed in the future to be self-sufficient ".

**Recommendation for Finding 2:**

Advocate for legislative changes so that immigrant CalWORKs participants get more time for both training and ESL. The current policy makes it virtually impossible for immigrants to “train themselves out of poverty” and into self-sufficiency.

**Finding 3: Immigrant public assistance recipients usually receive temporary and low paid jobs.**

Three focus groups with women CalWORKs recipients from Vietnam, Latin America and Moslem countries indicated that these women had difficulties in keeping jobs or finding more permanent employment. Also, these women said that they needed on-going support in order to escape the trap of low-paying jobs.
The random sample survey documented that CalWORKs recipients felt that they were often forced to take low paid jobs. The graph below presents all immigrant respondents from the public assistance recipient survey who responded to the question about feeling forced to accept a low paid job. Immigrant respondents from Bosnia were the most likely to feel forced to accept low paid jobs. In most of the groups, at least 20% of respondents felt the same way. However, there was also a direct correlation between the level of English proficiency and feeling forced to take low paid jobs. The lower the level of English proficiency, the more significant was the feeling of being forced to take a low paid job.

Respondents Who Felt Forced to Accept a Low-Wage Job (Public Assistance Recipients Survey)

For adults, learning a second language is almost always difficult. Therefore, immigrants need more time and better programs. The focus groups with Latinas on CalWORKs pointed out the needs for on-going training to find and keep jobs. Improvement of English skills needs to continue after finding employment. The random sample survey indicated that of all the specific barriers to better paying jobs, for immigrants the lack of English is key. The only exceptions were in the Indo-American and Filipino groups, which had a high percentage of English-speakers.

**Recommendations for Finding 3:**

- Work with employers and seek policy changes to develop more permanent and better-paid jobs to CalWORKs recipients.
- Encourage employers to provide English and job training classes on site so that these low paid immigrants can progress.
- Offer tax incentives for companies that provide on-going training and language classes to immigrants.
Create some model immersion programs for those who would prefer intensive learning.

**WHAT IMMIGRANTS SAY…**

**PROFESSIONALS NOT WORKING IN THEIR PROFESSIONS**

“There are many problems with the acceptance here of university studies completed in our home countries. In many cases that I have seen, people receive a university education in Central America and when they get here they have to take new examinations and study the same courses again. They make you study one or two more years. I came here with the equivalency of certain studies, and of the 30-35 classes that I had taken they only gave me credit for three. This was for interior design. Many of my friends work in catering. They work in catering even though they are professionals. In one case I had a friend who was an architect from Indonesia, and he told me that in order to work as an architect he had to take many more classes. It is clear that we have to respect the rules of each country but I believe that there should be some way to validate past studies so that it is not so difficult to exercise their prior professions. They should find a way for a person to work in their profession and at the same time take classes in their field, not require them to take all of their prerequisites first and then allow them to work in their profession. It is a major obstacle.”  *Silvia, El Salvador*

**Finding 4: Immigrant professionals need special training and ESL programs, professional centers, networks, and more help overall in their “professional adaptation” to their vocation in the United States.**

Spouses of immigrants holding H4 visas, often professionals themselves, do not have the right to work and have difficulties in getting education and training. With the teacher shortage in the United States, many could be trained as teachers. The focus groups with professionals not working in their profession and Indian immigrants documented the need for spouses with H-4 visas to have more independent status. These immigrants often have difficulties obtaining education and additional training.

Gaps in services and best practices research indicates the demand for more programs and classes such as De Anza College’s ESL for Allied Health Professionals. Mission College also has innovative classes in cross-training professionals who need English to work in the United States within their lifelong profession and experience. Immigrant professionals need to be better informed of these professional adaptation classes, so that they can at least work in their profession even if at a para-professional level. In terms of seeking professional credentials necessary to practice their profession in the U.S., the STAR Re-credentialing Resources for Foreign Professionals can be considered a model.
WHAT IMMIGRANTS SAY…

PROFESSIONALS NOT WORKING IN THEIR PROFESSIONS

“I am an experienced electrician and have worked in this field for over ten years. When I tried to get a job I realized that all sorts documents were needed. There is no way I can find those documents now. All I need is for someone to give a test and I will prove it to them that I can do the work.” Zakaria, Somalia

“Give professionals who speak different languages a chance to work for their communities in their own languages.” Bali, Pakistan

“In Santa Clara County whenever a new immigrant professional comes, we should give him all the literature available, help him during weekends and at other times. Community centers and professional organizations have to provide information about specific requirements, costs, time necessary to meet all the requirements. The County has to have more active role in informing. We can even make embassies able and responsible for providing more information to people with H visas about issues concerning their profession.” Ram, Uganda

“If you call California Dental Association, they will tell you only a part of the story about one test you need to pass. They don't tell you who is going to pass the test and how much time you will need. Big corporations even have their own immigration services to fix the status for engineers. But for dentists and other professionals nobody cares” John Smith, Yugoslavia

“I am a food technologist and I also have a master's degree in Horticulture. I have 2 master's degrees. I wanted to teach at SJSU as a lecturer or a demonstrator for Horticulture. They said: ‘You can be a field man and look after our garden.’ People who are very well qualified are not even getting a chance to volunteer. One of my friends is a surgeon and has a degree from London went to Kaiser and asked to volunteer. They said ‘you can pull wheel-chairs as a volunteer.’ That's a little too much for a surgeon who practiced surgery for more than thirty years.” Bob, Pakistan

“Most of our people were high officers, doctors, pharmacists in Vietnam. They are still working in Silicon Valley, but they don't have their rights. They got high education in Vietnam, but they have a hard time with their licenses and discrimination in the U.S. Even when they graduate they get bad jobs.” Hon, Vietnam

“I passed the English test, but for a graphic design test I didn't know the words, technical words, although I know that in my language.” Juliet, Argentina, 19 years of education
**Recommendations for Finding 4:**

- Create more special professional adaptation programs and classes for immigrant professionals.
- Encourage and financially support existing professional organizations and community centers as well as immigrant specific organizations to provide comprehensive information for different professions so that immigrants can access this information as newcomers. These organizations should provide all necessary information, from requirements and licensing process to fees and places where additional training is available.
- Encourage the formation of more immigrant professional networks, beyond the hi-tech industry.
- Develop internships in governmental, educational, and non-profit institutions so that immigrant professionals can stay in their fields and gain necessary work experience.
- Improve career counseling at community colleges and universities to provide all the necessary information for professional adaptation curriculums to foreign-educated professionals. In this regard, it is important not to steer immigrants down certain paths because of stereotypes. As Laura, a professional from El Salvador stated in the Central American focus group, "They discriminate a lot against Central Americans because they think we're not trained people ("personas capacitadas") like them or those from other countries."
- Allow spouses with H-4 visas to work and receive additional education and training, advocating for this policy change.

**Finding 5: More training programs and ESL classes are needed at worksites.**

Immigrants Building Community documented this need. The Iranian IBC Group pointed out that Vocational English as a Second Language (VESL) was needed, and suggested that businesses offer VESL more frequently. The random sample survey showed that 17.2% of immigrants and 5.5% of US born respondents needed employment training. For almost 12% of immigrants it was important to have worksite vocational classes. In analyzing gaps in services, the same conclusion was reached.

Silvia, a professional from El Salvador, stated: "Even though we don't speak English, employers need to respect our skills, our abilities, and respect us as human beings. We deserve respect. We have a lot of people who are capable, but what we don't have is on-the-job training."

**Recommendations for Finding 5:**

- Support companies that provide on-site vocational training and VESL. Tax incentives are appropriate in a case like this where long-term self-sufficiency and re-payments into the tax base by higher-paid workers take place.
• Develop jobsite coordination with different businesses, including the compilation of best practice companies. This could occur either through the county CalWORKs program or in concert with the county-wide ESL coordination that is proposed.

**Finding 6: There are few job training programs that provide a bilingual form of instruction, Functional Context Education, or culturally appropriate childcare.**

Early childhood development classes in Spanish and English at Mission College and formerly at Gavilan College provide a model that “kills four birds with one stone”. First of all, many immigrants prefer bilingual instruction initially in the United States so that they can fully grasp the material. Secondly, by teaching in the native language and English directed at a specific skill, learning is improved because it is contextualized. It is made real. Third, these immigrants receive college credit for classes that are taught predominantly in their native language. This provides the basis and incentive for further college learning so that a “step-in, step-out” career ladder toward ever-increasing self-sufficiency is possible. Finally, there is a need for bilingual childcare workers and businesses. The random sample survey showed that some immigrants had language difficulties at their childcare, and that immigrants prefer in-home care of disabled and elderly relatives. In an Immigrants Building Community session the Latino group said that it was important to encourage mothers to open private in-home childcare centers where they would provide care in Spanish.

An analysis of gaps in services indicated that there are not enough bilingual and other language instruction programs for occupational training programs. Four Cs and Mission College are the only programs providing such instruction, and they are providing it for Early Childhood Education only. Two other programs that could be effective in training immigrants at the community college level are bilingual certificates for elderly and disabled care providers and certificate programs for bilingual teacher aides.
Recommendations for Finding 6:

- Offer more early childhood education classes in languages other than English.
- Better coordinate the business goals of these programs with chambers of commerce that serve immigrants in their own language, to develop a business plan, a credit record, and knowledge of lending institutions and opportunities.
- Offer more training programs for bilingual teacher aides and for disabled and senior care providers in a bilingual form of instruction or in languages other than English.
- Analyze which job growth areas require some college training and offer bilingual or monolingual first language instruction to immigrants so that they can learn in context, develop necessary job skills, and earn college credit that can be applied to career growth.

Finding 7: Immigrants lack distance learning options and class scheduling that meet their learning needs.

The Korean focus group documented that there is a need for more diversified programs and schedules. The Vietnamese immigrant focus group also documented that older immigrants who do not drive need classes that are easier to access. Immigrants Building Community, especially the Latino and Vietnamese groups, affirmed that many immigrants work long hours, in shifts, and at more than one job, so that they have little time or opportunity to take classes, even though they are interested. They proposed different schedules of classes and new ways of teaching that would take into account the realities of hard work. Best practices research indicates that distance learning programs--both bilingual and English only--are effective solutions for immigrants who cannot attend classes offered in a conventional classroom setting.

The random sample survey and the public assistance recipient survey both confirmed that many potential and current students consider current class scheduling and their current work load as incompatible for taking ESL classes regularly in a conventional classroom setting. On the random sample, approximately 44% of the immigrant respondents said that they had no time, 29% said that they had scheduling problems, and almost 14% of immigrants recommended longer classes. The same percentage (14%) reported the lack of affordable childcare as a barrier to accessing training and English classes, and 8% said that they had no transportation. For Mexican, Vietnamese, and Indian immigrants weekend classes are better than other scheduling options. The evening time slot is good also. Overall, more than 31% of immigrants think that weekend classes would be helpful. Respondents also believe that having English classes by computer (23%) and by audiocassette (24%) would help immigrants learn English faster.

One immigrant named Alberto stated that during the week, "The 6-9 PM time slot for studying is good". A Salvadoran woman named Laura stated that "There are Saturday classes and this is good. We need more." Many immigrants stated they do not know about the availability of existing weekend class and distance learning options.
Recommendations for Finding 7:

- Encourage community colleges, adult education, businesses, and non-profit organizations to offer more distance learning and weekend programs to immigrants, backed up by technical support.
- Better publicize the existence of the programs that exist, in a language understood by immigrants.