

Testimony of David Wellmaker

House Health & Human Services Committee, HB 2600

February 11th, 2016

Hello, my name is David Wellmaker. I am an independent contractor with the Kansas City, Kansas and Overland Park branches of the Department for Children and Families (DCF), since November 2014. Prior to beginning my contract work with DCF, I had a contract with the Kansas Workforce Partnership Office. For 3 months in the summer, from 2009-2015, I had the privilege of training for 30 days and working to gain employment for 2 months, for up to 200 at risk youth, aged 18-21 in Wyandotte, Johnson, Jackson, and Leavenworth Counties.

In my capacity, as a contractor with DCF, I have had the privilege of providing three services for referred clients on cash assistance (TANF):

1. Conduct a Successful Living, class once a month for two consecutive weeks, for the WYCO DCF branch.
 - a. Objective: Help clients identify and develop strategies to overcome emotional and life barriers, which may affect their ability to attain and keep gainful employment.
2. Conduct a weekly Job Club, one day a week, at the JOCO DCF office.
 - a. Objective: Assist clients in identifying career opportunities, write functional and quantifiable resumes, and job search.
3. Provide individualized Job Coaching services, for clients deemed ready to work, for both offices.
 - a. Help clients, referred by Career Navigators, identify and overcome barriers to possible employment
 - b. Create measurable, functional, quantifiable resumes which stand apart from the other job applicants
 - c. Search for meaningful employment commensurate with their families income/life style needs
 - d. Gain employment, and retain that job for at least 90 days

Since I have worked, as a contractor for DCF, my level of admiration for the services they provide to clients has grown exponentially. Prior to working in my current capacity, I must identify myself as a skeptic. I was one of those who thought, and at times verbalize to friends, my disdain and skepticism for those who I thought were lazy, just seeking a government handout. I now know that view, that bias, to be completely unfounded. For the majority of the over 175 DCF clients, I have worked with, their desire to be something more, to gain employment, provide for their family, is inspiring. They have to deal with many challenges to attain self-sufficiency. Clients must deal with issues such as relying on buses to job search keep a job, lack of education, childcare and mental health issues, domestic violence, low self-esteem, and lack of work skills, to name a few. Yet, they do so with dignity, with a desire to learn, to take advantage of the opportunities afforded them by the Robin Schrand's, Debbie Helton's, and their passionate, committed, Career Navigators.

I will be the first to say there are a few clients, very few, who due to an institutionalization of their mind and spirit, attempt to take advantage of the many services provided to them by DCF. But, they are quickly identified, in my experience, and weeded out quickly. These types are not allowed to negatively affect or corrupt a service (DCF) dedicated to raising people out of poverty, and giving them hope they can be so much more than they ever realized. Without DCF, its Navigators, community based partner, and providers like myself, many people who were once without hope, no future, still would be languishing in despair. My business partners name is Hilary Anderson. We have opened a successful business dedicated to raising the spirit and expectations of DCF clients. Hilary was a DCF client. There are hundreds, thousands of success stories like Hilary's.