



**Greater Battle Creek/Calhoun County Continuum of Care
Employment Resource Network
Guide Book**

What is it?

The Employment Resource Network (ERN) is accessed through the HARA (Housing Assessment and Resource Agency). ERN is a community partnership which will aid in increasing employment and resource support opportunities as well as housing access for the homeless and chronically homeless in the Greater Battle Creek/Calhoun County area.

Participants will be identified through the Calhoun County Continuum of Care Coordinated Entry System (CES) as they access the system through self-referral or agency referral. Navigation and agency collaboration are key to this process. The CES is a no wrong door entry system which gives participants access to opportunities from several locations.

[CoC CES Entry – Assessment – Referral to HARA - Navigation for program and housing match](#)

Why?

The target population of homeless and unemployed as well as chronically unemployed have more pressing needs and often fewer skills to offer potential employers than most people who are looking for employment. The unemployed homeless are living an experience of a hand to mouth existence where daily survival needs distort priorities most of the community takes for granted.

For those reasons, personnel working with this population need a different skillset along with the ability to inspire trust and confidence which is not necessarily required with those working in a typical employment agency environment. Community support resources become more important as personal and family resources dwindle and disappear. Navigation and case management are vital to making time saving connections as well as offering encouragement and motivation to someone who feels far from successful and able to achieve and grow.

This process is a way to give a population who feels largely ignored and demeaned, opportunity for more substantial income growth and stability that can change their lives and break what is often a generational cycle of poverty and instability.

Target Population

Accessed through the Coordinated Entry System (CES), ERN is a tool to be used to help those homeless who are physically and mentally able to work but unemployed or underemployed find and keep adequate employment and housing. Services will be available to those who, with minimal assistance, can return to work and maintain long term employment, however special emphasis is on the hard to employ and chronically unemployed. The primary program participant will be those with gaps in education and employment skills, both hard and soft work skills, along with a poor work history leading to repeat occurrences of homelessness.

Goals and Purpose

The goals of ERN are:

- to break the cycle of chronic unemployment, evictions, and homelessness;
- to provide stabilization of individuals and families in crisis due to chronic unemployment;
- to assist in acquiring and or increasing employment skills with the intended outcome of increasing employability and thereby, increasing income and becoming more attractive to landlords and eventually housing lenders.
- to promote the acquisition of skills and habits that lead to increased opportunities for better employment and housing;
- to help keep that employment permanently or until a better employment opportunity is found.

Ideally, if gaps between employment occur they will be brief and become further and further apart. Among the tools to accomplish the goals of ERN are increased education and skills building including social and communication skills, and navigation to community supports.

Rapid Rehousing efforts will happen in conjunction with employment services. The addition of housing to employment services acts as additional motivation for participation and adds to participant self-esteem and feelings of empowerment. Housing is the first priority for anyone who doesn't have it. The sooner a participant acquires housing, the sooner they can focus on employment.

How?

Navigation consists of referrals to agencies and services based on participant assets and skills, needs and barriers as determined during the initial assessment.

After assessment, the case manager will match the participant with the community supports that address the participants' needs and goals. First, they will assist in acquiring housing and help finding any eligible income supports such as social security, TANF, food assistance etc. Then, the participant will be referred to the HARA for employment connections.

The community has several programs that focus on matching employment to participant needs and goals that support the acquisition of work skills to meet those goals including such as resume building and application process, interview skills and attire, employer expectations, and communication and social skills, computer skills. Several agencies have programs leading to certification in many areas with scholarships available in many of those areas from Women's Co-op, Goodwill Industries of Central Michigan Heartland, MI Works! and KAMA (Kellogg Advanced Manufacturing Assembly) through the Regional Manufacturing Technology Center (RMTC).

The following is a sampling of services offered not a complete listing of services available:

- **Goodwill** – Transportation, work experience, financial management
- **Mi Works!** - Transportation, soft-skills, employer connections, scholarships

- **Employment HUB** – A program offshoot of Mi Works! Providing mentoring, referrals and skills building for those needing more basic detailed one on one assistance to become employable.
- **KAMA** – Employer connections, manufacturing certificate programs
- **Women’s Co-op** – Work experience, certificate training programs, scholarships
- **Charitable Union** - Interview clothes, steel toed boots, uniforms-scrubs
- **Michigan Resource Services (MRS)** - Employment support services and help accessing other benefits as eligible to those with mental or physical disabilities.

These employment programs have access to employers and match participants to employers based on employer needs and preferences as well as participants needs skills, education and transportation availability.

Case Management

The HARA works closely with service agency case managers and makes referrals to various agency programs according to participant needs and assets as revealed in the initial assessment, and goals as determined through the participant interview. Case managers between agencies may find it necessary to keep in contact with each other through HMIS or e-mail/phone if not an HMIS participating agency on behalf of shared participants.

Case managers are encouraged to attend Interagency Service Team (IST) meetings which now include updates and reports concerning employment and income growth as part of the monthly agenda.

Case managers will provide follow up to participants at regular intervals, and will decrease as participants become more and more proficient in their new skills and life habits resulting in stability.

Peer support

Participants who have been successful utilizing the ERN system and are employed and housed long term can be a valuable support source for those just entering the system. Those working for the same employer may be especially useful. By offering the successful candidate a chance to act as a peer support gives them the opportunity to give back to the community in an impactful way that does not require a monetary commitment and helps give them a reason to stay engaged with their own support system should they become tempted to fall back into old harmful behaviors.

Through tracking participants, between the HARA and agency case managers, job coaches and peer support specialists, participant progress can be reviewed and gaps in services can be identified.

Transportation to Employment

The transportation committee of BC Vision has worked with Battle Creek Transit to evaluate user need data to update and expand local bus routes to provide better access for employees to businesses in the Fort Custer Industrial Park and expand service in residential areas where vehicle ownership is less common.

Goodwill Financial Opportunity Center has vehicle ownership programs accessible for their clients and those of collaborative partners, also several agencies have bus passes for their clients searching for work and continuing until regular paychecks enable the participant to buy bus passes.

Housing

Using a Housing First model, participants are prioritized for housing by the HARA based on the assessment VI-SPDAT Score and placed in housing as soon as units are available. Recruitment of landlords to work with the homeless population is ongoing, and fostering of relationships with area landlords is realized through the Rental Roundtable. Housing case management is extremely important to teach and foster good tenant behaviors and maintain communication between landlords and tenants.