

BASIC FOOD, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING PROGRAM (BFET)

"The jobs program for Washington's food-stamp recipients has drawn notice for its focus on preparing people to get hired quickly"

The Seattle Times, "Off food stamps and employed – with taxpayers'help" May 28, 2013

"BFET and worker retraining has really kind of taken my hand and guided me through how to reach my goals, how to talk to people, how to find what I need to find, how to be resourceful and the end goal is the job. Not just a job, but a career..."

Lake Washington Institute of Technology student Nova Beckwith, Kirkland Reporter Dec. 2, 2013



Photos courtesy Department of Social and Health Services

Off food assistance, into jobs

Washington's community and technical colleges are helping thousands of people who receive food assistance¹ train for jobs and become self-reliant.

All 34 community and technical colleges participate in the Washington State Basic Food, Employment and Training program, or BFET. The program emphasizes vocational training, giving participants the skills they need for better paying jobs and economic security.

Impressive results

The BFET program yields impressive results. Two years after exiting BFET, 73 percent of participants are employed with a median hourly wage of \$11.13, above the state minimum wage of \$9.47.² Since 2005, BFET has served more than 45,000 Washington residents.³ More than 80 percent were enrolled at a community or technical college as part of their BFET training.⁴

Tailored services

BFET services are delivered through a partnership of the state Department of Social and Health Services; the community and technical college system; and more than 30 community-based organizations. Services include:

- Personal assessment and career planning.
- Tuition assistance applied to a vocational certificate or non-transfer associate degree.
- Adult education for foundational skills in reading, writing and math.
- GED preparation and English language instruction.
- Case management.
- Job search help.
- Support services for childcare, housing, transportation, clothing, supplies and other job-related expenses.

Case managers work with each recipient to form an employment plan based on career goals, skills and the local job market.

The recipient cannot be enrolled in "Temporary Assistance for Needy Families," (TANF)⁵ the federal government's cash-assistance program. TANF offers its own job training component, known as "Workfirst."

What sets BFET apart

Several features set BFET apart from other state programs:

- **Resources are leveraged.** BFET is a public-private partnership. Local, private and state educational funds are packaged to leverage matching funds from the federal government. This stretches dollars further, allowing more students to be served.
- **The impact is collective.** The *Seattle Jobs Initiative*⁶ describes BFET as a rare example of collective impact: It has spurred colleges and community-based organizations to build partnerships to serve people they would have been unable to serve by themselves.
- **BFET goes beyond job-search services.** Historically, state programs for people who receive food assistance are limited to job-search help. Washington's program provides education and training opportunities that lead to industry-recognized degrees and credentials valued in today's labor market. BFET represents a shift from a "stand-alone program with a compliance feel, to an employment and training program connected to the state's workforce system," according to the *Seattle Jobs Initiative*.⁷ And because BFET is a voluntary program, it serves people who are prepared and motivated to change their lives through education.

National recognition

The BFET program has won national recognition for using a collaborative approach that leverages resources and connects with the state's workforce system. The 2014 federal Farm Bill created a three-year grant fund to encourage states to provide targeted employment and training programs similar to Washington's BFET program.

Washington state was awarded one of those grants for the "RISE" project (Resources to Initiate Successful Employment).

The RISE project

RISE (Resources to Initiate Successful Employment) is a three year, \$22 million pilot program funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service.

RISE provides additional services for BFET participants who face even greater barriers to finding employment.

RISE participants are assigned to case managers who provide coaching, guidance in navigating the process, and referrals to other services.

Participants also benefit from work-based learning opportunities. These include unsubsidized and subsidized employment, pre-apprenticeships, work-study, internships, community jobs and courses that integrate vocational and employability lessons with on-the-job training.

They also learn how to manage work and life stress, solve problems and think critically.

RISE is offered in King, Pierce, Spokane and Yakima counties. Highline College and North Seattle College are among the organizations that offer RISE services.

Washington's community and technical colleges are proud to play a key role in BFET and RISE, helping lift people from hunger and poverty and into jobs.

Sources:

1. Washington's food assistance program is called "Basic Food." It is the state's name for the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP. Both programs were formally known as "food stamp" programs. In addition to food assistance, all states are required to offer an employment and training component -- hence, "BFET" for Basic Food, *Employment and Training*."
2. Email from Jason Turner, DSHS Food Program Manager, to Mat Carlisle at SBCTC, March 30, 2015. Data from first calendar quarter of 2009 up until the third calendar quarter of 2012.
3. Basic Food Employment and Training (BFET) at a Glance, Nov. 20, 2014, by DSHS.
4. Ibid
5. TANF was formerly known as federal "welfare."
6. Washington State's Basic Food Employment & Training Program, June 2014, Seattle Jobs Initiative.
7. Ibid