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## Employer and Training Needs: Report 09 Human Services Programs

Carole Davis  
*University of Nebraska at Omaha*

Joan V. Holley  
*University of Nebraska at Omaha*

Marian Meier  
*University of Nebraska at Omaha*

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Report Number Nine


HUMAN SERVICES PROGRAMS

# EMPLOYER AND TRAINING NEEDS

PREPARED FOR METROPOLITAN TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE



Center for Applied Urban Research

university of  
nebraska   
at omaha

HUMAN SERVICES

by

Carole M. Davis

Joan V. Holley

Marian Meier

## HUMAN SERVICES

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the employer and training needs for paraprofessionals to work in the human services areas in the metropolitan Omaha area.

### Study Design and Execution

The 1978 Health and Human Service Directory for Douglas, Sarpy, and Pottawattamie Counties published by the Midlands Information and Referral Agency, was consulted to determine the names and telephone numbers of social service agencies who might employ paraprofessionals. Eight major areas were investigated and included: public welfare, gerontology, the physically impaired, mental retardation, family substitute services (day care, adoptive, and foster care), mental health (alcohol and chemical dependency, emotionally disturbed), employment counseling, and criminology. Telephone interviews were conducted using the survey instrument constructed for use in previous employer and training needs studies. The research findings are presented here with conclusions about the employer and training needs in each employment category.

In the area of criminology procedures were somewhat different in that informal interviews were held with professors in the Department of Criminal Justice at the University of Nebraska at Omaha to determine the target population for this study. The population, as recommended by these criminal justice professionals, consisted of administrators or supervisors in the following organizations: the Douglas County Juvenile Court, the Nebraska Department of Corrections, the Nebraska Adult Parole Administration, and the Douglas County Corrections Department.

## PUBLIC WELFARE

### Findings

Number of Employees. The number of paraprofessionals working in county social services varied from 18 in one welfare office to 100 in another. Job requirements are determined by the State Merit System, and examination is necessary for all positions. A four-year degree is preferred for most upper level positions such as social worker III and IV although various combinations of experience in human services and degree work are accepted. A masters in social work is required to work in Child Protective Services.

Paraprofessionals working as caseworkers I and II and social service aides and workers I and II have high school diplomas combined with either experience in human services or up to two years of college.

New Jobs in this Category. Employers did not know whether any new jobs would be created in the next three years. Funding is supplied by county and federal governments, and the addition or deletion of programs is determined by government guidelines.

The majority of employers said there were more job openings than trained people available, and they had too few qualified applicants when there was a job opening. The reason for this, according to one employer, was that people did not know they had to be tested and on a register under the Merit System. Another said many jobs were turned down when offered because the pay was low.

Skills and Knowledge. The most frequently mentioned skill needed in the human services was the ability and desire to work with people. Good communication skills, both verbal and written, followed. General knowledge of human behavior was also frequently mentioned.

The skill most often cited as lacking among job applicants was communication skills which also included the ability to read well. Employers said that math skills were also often quite low.

Job Preparation. When asked what type of education/training was appropriate for this job, the majority stated that on-the-job training or a practicum within the setting combined with a one-to two-year program at a technical community college would be the best.

The specific courses that should be included in a training program for paraprofessionals working in a public welfare agency included social work, sociology, and/or psychology classes. One employer said, "The more social work

classes you have the better." Basic English and mathematics courses were also mentioned as being essential. Half of those interviewed said Metro Tech should establish a program of studies to prepare individuals to work in this area, and half said they didn't know. One employer said, "We don't lose employees because they are not capable but because salaries are low or they get tired of the work."

Salary Scale. The beginning salary for a Level I position was about \$715 a month. Maximum monthly salary for a Level I position was \$968 a month.

#### Summary and Conclusions

Personnel officers in several public welfare agencies were contacted by telephone to determine employer and training needs of paraprofessionals to work in human service agencies.

The majority of employers said there were more job openings than trained people available. They said funding services would largely determine the hiring of more employees even though a need might exist.

The ability to work with people was the most frequently mentioned skill needed for this job. Good communication skills were most often cited as lacking in job applicants. On-the-job training combined with a one- to two-year program at a technical community college was considered the best type of preparation for these positions. Several employees said Metro Tech should establish a course of study to train individuals to work in this area.

## GERONTOLOGY

### Findings

Types of Job Categories. Several agencies offering services in the field of gerontology said they employed paraprofessionals. Job descriptions varied widely. One was called a geriatric technician which was a nurses' aide job requiring a one- to two-year associate degree. Another job title was day care technician and required a high school diploma. Transportation attendants were categorized as paraprofessionals at one agency. Another agency working with the elderly employed about 12 peer counselors which were part-time volunteer type paid positions. Their backgrounds varied from individuals who had high school diplomas to those who had nursing degrees. A masters level person supervised their work. They were selected to work because of what they had to offer as individuals rather than the educational levels they had attained.

Thus, there appears to be no clear-cut definition of a "paraprofessional" in the field of gerontology. Even so, the majority of employers said that the number of people exceeds the number of available jobs. These people are generally not "trained", however. Employers anticipated their needs for employees as remaining about the same, however, depending upon allocations.

Skills and Knowledge. Human qualities such as empathy, attentiveness, and trust were emphasized as being important for successful work in gerontology. Listening, communication, and problem-solving skills were also mentioned.

Several interviewees said that a background in gerontology would be neither practical nor very helpful unless combined with another skill such as nursing. Employers are interested in hiring people who have some technical skills. Knowledge about the elderly is then learned through experience. One agency said they first determine very specific job requirements, then hire to meet those qualifications as closely as possible. New employees then receive on-the-job training.

Salaries. Salaries for paraprofessionals working in gerontology were generally minimum wage unless combined with another skill such as practical nursing.

Suggestions for Metro Tech Programs in Gerontology. Interviewees said that Metro Tech should not establish a program of study with specialization in this area. They said that gerontology is not a methodology but a body of knowledge

that must be applied to some skills such as nursing or social work. Hospitals, extended care facilities, nursing homes or the Visiting Nurse Association would be major employers of persons interested in working with the elderly, and all require some type of medical training.

Available Training. The University of Nebraska at Omaha offers a Certificate in Gerontology which can be earned in conjunction with a degree. The certificate is awarded upon completion of 12-15 hours of study and one semester of full-time field placement.

#### Summary and Conclusions

Employers providing services to the elderly generally hire paraprofessionals to work in various capacities. Employees receive in-service or on-the-job training from the agency most of the time. Some agencies hire nurses' aides and call them geriatric technicians.

Good interpersonal skills are required to work in gerontology. Employers want to hire people who also have some kind of technical skills. Salaries are generally low.

The majority of those interviewed said that Metro Tech should not establish a program of courses to prepare individuals to work in this area. Employers said an apprenticeship or in-service program in the agency was the best training.



## PHYSICALLY IMPAIRED

### Findings

Several interviews were conducted with agencies listed as providing rehabilitation services for the physically handicapped. The majority said they hired paraprofessionals to assist such professionals as physical or occupational therapists. These positions, however, require a technical or medical background and not one in human services. One director of a family rehabilitation program said paraprofessionals called rehabilitation trainers were hired at his agency to teach vocational skills to the handicapped. He said there would be an increasing need in this area in the future. "Laws have changed bringing the handicapped back into the community, and services must be provided for them," he said. When they had a job opening there were too few qualified applicants, and they had to train employees themselves. He said Metro Tech should establish a program of study to prepare individuals to work with the handicapped in the area of vocational rehabilitation. Special education and developmental psychology classes along with behavioral techniques were courses he said might be included in a two-year human services program.

## MENTAL RETARDATION

### Findings

Number of Employees. The number of paraprofessionals working in this area varied from 300 in one agency to one in another. Job titles varied according to the type of setting and included residential assistants or associates who worked in group home situations, psychiatric assistants, and educational aides in a hospital and educational setting.

New Jobs in this Category. Several said the need for employees would probably increase over the next three years based on the assumption that the mentally retarded now in institutions would be returning to the community. However, budget restrictions are a factor that must be considered.

The majority of employers said when there is a job opening they have too few qualified applicants. Currently the only qualifications are that applicants be high school graduates. They are untrained and have no experience with or knowledge about mentally retarded people. Because of the economy one agency said they had a lot of applicants. The turnover rate is quite high, and employees stay an average of only eight to nine months. Employees are trained by the agency after they are hired.

Skills and Knowledge. The most frequently mentioned quality necessary to work in this area was patience and consistency in order to help clients achieve small, realistic goals. Good observation and reporting skills were mentioned by several. Basic understanding of child development and knowledge of the mentally retarded were also frequently mentioned.

Inability to express oneself both orally and in writing was the skill most often cited as lacking among applicants. Lack of understanding of the mentally retarded child and the inability to cope under stressful situations were also mentioned.

Job Preparation. When asked what type of education/training was the best preparation for this type of work, the majority said a two-year program at a technical community college. One employer said that on-the-job experience was the best training, supplemented by formal training after the individual determined that he/she liked the work. Courses in a training program for paraprofessionals working with the mentally retarded should give students an understanding of the major mental illnesses and causes of mental retardation, behavior modification techniques, philosophy of service delivery, types of

facilities and treatment available. First aid and medical training, supervisory, parenting, and coping skills were also said to be important.

The majority of those interviewed said Metro Tech should establish a program to prepare individuals to work in this area. One employer was concerned that too much training might price individuals out of the job market.

Salary Scale. Salaries are generally low, beginning at \$3.48 an hour at one agency. The hourly salary at the end of three months is \$3.58 with a six percent raise annually thereafter. Employees usually don't stay because pay is so low.

#### Summary and Conclusions

The majority of employers said that a two-year program at a technical community college would be the best preparation for this job and that Metro Tech should establish a program of courses to prepare individuals to work in this area.

FAMILY SUBSTITUTE SERVICES  
(Day Care, Adoption, Foster Care,  
Group Homes, and Institutional Care)

Findings

Number of Employees. Agencies employ individuals with four-year degrees or above to work in adoption and to do foster care placements. Day care providers are major employers of paraprofessionals. Several employers said they had hired Metro Tech students who had completed the Child Care Technician program and spoke highly of the program. One agency said that Metro students often do practicum placements with them. Salaries in day care are very low, generally starting at minimum wage.

Agencies which provide group home living employ numerous paraprofessionals. The number of employees varied from 100 in one agency to 18 in another. Some paraprofessionals were called assistant family teachers, others houseparents. The majority of employers said there were more job openings than trained people available. Degreed people are not excluded from these positions. One employer said, "We interview everyone who applies for the position and take who we feel is best, degree or no." For most people the position is only temporary, so turnover is generally high.

Skills and Knowledge. The most frequently mentioned skill needed for this job was good communication skills. Knowledge of parenting skills and behavior modification techniques were mentioned by several. Compassion for and understanding of children were also mentioned.

Most employers said applicants were most lacking in knowledge about what the job entailed. Most employees had predetermined ideas about how things should be done which complicated their adjustments on the job.

Job Preparation. When asked what type of education/training was appropriate for this job, the majority said that on-the-job training combined with a three-month to one-year program at a technical community college would be the best.

Elementary child psychology, human growth and development, sociology, and psychology courses and communication skills were specific courses that employers said should be included in a program of studies to prepare individuals to work in this area. The majority of those interviewed said Metro Tech should establish a program to train individuals to work in this area. One employer

said Metro could fill a definite need if they didn't turn out too many graduates. He said the program should have a general human services orientation.

Salary Scale. Salaries varied from a minimum of \$9,000 to a maximum of \$12,000 for these positions. One agency employer said the turnover rate for this position was around 30 percent at her agency.

#### Summary and Conclusions

The majority of employees said there is a need to train people to work in this area. They said a three-month to one-year program combined with on-the-job training would be the best preparation. They suggested a general human services program containing psychology and sociology classes. Salaries varied from \$9,000 to \$12,000 a year.

Day care is a major employer of paraprofessionals. Several of the agencies contacted said they hired Metro graduates of the Child Care Technician program. Professionals are hired to work in foster care placement and adoption.

MENTAL HEALTH  
(Alcohol and Chemical Dependency,  
Emotionally Disturbed)

Findings

Number of Employees. The number of paraprofessionals working in Mental Health varied from 28 in one drug rehabilitation center to four in another agency. Job titles varied from agency to agency. Employees were variously called family counselor coordinators, drug or alcohol counselors, residential attendants, or detoxification assistants.

New Jobs in this Category. The majority of employers contacted did not anticipate any new jobs being created in this category in the next three years. Several said they didn't know because of uncertainties about renewed or increased funding sources. The majority of those interviewed said they had more job openings than trained people available. Most applicants are high school graduates and must be trained by the agency after they are hired.

Skills and Knowledge. The most frequently mentioned knowledge required for the job was an understanding about the effects of drug and alcohol on the individual combined with a desire to work in the field. Ability to relate to people and to be warm, supportive, and empathetic were mentioned by several.

The skill most often cited as lacking among job applicants was knowledge about counseling theory and first aid. Employers also said they had difficulty with people burning out too quickly on the job. One interviewee said, "Workers often aren't dedicated. They have no sense of responsibility toward the job."

Job Preparation. Responses to the question, "What type of education/training is the best preparation for this job?" varied widely. The majority said that a one-year program at a technical community college would be best. A two-year program at a technical community college and a three-month program at a technical community college were each mentioned by one respondent. All agreed that training should be combined with on-the-job training.

The specific courses that should be included in a training program to work in this area included educational and counseling theory, psychology, sociology, first aid, community resources, technique and practice courses. An associate degree in human services with concentrated courses in alcohol and chemical dependency was thought to be most beneficial.

The majority of those interviewed said Metro Tech should establish a program of studies to prepare paraprofessionals to work in mental health areas. However, one interviewee said that there would not be enough jobs to employ Metro graduates.

Salary Scales. Salaries ranged from \$9,000 to \$12,000 a year.

Certification of Employees. Certification is now required for drug and alcohol counselors. Presently exactly what education and training will be required is not precise. The Division on Alcoholism, in conjunction with people throughout the state who work in alcoholism, is now in the process of developing certification guidelines for alcoholism counselors. Guidelines will be different for various counselor levels. According to one interviewee, employers will now be forced to hire trained alcoholism counselors who meet state requirements.

The State Drug Division also requires that all paraprofessionals be certified. They call a paraprofessional anyone who has less than a masters degree. The State Drug Division has a certification model, and agencies must meet these standards. The Drug and Alcohol Divisions will merge in July of 1980.

Available Training. Presently, the Eugene C. Eppley Chemical Dependency Unit offers a one-year training course called the "Chemical Dependency Counselor Training Programs." Persons completing the course are then certified by the State of Nebraska as alcohol counselors. The course is approved by the Veterans Administration for student loans. The training supervisor is presently working with UNO to set up arrangements for students to receive college credits. Classes start three or four times a year, and three applicants per class are accepted.

#### Summary and Conclusions

Paraprofessionals are employed in the mental health field, but the job situation is uncertain because of the funding situation. The majority of those interviewed stated that a one-year program at a technical community college would be the best preparation for the job, but on-the-job training would need to supplement this kind of program.

The majority of the respondents said Metro Tech should establish a program of studies to prepare individuals to work in mental health areas.

Certification is required for drug and alcohol counselors, and agencies must meet the standards of the State of Nebraska.

## EMPLOYMENT COUNSELOR

Interviews were attempted with five agencies listed under "Employment." Two of these agencies no longer existed. Two others said they did not employ paraprofessionals as employment counselors, one because they had no program in this area and the other because they only hired people with a four-year degree. The fifth agency presently employs about 20 such people, but their program is "being wound down," so these people will probably soon be out of work. In the case this agency's program should become funded, they do not anticipate a need for any new persons in this job category.

These 20 people, who are employed either as supportive services specialists or public service employment (PSE) specialists, make \$6.35 to \$7.50 an hour. A one- or two-year program at a technical community college would adequately prepare them for the position. This instruction should include counseling and interviewing skills, according to the interviewee.

When hiring persons for this job, the interviewee looks for some type of social service background and familiarity with labor plus work in counseling. The person interviewed was unable to express an opinion about whether or not Metro Tech should establish a course to train employment counselors.



## CRIMINOLOGY

The Need for Two-Year Certificate Employees. The court administrator of the Douglas County Juvenile Court reported that a four-year college degree is required for employment as a probation officer for the court. The supervisor of the Nebraska State Adult Parole Administration said that a four-year degree is preferred by his organization also, although experience as a parole officer can be substituted for all or part of the degree work. Discussing a recent proposal to utilize paraprofessionals in his department, the supervisor said, "This plan of action is now being considered by the Department of Correctional Services and could be part of a revision of the departmental booklet."

The personnel administrator of another state agency, the Nebraska Department of Corrections, described the six classification levels of jobs in his organization. He said that they have an abundance of applicants for job openings at the higher levels which require four-year college degrees and attributed this oversupply to the large number of persons enrolled in criminal justice programs from 1968 to 1978. However, at some of the lower job levels the need often occurs for qualified applicants. The personnel director said that a person with a two-year associate degree in corrections could begin at Level II at a \$10,000 annual income and, with the regular quarterly raises, would be earning \$12,000 within one year. With three correctional institutions located in Lincoln, he perceived a need for a two-year program to be offered in that area. He said that the opening of the new minimum security facility in east Omaha, which will require a staff of 100 to 150 persons, could create the need for such a program in Omaha.

The director of corrections for Douglas County also mentioned the need for two-year certificate employees. This respondent described the unrealistically high job expectations of criminal justice graduates. He said, "We need some practitioners since these are technical, not theoretical, jobs."

Suggestions for a Program. Course suggestions included classes related to the technical skills and knowledges required by correctional work, as well as theoretical and historical surveys. The director of corrections for Douglas County said that he had assisted many schools across the country in establishing two-year programs in corrections and would be willing to work with Metro Tech.

### Conclusions

Administrators or supervisors working with the county juvenile court, the state adult parole agency, and two correctional agencies were interviewed to determine the employer and training needs in this job category. The research indicated that recognition is increasing of the need for two-year associate degree persons in this occupational area. While many four-year criminal justice graduates are seeking employment in the field, some lower level jobs exist that require specific technical knowledges and skills and would be more appropriate for a trained paraprofessional. The Nebraska State Adult Parole Administration is considering revising their handbook to detail the roles of paraprofessionals in the organization. However, since this guide is not yet available and most agencies have not utilized two-year certificate persons in their work, the extent of the demand for these paraprofessionals is difficult to estimate. The minimum security facility in East Omaha, scheduled to open in 1983, will need employees in this job category.