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ABSTRACT

Cooperative extension service faculty at New Mexico State University started the Steps to Employment and Personal Success (STEPS) program to help Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) clients qualify for and maintain full-time employment and strengthen their families for long-term success. Clients are referred to STEPS by New Mexico Works. Approximately 65% of STEPS' clients are Hispanic, and 41% lack a high school diploma or its equivalent. STEPS' goals include improving participants' awareness and knowledge of requirements of the evolving workplace and helping them develop and/or improve their job search skills. Participants also receive training in family management skills, including setting financial goals, budgeting, cutting costs, using credit wisely, reducing debt, and saving and investing. To strengthen families, STEPS includes nutrition education and parenting classes. Through the program, participants also develop a network of social support that links families to community resources. STEPS features a rolling admittance policy and provides several experiential learning activities, including family outings for participants' children and field trips to the local community college. Classes meet 7 hours per day. Since July 1, 2001, 323 TANF recipients have been referred to STEPS. Many former STEPS participants credit the program with giving them direction in their lives, and 24% of them have subsequently enrolled in some type of further education. (MN)

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A. Vaile

STEPS: Moving from Welfare to Work

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Balancing work and family is difficult for most people. But if you're low on resources and short on skills, the stress of raising children while holding down a job can be overwhelming.

That's why Cooperative Extension Service faculty at New Mexico State University started the Steps to Employment and Personal Success (STEPS) program. STEPS provides life skills training for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) clients to help them qualify for and sustain full-time employment as well as to strengthen their families for long-term success.

Clients are referred to STEPS by New Mexico Works, welfare-to-work transition program of the Extension Service, which mainly serves single-parent families (63 percent) in the Las Cruces urban area. About 65 percent of the audience is Hispanic, and many of the participants (41 percent) lack a high school diploma or GED.

Goals of the program include improving participant awareness and knowledge of the requirements of the evolving work place and helping them develop or improve their job search skills. Participants learn resume building, cover letter preparation and interviewing techniques. At the same time, they learn family management skills in setting financial goals, budgeting, cutting costs, using credit wisely, reducing debt, saving for the future and investing in retirement.

To strengthen families, training addresses nutrition education, including healthy eating, nutrition on a budget and food preparation. Parenting classes strengthen parent-child bonding and promote family communication through literacy, play, music and family activities. In addition, the importance of having fathers involved with their children is stressed.

Through the program, participants also develop a network of support that links families to community resources. By the time they graduate from the program, they often state that they have increased their self-esteem. They are eager to look for and obtain employment in order to become self-sufficient and provide for their families. Many of the participants credit the program for giving them direction in their lives and the desire to seek further education.

STEPS: Moving from Welfare to Work

1
2
3
4 With the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation
5 Act of 1996, New Mexico was faced with finding ways to move welfare recipients into the
6 workplace. Many social and economic factors unique to New Mexico have made this a
7 challenging process.

8
9 New Mexico is 48th in per capita income with unemployment ranging from 1.9% to
10 22.8%, depending on the county. Twenty-nine percent of New Mexico children live in poverty,
11 and 32% live in single-parent families. New Mexico has consistently been designated as the
12 worst state in which to raise children.

13
14 Since July 1998, the College of Agriculture and Home Economics and the Cooperative
15 Extension Service at New Mexico State University have assisted people in southern New Mexico
16 with the transition from welfare to work through the New Mexico Works program. New Mexico
17 Works provides welfare recipients in nine counties with training, education, job development,
18 and job placement.

19
20 The goals of New Mexico Works include developing participants' self-reliance and
21 responsibility, enhancing participants' employability skills through education and training,
22 providing opportunities for work experiences and on-the-job training, and ending family
23 dependence on public benefits through job placement.

24
25 In addition to receiving job training and placement, New Mexico Works participants
26 build a variety of skills that will help keep them employed. New Mexico Works arranges for
27 alcohol and drug treatment programs, services for victims of domestic violence, community
28 service opportunities, child care, and public transportation to activities. Participants take classes
29 in parenting, managing money, securing permanent housing, improving language skills, earning
30 GED certification, and developing life skills.

31
32 The life skills program, Steps to Employment and Personal Success (STEPS), is delivered
33 by the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences and the Department of Extension Home
34 Economics at NMSU. The STEPS program was supported by a \$250,000 grant in year one and a
35 \$160,000 grant in year two from New Mexico Works. Funding was provided for salaries,
36 curriculum development, instructional materials and supplies, small equipment and furniture, and
37 student incentives.

38
39 The STEPS development team was selected based on areas of expertise and research and
40 teaching interests related to serving at-risk audiences. The team is comprised of four faculty
41 members—one department head, one professor in Family and Consumer Sciences Education,
42 one associate professor in Family and Child Science, and one assistant professor in Extension
43 Family Resource Management.

44
45 Teachers, work-study students, and graduate students are employed in the STEPS
46 program. Staffing patterns depend on the time of year, the number of the participants, and the

47 number of undergraduate and graduate students involved in teaching, internships, and/or research
48 activities. Typical class sizes have averaged eight participants.

49
50 The mission of the STEPS program is to conduct life skills education for Temporary
51 Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) participants to assist them in sustaining full-time
52 employment and strengthening family functioning.

53
54 The goals of the STEPS program are for participants to:

- 55 • Increase knowledge of the requirements of an evolving workplace.
- 56 • Develop or improve job search skills.
- 57 • Apply positive behaviors, attitudes, and practices necessary for long-term
58 employment.
- 59 • Balance work, family, and community commitments.

60
61 The life skills curriculum, compiled by the authors, focuses on personal development, job
62 search skills, communications, safety, resource management, and balancing work and family.
63 Lesson plans for Life Skills were derived from research-based curricula used in a variety of
64 programs from around the United States. A conceptual framework for the life skills program
65 was developed from a review of literature, an evaluation of available life skills curricula, and
66 consultation with case managers at New Mexico Works. Eight broad concepts were identified.
67 They are personal development; personal communication; job search; success on the job; safety
68 issues; money and benefit matters; balancing work, family, and community commitments; and
69 planning for the future. Each concept area was developed in depth, allocated an amount of time,
70 and organized into a four-week block plan, which is the average amount of time a participant is
71 referred to the program.

72
73 The Nurturing Parenting curriculum is research-based, available in English and Spanish,
74 has pre- and post- test evaluations, and is normally taught in 24 sessions, of two and one-half
75 hours each. In STEPS, one session is taught each afternoon for 20-24 days. The basic
76 curriculum is for parents of children from birth to five years of age. Additional age-appropriate
77 curricula are available to use with parents of older children. Topics include family
78 communication, brain development, effective discipline strategies, nurturing parenting skills,
79 parent/child roles and expectations, self-esteem, physical and emotional development,
80 parent/child activities, and child safety. These classes contribute to the development of
81 interpersonal, communication, and problem-solving skills of the participants for both work and
82 family situations.

83
84 Ideas for Cooking and Nutrition (ICAN), the food stamp education program of the New
85 Mexico Cooperative Extension Service, provides hands-on education in the areas of healthy food
86 choices, food preparation, safety, and resource management. Topics covered include food labels,
87 the food guide pyramid, menu planning, comparative shopping, food safety, and feeding your
88 children. Classes are taught by nutrition educators from the local Cooperative Extension office.

89
90 The STEPS participants are men or women referred to the program by New Mexico
91 Works and currently receiving TANF benefits. Since July 1, 2001, there have been 323 referrals.
92 The participants have ranged in age from 17 to 57 years of age, and 88 percent of the participants

93 have been female. Of the participants, 68% have been Hispanic, and 62% have been single
94 parents. Only 46% of the participants have completed high school/GED compared to 75% of the
95 New Mexico population 25 years of age and over. Twenty-four percent of the former
96 participants have gone on to some type of further education after attending f STEPS.

97
98 STEPS is located in the College of Agriculture and Home Economics complex on the
99 campus of New Mexico State University. The college campus location is a challenge to the
100 participants when they first begin STEPS. However, the friendly atmosphere of the College of
101 Agriculture and Home Economics reduces the anxiety of the participants who are included in the
102 activities and celebrations of the departments and the College. The comfort level and successes
103 experienced in this educational setting motivate many of the participants to further their
104 education when they leave STEPS.

105
106 The STEPS program has a rolling admittance policy that allows participants to enter at
107 any time. Classes are held seven hours per day including a study hour every afternoon for
108 completing job applications, composing resumes and cover letters, completing homework,
109 participating in service learning projects, and searching for jobs. A time clock is utilized to
110 develop good work habits, a professional environment, and to provide an accurate record of
111 participant attendance.

112
113 When participants begin STEPS, they are given a notebook that contains the program
114 rules and ten index tabs. Throughout the class, participants develop this notebook into a resource
115 by inserting handouts and the results of class activities and exercises. Upon graduation, they are
116 presented with their notebooks.

117
118 Incentives are used for motivation and increasing self-esteem. Participants earn points
119 every day for class attendance, participation, and other good work habits. At the end of each
120 week, points are totaled, and those participants earning at least 75% of the total points available
121 select items from the Country Store. The Country Store includes items they might not normally
122 purchase. In addition, perfect attendance certificates are given every Friday.

123
124 Participants are involved in several experiential learning activities. Family outings, which
125 involve the participants' children, have been taken to the public library, swimming pool, and the
126 park. These outings allow the staff to interact with the participants and their children and model
127 skills taught in the Nurturing Parenting classes. Field trips are taken each month to the campus
128 personnel department where participants review employment opportunities and federally
129 mandated safety postings. STEPS students have also attend a job fair at the Community College
130 where they were able to apply some of the skills and information they had learned, as well as
131 make valuable contacts. Field trips to the local community college expose participants to a
132 variety of educational opportunities. While there, they can meet with a potential advisor, acquire
133 financial aid information, enroll for placement testing, and/or complete career interest
134 inventories.

135
136 Service learning is incorporated into the daily study hour. Participants create carryall
137 bags to attach to the walkers of area nursing home residents. Field trips are taken to nursing
138 homes where participants socialize with the residents and deliver the bags. Each month,

139 participants also complete a quilt square. At the end of each year, a quilt is made with these
140 squares and delivered to the children's unit of the local hospital. Participants look forward to
141 these activities and learn from this opportunity to give back to their community.

142
143 Graduation is held at the end of each month for participants completing at least 75% of
144 all three curricula. Graduates invite family, friends, faculty, and staff. Many of the participants
145 don caps and gowns for the first time in their lives for this ceremony.

146
147 The formal graduation ceremony includes a motivational speaker, presentations, and
148 refreshments. Participants are presented with their resource notebooks and framed graduation
149 certificates. The *ICAN* nutrition educator presents each graduate with a cookbook.

150
151 A benefactor provides high quality books for each of the graduates' children.

152
153 Support services are offered on a continuing basis to former STEPS participants.
154 Computers, copy machines, fax machines, telephones, and Internet access are available for use.
155 Staff members provide encouragement, conduct mock interviews, and assist in job search
156 activities. When participants decide to further their education, STEPS personnel assist them in
157 negotiating the financial aid maze, establishing their schedules, and locating their classrooms.
158 Currently, 23 former STEPS participants attend a local community college. They have formed a
159 close-knit group, providing support, child-care, and study assistance for each other.

160
161 STEPS was designed as a laboratory school for students in the Department of Family and
162 Consumer Sciences at New Mexico State University and provides a "testing" ground for the
163 skills of our graduate and undergraduate students. Faculty members build assignments into their
164 course curricula that can be completed in the STEPS program.

165
166 Students enrolled in the Teaching in Informal Family and Consumer Sciences Settings
167 course have used the STEPS program as their "live audience" for their community teaching
168 presentations. Those preparing to be Family and Consumer Sciences teachers also practice their
169 teaching skills and methods in STEPS. As they teach, students are videotaped and observed by
170 the faculty. Self and peer critiques are completed by viewing the videotapes. The small size of
171 the STEPS program has made this a very comfortable teaching setting for those in front of an
172 audience for the first time.

173
174 Students taking other Family and Consumer Sciences courses, such as parenting and
175 child guidance, infancy and early childhood, family resource management, family dynamics,
176 interpersonal skills, clothing and human behavior, and human nutrition, find many opportunities
177 to complete class projects in the STEPS program. Graduate and undergraduate students can
178 conduct case study analyses, observations, and interviews with participants. In addition, students
179 can assist the STEPS participants with professional correspondence, resume writing, and
180 preparation for interviews. They can discuss problem solving related to finances, time
181 management, and nutrition. University students are provided with contextual and project-based
182 learning experiences and opportunities to learn from the STEPS participants.

183

184 Interns work with the STEPS staff in all aspects of the program. They gain experience in
185 planning, implementing, adjusting, and evaluating community-based programs. Plans are underway
186 for graduate students to complete Masters thesis research projects focused on various facets of the
187 STEPS program including curriculum development and evaluation; implementation assessment; and
188 participant satisfaction, growth, and success.

189
190 Of the 323 individuals assigned to STEPS, 67 participants have completed the entire
191 program and graduated from STEPS. Sixty-two of the participants assigned went on to another
192 placement at the discretion of their case managers. Case managers decide what experiences are
193 most suitable for each client and may reassign them prior to the completion of STEPS.
194 Participants might be placed in GED classes, volunteer work situations, or customized training
195 programs. If they are close to the end of their five-year limit for cash assistance, they also might
196 be sent on an intensive job search. Thirty-seven of the entering individuals obtained jobs prior to
197 their graduation from STEPS and therefore did not complete the program. Only 20 of the
198 referred individuals never appeared to begin the program. This number is lower than the national
199 non-compliance rate of 38% for programs of this type.

200
201 Of the 323 participants, 63 are known to be pursuing additional education. Twenty-three of
202 the participants have pursued further education at the local community college, while another 12
203 have attended a customized training for office specialist or certified nurses training. An
204 additional 11 are attending business school and nine are enrolled in GED preparation classes.
205 Five former participants are attending ESL classes, truck driving school, or the police academy,
206 while three have returned to high school. Many are employed and are not pursuing additional
207 education at this time.

208
209 The core expectation of the welfare-to-work program is to move families
210 from welfare to self- sufficiency. The STEPS program was developed to facilitate
211 this process. A mail survey is being developed and distributed to assess the
212 success of the program. This study will assess the success of the program. The
213 following multi-faceted purposes of this study will be addressed:

- 214
215 1. Determine personal life skill and job attainment changes of STEPS
216 program participants.
217 2. Assess the satisfaction of STEPS program participants with the overall
218 program and various program components.
219 3. Associate demographic variables with changes in life skills and job
220 attainment of STEPS participants.

221
222 Based on these assessments, recommendations will be made to strengthen
223 the STEPS curriculum and other program components for future participants.
224

224
225 STEPS has proven to be a successful program that makes a difference in people's lives
226 when they are committed to moving from welfare to work. Based on participant feedback, two
227 additional components of STEPS have been developed.
228

229 STEPS Reunion is designed for previous participant of STEPS, but is primarily for those
230 who have obtained employment. STEPS Reunion participants will meet one night a week for
231 one hour and 15 minutes. Each session will include a 30-minute lesson followed by a 15-minute
232 break and a 30-minute discussion. Child care will be provided. During the break there will be
233 refreshments and an opportunity for the children and parents to interact. Possible topics for
234 presentations include: completing W-4 and I-9 forms, coping with job stress, getting along on
235 the job, and practicing job ethics and etiquette.
236

237 Second STEPS is designed for previous participants of STEPS who are actively seeking
238 employment. Second STEPS participants will meet five mornings a week for presentations,
239 discussions, and individual assistance with the job search. During the afternoon, participants will
240 make job contacts, deliver resumes and applications, and attend interviews.
241

242 STEPS is a pilot project that has received recognition as a model program in assisting
243 participants to move from welfare to work. STEPS builds the individual's capacity to perform
244 the work of the family and the work of the marketplace, resulting in stronger families and a
245 decreased dependency of the family on society for financial assistance. The emphasis is on the
246 development of a variety of life skills, which will enable the participants to become self-
247 sufficient and employed.

STEPS: Steps to Employment and Personal Success
Vail, A., Cummings, M., Kratzer, C., Devall, E., & Galindo, V.
Extension Home Economics and Family & Consumer Sciences Departments
New Mexico State University

STEPS (Steps to Employment and Personal Success) is part of New Mexico Works, a program to assist individuals move from welfare to work. **STEPS** is housed in the College of Agriculture and Home Economics at New Mexico State University and is supported by the Family and Consumer Sciences and Extension Home Economics Departments.

The Mission of **STEPS** is to provide meaningful learning experiences that lead to full-time employment and productive life styles. The goals are to enhance job search skills; improve knowledge about work skills; obtain long-term employment; improve ability to balance work, family and community commitments; manage resources; improve parenting skills; and obtain additional knowledge about nutrition.

The participants are individuals who are receiving TANF benefits and have been referred to the program by their case managers.

A conceptual framework was developed in consultation with the case managers. The curriculum was put together by Connie Kratzer and Merrilyn Cummings and is based on materials developed by Extension in New Mexico and across the land-grant system. Recognizing the importance of families to success on the job, the Nurturing Parenting curriculum is also taught. A four-week block plan was designed to cover the concepts. Classes meet from 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday – Friday, with individual time for resume and letter writing, computer use and other skill development. A graduation ceremony is held at the end of each four-week session for the participants and their families. At this time, each of the children of the participants receives a new library quality book provided by a benefactor of the program.

STEPS began operation in July 2001 and in its first 17 months the total referrals were 323. Of these, 67 have completed the course and participated in graduation, 49 were employed prior to graduation, 63 have been reassigned and 20 were non-compliant. Twenty-three former **STEPS** participants are attending the local community college, 12 are attending customized training courses, 11 business school, 9 GED preparation classes, 5 are in miscellaneous training programs and 3 have returned to high school.

STEPS also serves as a lab school for the department. Over 60 undergraduates and graduate students are scheduled to do microteaching in the **STEPS** program as part of their academic work. Interns and graduate students are working in the program as well.

STEPS: Steps To Employment and Personal Success

WEEK 3	<p>IV. Success on the Job</p> <p>A. Communication in the Workplace</p>	<p>B. Company Policies and Procedures</p> <p>C. Personal Qualities</p>	<p>V. Safety Issues</p> <p>A. At Home</p>	<p>B. In the Workplace</p>	<p>C. Nutrition and Food Safety</p>
WEEK 4	<p>VI. Money and Benefit Matters</p> <p>A. Understanding Fringe Benefits</p> <p>B. Interpreting Earning Statements</p>	<p>Budgeting Your Income</p>	<p>C. Banking and Investing Your Income</p> <p>D. Using Credit</p>	<p>VII. Balancing Work, Family and Community Commitments</p> <p>A. Family Responsibilities</p> <p>B. Work Responsibilities</p> <p>C. Community Involvement</p> <p>D. Personal Time</p>	<p>VIII. Planning for the Future</p> <p>A. Creating a Vision for Self</p> <p>B. Setting Realistic Goals</p> <p>C. Planning for Upward Mobility</p> <p>D. Planning for Future Education and Career Training</p> <p>E. Using Networks</p> <p>F. Developing a Time Line for Future Goals</p>

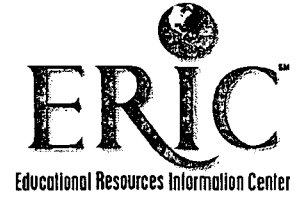
BLOCK PLAN FOR STEPS CURRICULUM

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
WEEK 1	<p>I. Personal Development</p> <p>A. Self Understanding B. Basic Human Needs</p>	<p>C. Self Esteem</p>	<p>D. Goals and Goal Setting E. Problem Solving Through Decision Making</p>	<p>F. Achieving Success G. Time Management</p>	<p>II. Personal Communication</p> <p>A. Types B. Importance of Effective Communication C. Factors Impacting Communication D. Qualities of Effective Communication E. Personal Communication Assessment F. Handling Difficult Situations G. Interacting with Public and Other Agencies</p>
WEEK 2	<p>III. The Job Search</p> <p>A. Possible Work/Career Options and Choices B. Sources of Job Information</p>	<p>C. Matching Personal Skills and Background to Job Opportunities</p>	<p>D. Networking Procedures E. Developing a Personal Fact Sheet F. Filing System for Job Search Materials</p>	<p>G. Developing a Professional Career Portfolio H. Written Application Materials</p>	<p>I. Etiquette in the Job Search H. The Interview Process</p>

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