



CENTRAL NEBRASKA COMMUNITY ACTION PARTNERSHIP, INC.

“Empower individuals and families while guiding them in the process to become self-sufficient and experience an improved quality of life.”

[Central Nebraska Community Action Partnership, Inc.](#)

(CNCAP) is a Community Action Agency created in 1965 that currently assists 15,000 people in North Central Nebraska through its programs and services. At the heart of this work is CNCAP’s vision to “Empower individuals and families while guiding them in the process to become self-sufficient and experience an improved quality of life.”

CNCAP manages four Rapid Rehousing (RRH) programs, including two funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD): THRIVES (Traditional for Rural Independence, Viability and Economic Stability) and a program for veterans. This case study focuses on the THRIVES, which serves people in 21 counties for up to 24 months.

THRIVES has shown success securing employment for its RRH program clients, including a large portion of the state’s homeless population that resides in rural areas. The core attributes of the program are intensive case management and community partnerships that lead to beneficial outcomes for housing and employment.

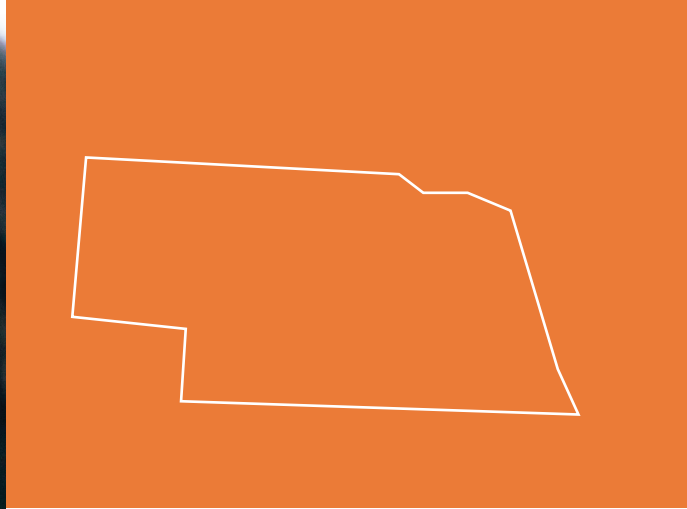
Client Entry & Assessment

CNCAP receives THRIVES client referrals from Nebraska’s coordinated entry system and through many of its collaborative partnerships with organizations such as domestic violence services/shelters and employment agencies. Coordinated entry in the state is open door, so even if clients don’t yet qualify for RRH programs, they are still referred so they can be added to the waiting list.

NEBRASKA

- THRIVES (Traditional for Rural Independence, Viability and Economic Stability)
- Veterans Program





“We do what it takes to get them employed, even though housing is their primary goal.”

FAMILY DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENT 12 LIFE AREAS*

1. Transportation
2. Family Relations
3. Parenting
4. Alcohol/Drug Use
5. Children’s Education
Adult’s Education
7. Income/Budget
8. Employment
9. Health Care
10. Nutrition
11. Housing
12. Legal

*Developed by ROMA Task Force for Community Action of Nebraska

Once clients are placed into an RRH program, they undergo a thorough assessment called a Family Development Assessment. Staff review the 12 life areas and talk about the person’s current status and goals for the future, such as employment, so the clients can eventually maintain housing on their own. CNCAP staff review the client’s employment and education history and discuss jobs in the local area that may fit the person’s knowledge, skills, and experience. The assessment is critical in capturing the client’s strengths, needs, goals, and challenges.

If clients are already employed, they are asked to bring in a pay stub and daily spending receipts. With this information, staff work with them on budgeting and money management. One case manager at CNCAP noted that “many clients don’t realize where their money is spent, so tracking their spending gives them a visual of where their money is spent day to day.”

Vocational Case Management: The Key

CCNCAP’s success in finding employment for RRH clients is powered by intensive, proactive vocational case management that focuses on the 12 life areas. Earning income through employment is a strong component of case management, because without an adequate income, clients won’t be able to afford or maintain their housing long term. The journey to self-sufficiency starts with clients paying a portion of their rent after 6 months, and they continue working forward until they can pay it all on their own.

CNCAP doesn’t require clients to accept case management, as it follows the Housing First philosophy, but no one has ever turned it down. In fact, most clients are very receptive to this service structure and have flourished under it.

“ Our clients’ successes are our success. We do what it takes to get them employed, even though housing is their primary goal.”



The case management experience is very person-centered. Case managers work one-on-one with clients to develop employment plans and goals, such as “apply for five jobs by end of week,” or “finish my resume.” Service plans include whatever clients want to work on, and by signing off on the plan, they acknowledge they agree with the goals and participated in plan development.

Despite CNCAP being a housing, rather than employment program, its case managers are well versed in strategies to find suitable employment for those experiencing homelessness. Each case manager basically serves as both a housing and employment specialist. They develop strong working relationships with outside agencies to ensure clients have every possible avenue to employment open to them. The responsibility for helping clients find suitable employment can mean long hours, lots of paperwork, and great effort, but case managers find great satisfaction in watching their clients move forward. One case manager noted, “Our clients’ successes are our success. We do what it takes to get them employed, even though housing is their primary goal.”

In terms of employment assistance, all case managers help clients decide on good contacts for references, hold mock interviews and coach them, give feedback on their resumes, and conduct home visits. Case managers also help clients look for job openings online or in local papers and help them talk with partner agencies and community colleges about education, training, and certification options.

Building Employment Partnerships in the Community

Because CNCAP does not have an internal employment department, the case managers build strong relationships with employment agencies, community colleges, vocational rehabilitation (VR), and the Department of Workforce Services (DWS). For its older client population, CNCAP has established a partnership with Nebraska Able (55+)—Senior Community Service Employment Program. This organization gives priority to veterans and offers up to 4 years of job training and job placement.

To stay informed, the CNCAP case managers attend DWS “spotlight” meetings, where social service agencies offer presentations about their services to each other. Attendance has helped case managers build a strong provider networking system to assist clients. In addition, DWS offers CNCAP office space, and DWS staff come to CNCAP offices if clients need special assistance. CNCAP case managers also attend a DWS-sponsored employment networking meeting in one community, which draw attendees from provider agencies, churches that provide homeless services, nonprofits, and school representatives. These networking opportunities have proven useful in helping find jobs for clients.

CNCAP staff also attend monthly state planning task force meetings. The meetings include many large factory employers who offer advice about how to get clients jobs at a higher wage and other valuable information.



Sometimes we have to look outside the box and teach tips and tricks to get to work on time, interview properly, and so on.”

Challenges and Solutions to Employment Success

Transportation. Transportation is often an issue for CNCAP clients living in rural areas, due to lack of public transportation. Even if a client secures a steady job, without a car and no bus, train, or cab system, success at that job is near impossible. For this reason, CNCAP partners with DWS and VR offices to work through transportation hurdles. For example, if a client does not have access to a car or someone to drive them, case managers help them look for employment options within walking distance. CNCAP also works with clients on budgeting and saving money so they can purchase cars and get the higher-paying jobs that requires transportation.

Education/Training. Employers most often now want some type of certification and 2 years of college, even for lower-level jobs, but many clients did not finish high school. These clients may possess the desire and ability to perform the job, but they need a certificate to get the job offer. In Nebraska's rural communities, certifications are very important, as most careers available to those without job histories, higher education, or skill sets require certifications, such as a commercial driver's license or certified nursing assistant. CNCAP partners with several educational organizations to get clients access to certification classes/training, or they offer such opportunities in-house.

Basic needs. Clients often have basic needs that impact their ability to attain employment. Some clients arrive to the program with nothing other than the clothes they are wearing. In many cases, they need help with personal appearance, such as haircuts, shaving kits, and professional clothes, so they can make a good impression at job interviews. In these cases, CNCAP case managers link clients with organizations that can provide appropriate interview clothes, clothing that fits the job environments, personal hygiene kits, and so forth.

Criminal justice involvement. When clients have a criminal history it generally takes longer for them to find employment, but it isn't impossible. With sexual misconduct or drug-related charges, work-setting options are restricted. These barriers are determined during assessments and case managers work within the parameters needed to find employment options for these clients.

Lack of soft skills. When clients have obstacles to successful employment, such as not showing up to work on time, struggling with interviews, or difficulty getting along with coworkers, case managers help them learn soft skills so they can function successfully on the job. Examples include teaching scheduling, finding jobs that fit their strengths, and avoiding jobs that are too far out of a client's comfort level or that require soft skills the client does not possess. As one case manager noted, "Sometimes we have to look outside the box and teach tips and tricks to get to work on time, interview properly, and so on."

Child care. Single mothers often struggle to find safe and affordable child care, but CNCAP staff notes they have greater advantage in rural areas because the mothers typically have strong networks of family and friends. When child care is a barrier for parents, CNCAP helps them find temporary solutions, such as Youth for Christ volunteers who provide daycare for short periods of time and a couple of churches that assist with child care. THRIVES also has childcare funds available for clients when they first start working.

Domestic violence. If a client has experienced domestic violence, workplace safety can be an issue. In these cases, the domestic violence agency remains involved, sends staff to talk with employers, and helps create safety plans. CNCAP and the domestic violence agency hold regular meetings and have a very strong working relationship. They are both committed to providing a safe future for survivors.



Employment Success

Among CNCAP RRH clients, less than 10% join the program with a job, but most have been employed within the past 2 years. The majority can work, but they have experienced a life-changing experience that impacted their housing and employment. A fair number of single female clients have never worked or have sporadic work histories, and they tend to be more difficult to employ as they often lack skill sets.

Upon exit, 65% of the adults in RRH gained or increased income between the time they entered the program and when they left it, and only 9% had no income when they left. Of those leaving the program with employment, 18% secured a job that offers health insurance and is consistent with what is considered a good job.



Conclusion

A Safety Net of Continued Support

At CNCAP, vocational case management goes beyond assistance to obtain and move into permanent housing. Even after clients find employment and are experiencing success, CNCAP case managers continue to monitor them, meet with them regularly, and sometimes meet with employers to address any workplace issues. In addition, CNCAP offers the HOPE (Hope Offers People Empowerment) Program to any client who has graduated from an RRH program but still needs help. HOPE has no time limit, as it does not receive outside funding. It is a type of life skills program with personalized case management/training around a client's specific needs.

CNCAP's carefully crafted system has served its client base well, as evidenced by the speed at which clients are able to get back on their feet, attain housing, and secure a job that allows them to maintain housing on their own. This success shows that even though having employment specialists on staff is ideal, with dedicated and well-connected case managers, RRH specialists can help clients both find housing and reach their employment goals by empowering them to become self-sufficient.