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[Proposal - Employ America: Using Volunteers to Deal with America's Chronic Unemployment Problem] [loose]

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EMPLOY AMERICA:

Using Volunteers to Deal With America's Chronic Unemployment Problem

Developed by:

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Eli Siegal
Office of National Service
The White House
Washington, D.C.

May 25, 1993

Dear Mr. Siegal:

On President's Day, my thirteen year old son Christofer handed Dee Dee Myers a proposal for an "Employ America" corps while we were visiting the White House grounds. Subsequently, on April 1st, I wrote Ms. Myers with a revised version of this proposal. Ms. Myer's kind response to this letter indicates that this document has been forwarded to your office.

As someone who spent six fruitful years as a Peace Corps Volunteer and staff member, I conceive EMPLOY AMERICA to be a domestic "Peace Corps" for the 90s. Its volunteer corps would staff specially designed programs to help unemployed Americans obtain and maintain employment. These volunteers could range from: a) college grads needing to perform national service to pay off their student loans to b) retired executives wanting to contribute their valuable expertise to dealing with this country's chronic unemployment problem. A national service program with an employment focus such as this could serve as a significant rallying point for many of the Clinton Administration's jobs-related strategies.

Attached is a Program Summary for EMPLOY AMERICA including annual goals and estimated costs. For your information, I have also enclosed a resume and articles about STRIVE, an employment program which I developed in New York, Chicago and Pittsburgh and on which aspects of EMPLOY AMERICA are based. I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to discuss this concept and how it might be implemented with you and your staff.

Sincerely yours,


Michael L. Frey

OVERVIEW

EMPLOY AMERICA is a proposed "Peace Corps" for the 1990s which will use volunteers drawn from various segments of our society to staff "grass roots" programs strategically designed to help chronically unemployed Americans obtain and maintain gainful employment.

Volunteers

This diverse volunteer corps will most likely include: *Retired Executives looking for a way to contribute, Disadvantaged Youth looking for a way out, Dislocated Workers looking for a way back to work and Recent College Grads looking for meaningful community services.*

EMPLOY AMERICA volunteers will be recruited, selected and trained for two year tours of duty. After completion of an intense two month training, they will be assigned to fill the employment programs' positions of Trainer, Peer Counselor, Job Developer or Business Analyst. They will receive stipends to cover essential living costs during their service as well as educational allowances at the end based on need.

Employment Programs

EMPLOY AMERICA programs would be established in the cities with the highest levels of chronic unemployment across the country. These programs would be: run by individual community based organizations, form a network in each city which would be coordinated by a consortium of industry, labor and education appropriate for that city and adhere to the same basic program design.

Annual Goals and Cost

- * *400 Programs.* Ten employment programs in each of forty cities.
- * *4,000 Volunteers.* Ten volunteers assigned to each of these programs.
- * *80,000 Unemployed People Employed.* 200 people helped by each program.
- * *48,000 Unemployed People Off Public Assistance.* About 60% of those employed.
- * *\$150,000,000 Budget.* A per capita cost of \$1,875 for each employed individual.
- * *\$354,000,000 Net Savings.* Reduced welfare, increased taxes minus program costs.

EMPLOY AMERICA

EMPLOY AMERICA'S CLIENTS

EMPLOY AMERICA will target its volunteers and program resources on the urban unemployed between the ages of 18 to 30 years of age who are on a merry-go-round moving from one dead-end job to public assistance or dependency on the street economy and back again. These young adults are usually minorities, often single parents as well as high school drop-outs and represent about 75% of today's jobless population.

Client Profile

This group is characterized by the following quotes from New York Times articles on February 29, and March 1, 1989 by William Julius Wilson from the University of Chicago and Roger W. Wilkins of the Institute for Policies Studies.

"They lead lives filled with violence and frustration. They know few working people, homeowners or professionals to give them inspiration or hope and they have little access to the world of most Americans. It is not surprising that they feel undeserving of a better life.

These youth suffer from the concentrated effects of poverty. They don't develop habits associated with regular work because their lives are not organized around work. They have rejected the values like discipline and study needed to get ahead in American life. They are crippled in inner city schools. They don't express themselves easily. And they are isolated from the job network so important in finding employment.

These young people are disillusioned with the system, have no notion that education is the key to long-term employment, have no confidence that they can make it in mainstream society and, in many instances, have opted for instant gratification and acceptance of the street world."

Traditional Programs Unresponsive

One of the reasons this crisis continues to grow is that most government-funded employment programs concentrate on expensive, long-term training of these young people for jobs that do not exist. People become social problems or statistics, not individuals. Inappropriate attitudes and poor communication skills are not dealt with in the course of these programs. And by not implementing long term follow-up, the central issue - job stability is lost.

EMPLOY AMERICA

WHY EMPLOY AMERICA PROGRAMS WILL WORK

The EMPLOY AMERICA programs will be built around five key elements which are critical for dealing with the real problems of young people in our cities who cannot find or keep jobs:

(1) Program Sites located in Inner City Neighborhoods

EMPLOY AMERICA programs will be situated - often in public housing complexes - so as to be accessible to people who need them and sensitive to local community issues. Centralized employment programs tend to become bureaucratic and removed.

(2) One month of Pre-Employment Training

This is intense training in a real work setting. It is geared to help chronically unemployed individuals make the adjustments necessary for their getting a job in today's high performance work place. The emphasis is on: correcting self-defeating attitudes, developing communication skills and an understanding of the work environment.

(3) Rapid Placement

The objective is to move those who successfully complete training quickly into a job as a first step on path to self-sufficiency based on the belief that work is the best training for work. Every attempt is made to identify suitable jobs which afford skill training opportunities and a chance for advancement.

(4) Two years of Post Placement Support and Career Counselling

Programs provide a case-managed continuum of work-skill building to help participants progress to stable, full-time employment with a livable wage, fringe benefits and opportunities for growth. This is in contrast to most government funded employment programs which presently focus on training individuals for entry level jobs but ignore the problems of long-term job stability and self-sufficiency.

(5) Job Creation Capacity

This capacity will include a business development fund to guarantee low interest loans so businesses can acquire the space and technology as well as marketing capability necessary for business expansion and for increasing the number of jobs suitable for EMPLOY AMERICA clients.

EMPLOY AMERICA

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND COSTS		
Number of Cities	40	
Number of Programs (10 per city)	400	
Number of Volunteers (10 per program)	4,000	
	Goals One Year	Goals Four Years
Number of Unemployed People Employed (average of 200 per program)	80,000	320,000
Number of New Jobs Created (average of 125 per city)	5,000	20,000
Number of Unemployed People Stably Employed and Moved Off Public Assistance (conservatively, 60% of those Employed)	48,000	192,000
	Cost One Year	Cost Four Years
Volunteers Living and Educational Allowances (an average of \$15,000 per volunteer per year)	\$60,000,000	\$240,000,000
Business Development Fund (an average of \$12,000 per job created)	\$60,000,000	\$240,000,000
Volunteer Training and Program Support	\$10,000,000	\$40,000,000
Program and Fund Administration	\$20,000,000	\$80,000,000
TOTAL	\$150,000,000	\$600,000,000

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PROJECTED IMPACT	One Year	Four Years
Savings in Welfare Payments for stabilized workers (\$8,000 X 48,000 stabilized workers per year)	\$384,000,000	\$1,536,000,000
Tax Collected from stabilized workers (\$2,500 X 48,000 stabilized workers per year)	\$120,000,000	\$480,000,000
Minus Total Cost of Program	<u>(\$150,000,000)</u>	<u>(\$600,000,000)</u>
NET SAVINGS	\$354,000,000	\$1,416,000,000

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Summary: Extensive project management and strategic planning experience as an executive and management consultant in complex human services, arts, education and employment organizations. Specializing in problem solving and financial planning, program design and fund-raising, human resource and organizational development.

Accomplishments:

Developed and served as founding president of *STRIVE*, a nationally-recognized employment program for disadvantaged youth with twelve sites in NYC, Chicago and Pittsburgh.

Developed and administered *JOBS 10,000*, a six year, \$12M project to help 10,000 chronically unemployed New Yorkers obtain permanent employment.

Designed and organized the service delivery and financial systems of a comprehensive workforce education program serving labor and industry throughout NYC.

Designed and implemented a deficit reduction plan which saved one of the nation's most prestigious cultural institutions just under \$1M a year.

Developed a manual for states and cities on the creative leverage of Federal dollars to provide disabled persons the housing and services needed for independent living.

Developed and conducted "Team Building" workshops for project managers and maintenance superintendents in public housing complexes.

Developed a country-wide, professional in-service training program for West African educators.

Experience:

1992 - PROJECT MANAGER, *NYC CONSORTIUM FOR WORKER EDUCATION*

1986 -91 PRESIDENT, *EAST HARLEM EMPLOYMENT SERVICE*

1982 -85 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, *HENRY STREET SETTLEMENT*

1979 -81 MANAGEMENT CONSULTANT, *PUBLIC POLICY AND ADMINISTRATION*

1975 -78 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER, *NYC AGENCY FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT*

1972 -74 PERSONNEL MANAGER, *NYC HUMAN RESOURCES ADMINISTRATION*

1969 -71 ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, *PEACE CORPS SIERRA LEONE*

Education: Peace Corps Fellow, Washington, D.C. , 1968

Peace Corps Volunteer, Liberia, 1965 - 1967

B.A., Stanford University, Stanford, California 1965

PROFILE

STRIVE: Job Training for the Long Haul

BY MARY KEEFE

IT LOOKED LIKE ONE OF A THOUSAND corporate meetings: a large room filled with standard-issue office chairs, men wearing starched shirts and ties, women in dresses and blazers, not a hair out of place. Yet instead of taking place in Wall Street or midtown, this meeting occurred in the basement of a community center in East Harlem. The 27 participants were enrolled in STRIVE, a three-week employment training program designed to help people find permanent jobs and keep them.

It was the third day of the program and each member of the group gave a five-minute speech that was recorded on video. For many, the experience was nerve-racking. Nahir Gonzalez, a lively 20-year-old, panicked during her speech but eventually completed it and later called five minutes "the longest time ever." Donna Valdes, who came to STRIVE because she has trouble staying at jobs, says she nearly didn't come to the class because of her fear of public speaking.

"You were nervous and you didn't want to get up here today. But you did it," announces Frank Horton, 29, a STRIVE graduate who now leads the program in East Harlem with equal measures of patience and toughness. "There's places you want to be in your life, but you are afraid... You expect people to understand that fear. We can understand it all day long, but until you cross that bridge and take on the responsibility, it won't change."

STRIVE, which stands for Support and Training Resulting in Valuable Employment, focuses on people who are often labeled "hard-to-employ." Of the 516 East Harlem STRIVE graduates between 1985 and 1988, 49 percent were high school drop-outs, 75 percent were on public assistance, 45 percent were parents and 97 percent were black or Latino. The average age was 23.

Low Self-Esteem

According to Horton, many of the people in the program are struggling with low self-esteem and language barriers. "Their confidence is ter-



Confidence builder: Frank Horton leading a STRIVE session.

rible," he says. "My job is to deal with their attitudes. They have gone to job after job and not been successful." At STRIVE, he says, "before they know it they have 20 or 30 positive experiences since they walked in."

These positive experiences appear to pay off—since opening in 1985, the program has placed 79 percent of its 853 graduates in jobs. And follow-up calls four times a year show that 80 percent remain employed. "We don't think our training is complete until someone is stably employed," says Michael Frey, founder and president of STRIVE. To him, that means two years in a job that's not a dead end.

Frey started STRIVE five years ago to replicate a program he was impressed with while serving as director of the Henry Street Settlement. The job training effort is privately funded and meets needs that are ignored by government-funded programs under the federal Job Training and Partnership Act (JTPA). Many advocates criticize JTPA because the emphasis is job placement rather than job retention.

Since its inception, STRIVE has expanded and now has a second

branch located in a public housing project in the Bronx. The program is poised to take another leap because the New York-based Clark Foundation recently awarded it a \$4 million challenge grant. Over the next five years, the STRIVE staffers have to raise another \$8 million to fund expansion into eight new locations and to place 10,000 young New Yorkers in permanent jobs. The grant is a "particularly large one" for the Clark Foundation, and what sold the board was STRIVE's five-year record of job retention rates, according to Joseph Cruickshank, secretary of the foundation.

Rob Carmona, executive director of STRIVE, says that the key to STRIVE's job retention rates is extensive personal contact and individual calls to graduates at regular three-month intervals. The program is short and intensive, and once it is over, graduates have lifetime access for extra help with personal problems, assistance moving up the job ladder or into higher education.

Job developers at each STRIVE location work with New York employers to help find slots that graduates can apply for, although many people find their own jobs. Carmona

says. Most of the jobs are in back office operations, in areas like building operations and hospitals. The police department runs recruiting workshops at the Bronx location.

Program Meets Needs

Last October, Miriam Gaston read an ad for STRIVE in a newspaper after she'd been out of work for a

friendly" computer training is available to everyone and day care is provided at one of the two branches.

Ten days after Gaston graduated from STRIVE, she landed a job as an administrative secretary at the graduate film department of New York University. Summing up why STRIVE has helped turn her life

around, she says, "Being on public assistance is not exactly an ego building experience so you don't always come in with the best attitude." At STRIVE, she says, "there's always a sense of pride and respect." □

Mary Keefe is a freelance writer focusing on community issues.