

How Welfare Still Discourages Work—And Why That Must Change

Experts in the Field See Need for Reform

One Problem a Strong Economy Hasn't Solved

OKLAHOMA CITY, Nov. 27, 2019 – After nine straight months of an unemployment rate below 4%, many assume that everyone who wants a job has one. But as Express Employment Professionals sees on a regular basis, there are still many Americans who would like to work but choose not to—because taking a job would actually harm their financial situation.

Welfare programs in America are structured in such a way that they can create a disincentive to work. Express franchise owners witness this on a regular basis, hearing variations of a similar but unfortunate refrain: “I want to work but having a job would actually mean having less money.”

Welfare programs represent a complicated patchwork of federal and state programs with varying qualifications and levels of benefits. But similar effects are witnessed across the country:

- Boulder, Colorado: “They can’t afford to make too much money or they will lose benefits.” –Todd Isaacson, Express franchise owner
- Windsor, Connecticut: “Welfare programs provide ‘just enough’ to incentivize staying in them. It drives people to take ‘under the table’ jobs instead of ‘real jobs.’” –Dwight Hahn, Express franchise owner
- Crystal Lake, Illinois: “When an associate takes a job and it doesn’t work out, they have to go through the hassle of applying for benefits all over again.” –Terri Greeno, Express franchise owner
- Wakefield, Massachusetts: “We have associates who can only work 20 hours a week because they will lose their benefits if they work more hours.” –John Dickey, Express franchise owner
- Fort Worth, Texas: “We can see how the dependency on welfare programs can cause people to have longer than necessary gaps in work history, which in turn makes it even harder to re-enter the workforce.” –Jan Riggins, Express franchise general manager

As Express experts explain, this has consequences beyond the financial implications. Work provides vital non-monetary benefits including:

- Purpose and confidence that comes from earning a paycheck
- Socializing and a sense of belonging
- Intellectual stimulation and improved mental health
- Satisfaction of making a societal contribution
- Skill development

Dwight Hahn says, work “shows responsibility. It is good for self-worth, as well as mental and physical health. It allows people to contribute to society, provide for their families and give people hope and purpose.”

Terri Greeno adds, “Work brings dignity to life. Work gives purpose and meaning. Work builds character. Work improves health and is inversely correlated to depression.”

With all of this at stake, what is the solution?

Make welfare benefits “a sliding scale,” says Todd Isaacson, “allowing people to work but still get benefits they need.”

Jan Riggins agrees.

“I think a decrease in benefits as a stepping stone when re-entering the workforce would be more beneficial than an either/or situation,” she said.

Welfare programs provide a vital safety net in modern society, especially when helping Americans facing difficult and unexpected circumstances, according to Bill Stoller, CEO of Express.

“It’s hard to blame anyone for making the financial calculation that under the current system they might actually be better off not working,” he said. “But we can’t stop there. Work is too important and opens too many doors of opportunity for us to leave our fellow Americans trapped outside the workforce. Reform is needed to help people reach their full potential.”

If you would like to arrange for an interview with Bill Stoller to discuss this topic, please contact Sheena Karami, Director of Corporate Communications and PR, at (405) 717-5966.

About Bill Stoller

William H. "Bill" Stoller is chairman and chief executive officer of Express Employment Professionals. Headquartered in Oklahoma City, the international staffing company has more than 800 franchises in the U.S., Canada and South Africa. Since its inception, Express has put more than 7.7 million people to work worldwide.

About Express Employment Professionals

Express Employment Professionals puts people to work. It generated \$3.56 billion in sales and employed a record 566,000 people in 2018. Its long-term goal is to put a million people to work annually. For more information, visit ExpressPros.com.