

**City of Jacksonville, Texas****Location:** Cherokee County**Population:** 13,868 (2000)**Ethnic composition:** 63% White, 23% Hispanic or Latino, 21% Black or African American**Median age:** 31.4 years (2000)**Adults ages 45 to 64:** 32,487**Adults ages 64 and older:** 2,487**Percentage of adults ages 45 and older compared with total population:** 33%**Median household income:** \$29,802 (2007)**Other key information:** Twenty-five percent of residents live on incomes below the federal poverty level.

## EMPLOYMENT

**Industry:** Local Government Agency/Nongovernmental Organization**CHALLENGE**

Current economic conditions are causing growing numbers of people to change their plans to retire or transition from fulltime to part-time employment. A December 2008 AARP Public Policy Institute survey of 1,097 people found that among current retirees (i.e., those not currently working or looking for work), at least 25% said that within the past 12 months, they had either looked for a job or thought about returning to work because they needed more income. The survey also found that 16% of people ages 45 and older had decided to postpone retirement.

Along with income, concerns about growing health care costs remain a big driver for decisionmaking among those considering retirement, especially for those too young (i.e., under age 65) to qualify for Medicare coverage. They may stay in jobs longer, defer retirement, or even consider not retiring at all. Meanwhile, retirement funds and home equity have dropped off sharply or perhaps disappeared altogether, while the cost of living continues to rise.

At the same time, many states, counties, and cities are experiencing financial turmoil due to a plummeting real estate market, sharp increases in home foreclosure rates, and dwindling sales and property tax revenues.

Finding employment as an older adult presents significant challenges, especially when the unemployment rate is high. Older workers bring extensive practical experience and highly honed skills to the job (even though some may need to brush up on their understanding and use of technology in the workplace). Yet in a tight job market, these workers often find themselves competing with younger jobseekers, even for the same entry-level positions. And younger jobseekers may be willing to accept a lower salary, making them more attractive to potential employers. Given popular culture's emphasis on youthfulness, employers may be biased against certain applicants (whether consciously or unconsciously) just because they look older. Younger workers may feel uncomfortable managing someone older, or think that older people cannot adapt to new ways of working.

## SOLUTION

Recognizing the particular challenges older people face in finding and keeping work, the U.S. Department of Labor established the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP). According to the department's web site, SCSEP "enhances employment opportunities for older Americans and promotes them as a solution for businesses seeking trained, qualified, and reliable employees." SCSEP provides both job training and employment assistance to its participants.

Of the program's \$433 million in total funding, 22% goes to state programs, such as those from departments of aging and local Area Agencies on Aging, for example, and 78% goes to 18 national organizations that compete to provide services at the regional and local levels. The recently enacted American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 provides for nearly \$120 million in new funding for SCSEP. The Department of Labor recently issued policy guidance that calls for the funds to go toward "increased services and training for unemployed, low-income older adults, and to invigorate and advance prosperity in the communities where they live."

Experience Works, one of 74 SCSEP grantees across the United States, is a community-based nongovernmental organization that aims to help older adults get the training they need to find employment within their communities. The City of Jacksonville contacted Experience Works, the local SCSEP serving Cherokee County, and asked to become a "host" agency. As a host agency, the city would agree to pay participants' wages, including workers' compensation insurance premiums, for an average of 20 hours per week during a transition period that cannot exceed two years.

## RESULTS

The City of Jacksonville, as a host agency, placed SCSEP participants, as trainees, with an employer. Marilyn Cates, employment and training coordinator for Experience Works, explains, "We do the applicant screening and training for our host agencies. I work very closely with our participants and really get to know them in the process. I am also in close contact with our host agencies. I will not refer an applicant unless they are well qualified for the job." The City of Jacksonville placement worked out so well that applicants were hired into fulltime positions.

SCSEP benefits both older jobseekers and employers. It provides resources, support, and professional guidance to jobseekers at the beginning of their search to help them re-enter the workforce. At the same time, it helps employers by matching the skills of older adults with employer needs to ensure the best match for open positions without the cost of a search firm or employment agency.

Robert Rice, director of the AARP Foundation-sponsored SCSEP based in Sacramento, California, says, "The program provides an opportunity for the host agency to determine if the trainee has the skills for the job and fits well in the position. The unique opportunity to see if the applicant is right for the job, before hiring, provides a significant advantage to the employer." Based on his work with SCSEP over the past four years, Rice has found that "many employers are not convinced that the older worker is up to the task. This program provides the older job applicant a chance to show that he or she can do the job well."





#### **AGING WELL BENEFITS—EMPLOYMENT**

Individuals who continue to work beyond the traditional retirement age (i.e., between the ages of 59 and 69) express greater well-being and self-satisfaction. People ages 65 or older and working in physically demanding jobs have reported better physical health. Growing older is often accompanied by loss, such as the death of a spouse or other loved ones, the loss of status associated with a job title, or declines in physical health and independence. For many older adults, losing their work identity and the financial benefits of employment can be devastating. In contrast, getting up every morning to go to work or holding responsibility for a specific task or role provides meaning and purpose. A routine work schedule in an environment with other people offers opportunities for social interaction and camaraderie. For many older adults, the workplace also serves as an important informal support network that reduces isolation and loneliness and strengthens ties to other people, as well as to the larger community.

#### **PROMISING PRACTICES—LESSONS LEARNED**

- Improve job satisfaction and retention by using training and career counseling services.
- Take advantage of the pool of potential employees interested in part-time, long-term positions.
- Promote resources and networking opportunities among jobseekers and employers.
- Seek available expertise to screen potential job applicants to determine the best fit and opportunities.

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## FOR MORE INFORMATION

This case study is part of [Aging Well in Communities: A Toolkit for Planning, Engagement & Action](#). This toolkit includes a community planning overview; guides for resident surveys, public forums, and focus groups; case studies; and a list of aging-related resources. For the complete toolkit, visit <http://www.civicpartnerships.org/aging-well>.

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