

Federal stimulus program helps Marin's jobless

Brent Ainsworth

Posted: 04/11/2010 09:40:26 PM PDT



Amy Markham, a client of the Buckelew Programs who is employed at the Marin Humane Society, walks with Daisy in the canine kennel viewing area at the Humane Society. Markham's employment is being paid for with federal economic stimulus funds. More than \$9 million has been provided to Marin nonprofits, such as Buckelew, to line up low-income and unemployed people with jobs. (IJ photo/Jeff Vendsel)

Amy Markham, a single mom from Novato with kids ages 7 and 2, went nearly four years without work.

"I really needed to get out of the house," she said.

Now, she is about one month into a new job at the Marin Humane Society through a temporary countywide program fueled by federal economic

stimulus funds.

The program, called Marin Works Now, is designed to help people who need a boost: low-income and unemployed residents, as well as business owners who need more help but haven't been able to make hires during the recession.

So far, 460 local people have found temporary work through the program, which started in Marin in December.

Markham, 26, said she always wanted to be veterinarian or a vet's assistant. Her job as animal care assistant includes cleaning and preparing the adoption and vaccination rooms, cleaning kennels and cages, walking dogs and assisting

with other animals such as chickens and rabbits.

"I love the Marin Humane Society and I'm so thankful for this program," she said. "My only problem has been getting (emotionally) attached to the animals."

Animal care director Tricia Breen said Markham is making the most of her 22 hours per week.

"She is showing a huge amount of initiative and she's learning as much as she can," Breen said. "We are very happy to have her. The hope is that, once she's settled, she can move into a permanent position with us."

That's part of the idea behind Marin Works Now, which falls under the auspices of the Marin County Department of Health and Human Services. One primary goal is to place people in temporary positions over the next six months with the hope that the jobs could become permanent and provide

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help for businesses.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act has provisions that allow counties to receive funding to cover 80 percent of the cost of subsidized wages for low-income families through Sept. 30. In Marin, the agencies involved in Marin Works Now see it as a use-it-or-lose-it situation.



Bucklew Programs client Amy Markham found a job at the Marin Humane Society with the help of Buckelew administrator Dan Daniels Sr. and Marin Works Now, a program funded by the federal stimulus and designed to help low-income and unemployed residents. (IJ photo/Jeff Vendse)

The county was allotted \$9.9 million for the program with workers making no more than \$15 per hour unless there are special circumstances.

"It has gone very well," said Mary Donovan,

manager of the county's employee and training branch. "Most of the information we've received back from clients and their employers is that both are very happy. There is a possibility at the federal level that it will be extended one more year. We are anxiously awaiting news on that."

Three organizations in Marin - Community Action Marin, the Marin City Community Development Corp. and Manpower - have been contracted by the county to refer clients to employers and work with other nonprofits find strong candidates.

Markham's referral to the program came through the Marin City Community Development Corp. via Buckelew Programs, which helps people with mental illnesses acclimate into the community. Shelley Norris-Alvarez, Buckelew's program director, said 12 Buckelew clients - all low-income people who have children - have found work through Marin Works Now within 30 days of enrollment.

"Many have been unemployed for quite a while and are looking to build their confidence and skills levels," she said. "When these people get a paycheck, it helps our whole economic system. We look at this work as part of a person's recovery and overall wellness."

Dan Daniels Sr., Buckelew's marketing and community relations administrator, said he has kept busy getting enrolled clients lined up with jobs. The state's Department of Rehabilitation has provided on-the-job training for some of the workers; an employer can receive upwards of \$5,000 to train a Marin Works Now employee.

"That can be such a huge support to these businesses," he said. "We are working hard to make sure these individuals meet the needs of a company so we can stimulate their business and their

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workforce."

Markham, meanwhile, said she has fallen in love with a Chihuahua mix and is probably feeding her too many treats.

"This is already like a second home to me," she said.

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

To learn more about the Marin Works Now program, call Marin County Health and Human Services' Marin Employment Connection at 473-3300.

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