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Municipal Diverging from "Bureaucracy:" A Case Study of Organizational Image in Housing Services

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Diverging from "Bureaucracy:" A Case Study of Organizational Image in Housing Services

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This article presents a case study of efforts of a workforce development unit within a local public housing authority to recraft its image as separate from the larger housing authority, in order to better attract participants to its optional supportive services. Using qualitative interview data with Section 8 voucher recipients and public housing authority staff, and descriptive quantitative data from a larger dataset, and drawing on theories of street-level bureaucracies and agency-client interactions, the case study finds that service recipients perceive the housing authority as a largely compliance-oriented organization that is overly bureaucratic, excessively regulating of private spheres of family life, and highly punitive. In order to attract participants to its optional supportive services, the workforce development unit recrafted its organizational identity and its external image through spatial relocation, rebranding, reallocation of workload among staff, and program redesign. The result is a workforce development unit that is highly valued and attractive to service participants, and that service seekers view as distinct from the housing authority within which the unit resides.

San Diego is consistently ranked among the least affordable housing markets in the United States, topping that list in 2015 (Horn 2015), and coming in at number two in 2016 (Cox 2017). Rather than looking exclusively at housing *costs*, assessments of housing *affordability* consider housing costs in relation to how many residents of a community can afford to purchase a home at the median price. In 2015, real estate industry research showed that less than half of households could qualify to buy a median priced home in 93.3 percent of San Diego zip codes. This was the highest ratio of any city in the study (Horn 2015). Some find San Diego's ranking surprising when considering notoriously high-priced cities like New York or San Francisco. Though San Francisco does have higher home prices, San Franciscans' higher incomes mean that the ratio of residents who cannot afford to buy homes was lower than in San Diego in 2015 (though still alarmingly high). In the fourth quarter of 2016, the median home price in San Diego rose to $593,000. This means one required an annual income of more than $113,000 to qualify for a mortgage loan, and then would pay a mortgage of nearly $2,650 a month (Cox 2017). West coast cities dominate the list of the top ten least affordable housing markets. Boston, Miami, and New York were the only east coast

cities on the list of the top ten least affordable housing markets in 2015 (Horn 2015).

A shortage of housing units in San Diego County means it is not only aspiring homeowners who bear the burden of high housing costs; renters are also under extreme pressure. Housing affordability is an important political concern for middle-class families, and a critical consideration for lower-income San Diegans. Fifty-seven percent of renters in the San Diego region are rent-burdened, meaning they spend at least 30 percent of their income on rent- the 10th highest figure in the country (Levy 2017). The San Diego Housing Commission estimates that, since 2014, the San Diego region has produced only four percent of the number of moderate-income housing units needed to meet demand, and only six percent of the number of low-income housing units needed, compared to thirty-one percent of high-income units needed. At present, a renter needs to earn three times the minimum wage to pay the median rent price in San Diego, meaning many working-class families pay up to 70% of their income on rent, or are choosing to leave the region altogether (Morlan 2017).

In the context of this housing crisis, local housing authorities play a crucial role in providing physical access to housing and providing supportive services to help clients better succeed in the private rental market. Like many public housing authorities nationwide, within San Diego County some housing authorities offer supportive services, such as workforce development services. This case study examines a workforce development unit within a public housing authority, and the ways that the unit's efforts to shift its image and organizational identity resulted in attracting more participants to its optional supportive services. The workforce development unit offers workshops, counseling, and outside referrals to assist with a multitude of issues, including personal and household budgeting, parenting skills, job procurement, entrepreneurship, financial literacy, welfare eligibility, and more. The workforce development unit also operates the Family Self Sufficiency (FSS) program, which is a hallmark program of many public housing authorities.

This research project has a goal of exploring why a particular workforce development unit has been successful in reinvigorating its programs and attracting a large number of participants to its non-mandatory services at a time when many other agencies struggle with participation (Bates and Flanigan 2018). Using qualitative interview data and descriptive quantitative data from a larger dataset, this case study examines how increases in participation and client satisfaction were driven in part by efforts that the workforce development unit undertook to recraft its image as separate from the larger housing authority. Drawing on theories of street-level bureaucracies (Lipsky 1980) and agency-client interactions (for example, Soss 2002), findings indicate that service recipients perceived the housing authority as being a largely compliance-oriented organization that is overly bureaucratic, excessively regulating of private spheres of family life, and highly punitive. Findings show that a substantial increase in participation in non-mandatory programs offered by the associated workforce development unit was a result of the units' efforts to recraft its organizational identity and its external image through spatial relocation, rebranding, reallocation of workload among staff, and program redesign. By differentiating itself from the larger, less personal public housing authority, the workforce development unit became highly valued and attractive to service participants.

Street-level Bureaucracies and Agency-Client Interactions
Though policy goals of eradicating poverty may vary with the political winds, scholars such as Piven and Coward (1971) assert that the poor nonetheless perpetually endure as a problem to be managed, and, in turn, are a population to be governed. This process of "poverty governance" requires poor people to interact with the state frequently and repeatedly. On the

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front lines of this poverty governance landscape are street-level government staff. Everyone has experiences with government frontline workers; teachers work with our children, and TSA agents screen us at the airport. However, poor and minority communities have disproportionately high levels of interaction with government, and the frontline staff who work in government agencies have disproportionate influence on the lives of the poor (Lipsky 1980).

As part of a long tradition of public efforts to "improve" the poor (Katz 1997), a modern trend in poverty governance has been a paternalist reform movement that emphasizes the state's role in directing the poor into "appropriate" behavior and making aid dependent upon "good" conduct. Programs provide incentives for desired behavior (such as working), impose penalties for noncompliance, and engage in regular monitoring of behavior (Korteweg 2003; Mead 1997, 1998; Schram, Fording, & Soss 2011). Under the banner of making the poor better citizens and encouraging personal responsibility, the state engages in monitoring and regulation not only of work, but of child rearing, family arrangements, sex, and substance use and abuse (Abramovitz 1988; Gordon 1994; Keiser and Soss 1998). A construction of deservingness shapes how the poor are greeted by agencies (Altreiter and Leibetseder 2015, Djuve and Kavli 2015); workers may break or ignore rules for those constructed as "deserving," but may use rules to withhold or reduce services for "undeserving" individuals (Riccucci 2005). This process of monitoring, ensuring compliance, and administering punishment has disproportionately affected communities of color (Goldberg 2007; Lieberman 1998; Schram 2005; Schram, Fording, & Soss 2011; Schram, Soss, Fording, and Houser 2009; Wacquant 2009).

The complexity of social policy allows, and demands, substantial discretion on the front lines (Nothdurfter and Hermans 2018). Street-level workers determine eligibility for services and oversee the services individuals receive (Lipsky 1980; Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2005; Watkins-Hayes 2009). There are many instances where interactions may be perceived as negative by the potential recipient. Poor people are denied housing vouchers, informed that their nutrition assistance will be reduced, or told that there is no childcare program available during the hours when they work. In addition, the process of determining eligibility can be onerous and invasive. Individuals may be asked to disclose basic information about their income and health status, but sometimes also are required to disclose criminal histories, information about guests staying in their home, and even detailed accounts of their sexual history (Soss 2002; Keiser and Soss 1998). In addition to formal requirements for personal information, certain informal practices and procedural discretion increase the burden of requesting benefits for vulnerable groups, by making these processes complex, confusing, and difficult to navigate (Brodkin and Maimundar 2010).

This is not the fault of the frontline staff per se. Many street-level workers themselves are troubled by certain rules and limits placed upon them by their agencies (Lipsky 1980; Watkins-Hayes 2009). Lipsky (1980) and others (for example, Tummers et al. 2014, 2015) regard street-level discretion and deviation from certain formal rules as a necessary tool to address unrealistic mandates. Rules often are created not to provide better protections to those seeking services, but to restrict the generosity and lenience of street-level workers (Cosmo 2012, Suvarierol 2015). Burdensome processes created through informal procedural discretion often are driven by larger organizational priorities, such as pressure on an agency to decrease welfare rolls (Alden 2015a, 2015b; Brodkin and Maimundar 2010). In other cases, street-level bureaucrats use discretion to cope with ambiguous or contradicting policies, inadequate resources, and high workplace pressure (Alden 2015a, 2015b; Barberis

and Boccagni 2014; Cuadra and Staaf 2014; Ellis 2007; Evans 2016; Hoybye-Mortensen 2015; Östberg 2014).

Of course, street-level discretion is not all bad for those seeking assistance. The public management and social policy literature discusses both the perils and the benefits of frontline discretion for vulnerable individuals (Nothdurfter and Hermans 2018). Nevertheless, frequent repeated interactions lead many poor to have a negative image of "caseworkers", and the bureaucracies within which they are housed (Goodsell 1981; Lipsky 1971; York & Henley 1986). This makes this case study particularly notable and worthy of duplication, as low-income clients hold an overwhelmingly positive view of the front-line workforce.

Methodology

In a study of supportive housing services in San Diego County, researchers collected qualitative data from Section 8 voucher recipients participating in a variety of workforce development services within one public housing agency. "Section 8" is a common name for the Housing Choice Voucher Program, funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and administered by local public housing authorities. The Section 8 program allows low-income tenants to seek rental units on the private market, and a housing subsidy is paid directly to the property owner by the local public housing authority (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, n.d.). Local public housing authorities often offer workforce development services to public housing residents and Section 8 voucher recipients. The study sought to understand how the workforce development unit dramatically improved participation in non-mandatory workforce development programming.

Qualitative interview data were collected longitudinally, over a period of sixteen months, using a series of semi-structured qualitative interviews. During the first phase of the study, thirty-one Section 8 recipients participated in interviews. In addition, seven staff members from the workforce development unit were interviewed using a semi-structured qualitative interview protocol. The staff members interviewed ranged from street-level bureaucrats to the director of the unit. The director had been hired with a charge of improving participation in the unit's programs and increasing the impact of the unit's services. The qualitative interviews were transcribed and then coded using a structural approach (MacQueen et al. 2008, Saldaña 2016), using MaxQDA software as an aid. All interviews were coded by at least two separate coders, and a high degree of intercoder reliability was achieved (Kappa coefficient of greater than .90).

These qualitative data were complimented with quantitative analysis of an agency-provided dataset that contained information on 6,916 service interactions for 175 randomly selected Section 8 recipients who were workforce development program participants. The service interactions took place over an average of fifteen months. This dataset was analyzed to find distribution and frequency data on the types of services individuals usually received from the workforce development program, and the frequency with which the services were sought.

Subject Recruitment

Individuals who were Section 8 voucher recipients and participants in optional workforce development programming at a local housing authority in San Diego County were recruited for this study with the assistance of agency staff. Agency staff invited individuals to informational meetings by email, personal conversation, and through passive methods, such as flyers. An estimated 300 individuals were reached by non-passive, individual

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invitations. The workforce development unit within the agency organized informational meetings regarding participation in the research project, and researchers provided an orientation to the research project. Thirty-eight individuals attended the informational meetings. All individuals in attendance indicated an interest in being part of the research project and provided contact information for further follow-up. Thirty-one individuals (81.5% of information session attendees) participated in time one interviews in January 2017, 80.6% of those (25 individuals) participated in time two interviews in August and September of 2017, and 70.9% of the original interviewees (22 individuals) participated in time three interviews in April 2018 (see Table 1).

Table 1: Interview Timing and Number of Section 8 Interview Participants

Time 1 interviews Jan 2017	Time 2 interviews Aug & Sept 2017	Time 3 interviews April 2018
31 families (81.5% response)	25 families (80.6% retention)	22 families (70.9% retention from Time 1, 88% retained from Time 2)

None of the eight individuals who refrained from participating in time two and time three interviews indicated a lack of interest in the research project, but were unreachable due to changes in contact information or were difficult to schedule due to self-reported chaotic events in the individuals' personal lives. In addition, researchers interviewed seven staff members at various levels of the workforce development unit, ranging from the director of the unit to street-level caseworkers.

Table 2: Section 8 Interview Participant Demographic Information Number of participants

Race/Ethnicity	**African American**	**15 (48.3%)**
	Asian/ Pacific Islander	2 (6.5%)
	Hispanic	11 (35.5%)
	White	3 (9.7%)
Gender	Female	22 (71%)
	Male	9 (29%)
Age Range	20-29	3 (9.7%)
	30-39	13 (41.9%)
	40-49	6 (19.4%)
	50-59	9 (29%)
Language spoken at home	English	17 (54.8%)
	Spanish	8 (25.8%)
	Other	6 (19.4%)

Of the thirty-one Section 8 participants interviewed, fifteen were African American, two were Asian/Pacific Islanders, eleven were Hispanic, and three were white. Fourteen spoke a language other than English at home, with eight of these reporting they spoke Spanish at home. Four additional languages were reported. Twenty-two were female, and nine were

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male. Ages of participants ranged from 24 to 57, with the largest number of participants being in their 30's (thirteen) (see Table 2).

Data Collection

Qualitative data were collected from individuals who were recipients of Section 8 vouchers and participants in optional workforce development programs in the local housing authority. Data were collected through periodic, in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The interview protocol asked questions about how individuals became involved in the programming, their experience in the program, and their experience with their key contact person or "caseworker." The protocol also asked how Section 8 participants went about seeking assistance for other needs beyond housing, their experiences with other government agencies, including the criminal justice system, and general questions about Section 8 participants' perceptions of government and front-line government workers. The protocol ended by asking Section 8 participants their goals for the coming year. Time two and time three protocols were individually tailored to each participant, following up on progress toward individual goals.

Individuals were offered reasonable guarantees of confidentiality in line with standard human-subjects procedures. Interviews were conducted at a time and place selected by the participant, often the individual's home or near his or her workplace. Interviews averaged one hour in length, lasting as long as one hour twenty-five minutes.

The workforce development unit provided quantitative data on 6,916 service interactions for 175 randomly selected Section 8 recipients who were participants in optional workforce development programs. These data were provided in a standard agency spreadsheet and were cleaned and coded by the researchers to permit some basic quantitative analysis. While no variables were included that could be used as clear indicators of success in the program, the data provided a useful picture of the broad spectrum of services sought by participants and the frequency of agency-client interaction.

Case Study Design

The data sources were used to develop a case study of how and why a specific workforce development unit had been effective in reviving its programs and drawing a large number of individuals to its non-mandatory services, at a time when many other agencies struggle with waning participation (Bates and Flanigan 2018). Case studies are a useful approach for answering these sorts of "how" and "why" questions in settings where the researcher does not have control over behavioral events (Agranoff 2007; Yin 2018). In this case study, the data were used to better understand operational processes over time, rather than only measuring frequencies or incidence of behavior, with the goal of better understanding the impacts of a set of decisions made in the reorganization of the workforce development unit.

Diverging from "Bureaucracy": A Conscious Effort at Shifting Organizational Identity and Image

The literature on poverty governance provides evidence that poorer citizens perceive many public institutions as overly monitoring and excessively punitive. As a result, the poor often desire to avoid those institutional relationships, unless interaction is absolutely necessary. For programs offering non-mandatory services, the reputation of human service agencies as part of a cold, harsh bureaucratic system can be problematic for outreach and service provision.

In this case, the workforce development unit had experienced dwindling participation in its programming. The programs had a reputation among both clients and staff of the public housing authority for being ineffective and were described by several staff

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members as "fluff." The director of the workforce development unit indicated that she had been hired to improve participation in the unit's non-mandatory programs, as well as improving the beneficial impact of the programs on Section 8 participants' self-sufficiency. She explains,

> *When I was hired in, I was hired to really revamp the (unit). Change the programming, make it more of a workforce related unit, instead of…well, they used to have a lot of coloring, times when the kids would come in and they'd color, but (the programming) wasn't really helping people become self-sufficient.*

The unit director described a low level of participation and a need to encourage more individuals to take advantage of new and improved services that were developed. She explained how she attended to program content and delivery, but also gave particular attention to relatively minor changes in atmosphere that would be more appealing to potential workforce development participants. She explained,

> *I've been really focused on getting money (from outside donors and grants) because with federal (Department of Housing and Urban Development) funding, it's limited what you can do. You can't feed people, you can't do things that bring people into a program…There are certain incentives that are very small that make a difference, that you can't do with federal (funds).*

This study took place approximately five years after the director had been charged with increasing program quality and participation, and participation had increased markedly during that period. The Section 8 participants who were interviewed largely had a positive impression of the workforce development unit staff and of its services at the time of the study. The nature of the workforce development unit's activities was an important factor. Staff in the workforce development unit did not determine eligibility for Section 8 vouchers; they provided additional supportive services and incentives, rather than denying services. This removed much of the power and possible punitive action these staff had over the Section 8 interview participants in the study, which is different from the power dynamics described in much of the literature on poverty governance (Abramovitz 1988; Altreiter and Leibetseder 2015; Djuve and Kavli 2015; Gordon 1994; Keiser and Soss 1998; Korteweg 2003; Mead 1997, 1998; Schram, Fording, & Soss 2011). Staff members acknowledged this,

> *I want (the Section 8 participants) to feel like we are all working together, and we are all a team, and we are all there for them. For their success! I'm not there to punish them or talk about any issues they have with their housing. No, I want to make sure that the other part of their world is going right.*

In an environment where many agencies struggle to keep lower-income clientele engaged in non-mandatory programs (Bates and Flanigan 2018), two thousand clients each year make use of this particular workforce development unit's entirely voluntary programming. Interview data indicate that the conscious, strategic effort to differentiate the

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unit from the customary image of a bureaucracy, and from the image of the housing authority in which it resides, played an important role in attracting Section 8 participants and keeping them engaged over time. These efforts to differentiate the workforce development unit from the larger agency bureaucracy were manifest in several ways, including the name and physical location of the workforce development unit, the spectrum and flexibility of services provided, frequent and positive caseworker interactions, and the culture of service within the unit.

Physical Location and Environment

Nonprofit and government organizations are finding that staff member personalities, and a welcoming corporeal environment, can be an important part of their marketing strategy. In this case, as part of a strategic effort to increase its appeal to Section 8 recipients, the workforce development unit adopted a catchy, memorable name that was different from the name of the housing authority itself.[1] The workforce development unit also physically detached itself from the larger housing authority. The workforce development unit was relocated to a separate floor from the office that processes Section 8 voucher applications, with which clients were most familiar. The entrance to the new location was on a separate side of the building from the main entrance where clients entered for Section 8 eligibility processing, giving the participants the sense of entering a different entity.

In addition, staff interviews indicated that the internal physical environment was carefully designed to be more appealing and less intimidating to potential Section 8 participants. In the Section 8 office, staff greeted clients through a small microphone from behind thick security glass. In their interviews, Section 8 recipients frequently described the public housing authority's Section 8 office as communicating an ethos of monitoring and control, similar to that described by scholars (Abramovitz 1988; Goldberg 2007; Gordon 1994; Keiser and Soss 1998; Lieberman 1998; Schram 2005; Schram, Fording, and Soss 2011; Schram, Soss, Fording, and Houser 2009; Wacquant 2009). As one Section 8 interview participant noted,

> *When you walk into the (Section 8 area), it's like you are going in and applying for a benefit. Like you are going into the Medicaid, or the welfare office, or social security office, or something like that. It's really strict, tight security. Not that I am saying that they don't assist you, but it's a totally different environment.*

In contrast, in the workforce development unit, Section 8 participants were greeted at a large, open desk and asked to wait in a comfortable waiting area until they were invited to meet face-to-face in their caseworker's office. The offices were glass-walled and filled with natural light, with comfortable chairs for participants. Many offices had toys and coloring supplies for children who accompanied their parents to their appointments. As the director of the workforce development unit noted,

> *We when started designing what the (workforce development unit) was going to look like, we wanted it to be very open. We're on the first floor for a reason. Even though we're not connected to the rest of the building, I think people feel more comfortable coming in and talking to our staff…*

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[1] The name of the workforce development unit is not shared for reasons of research confidentiality.

> *And even if other housing authorities have a similar concept, if they don't*
> *have their own floor or building, it's like people don't identify; they just*
> *think, "Oh it's the housing authority."*

Table 3: Categories of Assistance Tracked by Workforce Development Unit

Auto-Title Loan	Medical Benefits
Book Scholarship	Orientation
Bus Pass	Other Formal Loan
Car Purchase (loan)	Outreach
Checking Account	Payday Loan
Child Care Referrals	Savings Account
Child Care Subsidies	Sherwin Williams Prerequisites
Credit Cards	Small Business Training
Credit Report Error	Subsidized Housing
Delinquent Bill	Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
Education/ Training Search	Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)
Food Stamps and Comparable	Supportive Services & Work Support
GED Exam	Tax Preparation Services
General Benefits Screening	Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF)
Head Start/ Early Head Start	Transaction Dispute
Health & Wellness Referral	Unemployment Compensation
Home loan (purchase/ refinancing)	Utility Assistance
Homeownership Training	Women Infants and Children (WIC) Benefits
Identity Theft	Work Readiness
Individual Development Account	Work Supports
Informal Loan	Workshop Attendance
Job Search	

Section 8 participants certainly noted these differences. All Section 8 participants interviewed for the study referred to the workforce development unit by its individual, "catchy" name, but referred to the rest of the housing authority as "the housing" or as "the third floor," where Section 8 processing was located. As one Section 8 participant noted,

> *With (the workforce development unit) it's more of a learning*
> *environment, and there they assist you. It's totally different. I feel like*
> *I'm relaxed. I feel like they are there to help me achieve. The third floor,*
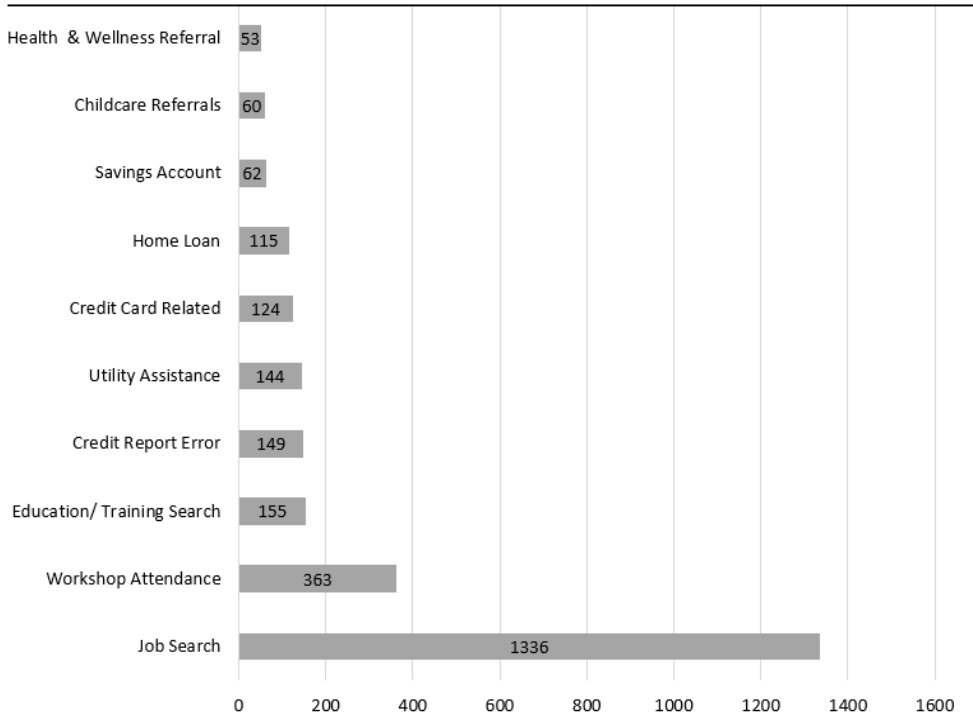> *you are just a number, and they are like, "Okay, get out of here."*

No "One Size Fits All": A Broad Spectrum of Flexible Services
Once Section 8 participants entered the workforce development unit and began working with their assigned staff person or caseworker, these individuals valued the wide array of services, assistance, and referrals the staff offered. The workforce development unit provided

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assistance with a broad spectrum of needs (see Table 3).

Section 8 participants most often came for assistance with job searches, but a wide array of other assistance was utilized (see Table 4).

Table 4: Ten Most Common Services Used by Workforce Development Participants

Service	Count
Health & Wellness Referral	53
Childcare Referrals	60
Savings Account	62
Home Loan	115
Credit Card Related	124
Utility Assistance	144
Credit Report Error	149
Education/ Training Search	155
Workshop Attendance	363
Job Search	1336

Note: Number of service interactions for 175 randomly selected clients, over an average of 15 months
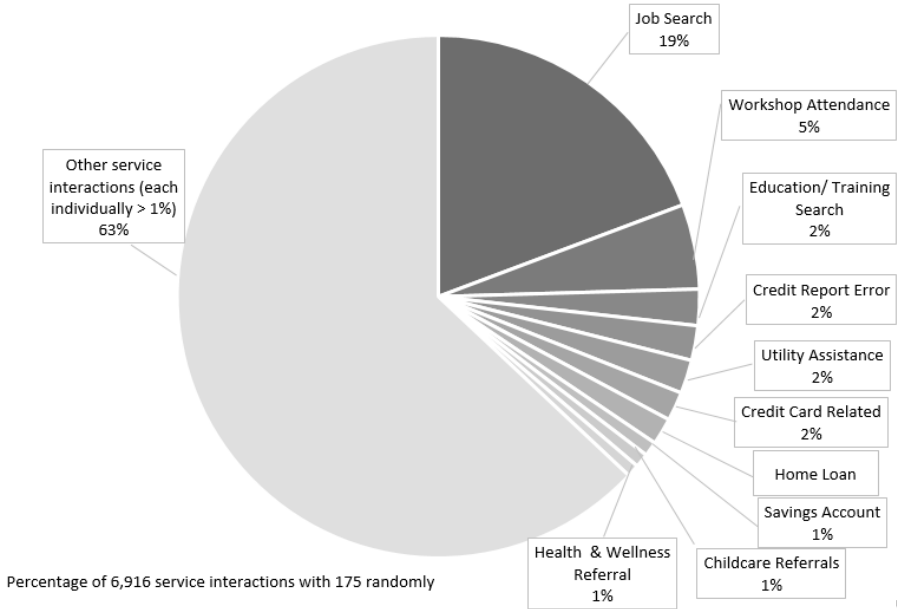
The pie chart illustrates the broad spectrum of services offered and shows that more than 65% of service interactions were for types of services that represent less than one percent of all services offered (see Table 5).

Stated differently, most of the assistance Section 8 participants sought was for small niche needs, and the workforce development unit stood ready to assist. Staff members indicated a freedom and desire to be creative and entrepreneurial in designing and implementing services to meet specialized needs (Arnold 2015). As one staff member explained,

> *If somebody comes in and they think trade school would be the best option for them, we're going to help them to get into a trade and be successful in that trade. If somebody comes in and they say, "I like doing hair," well then, let's help you make this into your own business. So that you can have yourself covered if anything were to happen. We are going*

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to show you how to run a business. So, we have that structure in place where I think people feel that we're not sticking them as a square in a round hole.

Table 5: Percentage of Service Interactions Represented by Top Ten Services Provided

Job Search
19%

Workshop Attendance
5%

Education/ Training Search
2%

Credit Report Error
2%

Utility Assistance
2%

Credit Card Related
2%

Home Loan

Savings Account
1%

Childcare Referrals
1%

Health & Wellness Referral
1%

Other service interactions (each individually > 1%)
63%

Percentage of 6,916 service interactions with 175 randomly

Staff members also reported being very flexible in offering assistance at various locations and outside of typical office hours. Section 8 participants were allowed to receive services on a walk in basis and were not required to have an appointment. Staff also did not insist on face-to-face meetings if assistance could be provided online or by phone. As one staff member reported,

We do have some clients that never come in, but are finding employment because they know how to complete a resume, they feel comfortable interviewing, they know how to search for jobs. So those I'll stay in contact with through phone, and they'll email me their resume, and I'll review it and send it back to them. I like doing that as well because it saves them a trip…then, if you have an interview and want to brush up on your interview skills, we'll do a mock interview for them.

A large majority of the Section 8 participants interviewed (82%) reported that this flexibility in communication was very valuable, since most participants did not live in a single housing development, instead using their vouchers to obtain housing on the private market all around the San Diego region. In a city that covers 372 square miles, using public

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transportation to get to the workforce development unit was not always easy, making phone and e-mail contact especially valuable.

Frequent and Positive Caseworker Interactions

As part of the workforce development unit's redesign, staff members were expected to have very frequent interactions with Section 8 participants, and participants were given customer satisfaction surveys to ensure that those interactions were predominantly positive. One staff member explained,

> *In the past, I think contact (with participants) was required once a year, for a comprehensive update in a one-on-one session. Now there's almost monthly contact between the staff and their participants. Also, instead of referring out, it's a lot of direct services as well. So a lot of in-house counseling, whether it's employment counseling or financial counseling with our financial counselor.*

A large majority of the Section 8 recipients interviewed in the study (87%) reported that they highly valued the intensive, personal, positive interactions they had with workforce development unit staff. This positive impression of workforce development staff is noteworthy because, as can be seen in the earlier literature review, this certainly is not always the case. In contrast to dominant perceptions of invasive monitoring and punitive action described in the literature (Abramovitz 1988; Goldberg 2007; Gordon 1994; Keiser and Soss 1998; Korteweg 2003; Lieberman 1998; Mead 1997, 1998; Schram 2005; Schram, Fording, & Soss 2011; Schram Soss, Fording, and Houser 2009; Wacquant 2009), the Section 8 interview participants had a very positive impression of workforce development unit staff, and these positive relationships were part of what kept participants engaged in programs. As one Section 8 participant explained,

> *I think having a positive relationship with your caseworker is very important. Very important, because, if you don't, you are not going to even want to be involved with them or engage that much at all. You're going to stand up and say, "Okay, I got to do this," and leave it alone. But when you really feel that someone genuinely cares or looks out for your best interest, you are going to get more involved in it.*

Workforce development unit staff interacted with Section 8 participants regularly and in a variety of formats. The quantitative data covered an average of 15 months of interactions for each of 175 participants. During this time, staff had an average of forty service interactions with each individual client, for an average of nearly three service interactions per client per month. It should be noted that these are interactions during which Section 8 participants received a concrete form of assistance. Check-in calls or e-mails to inform Section 8 participants of upcoming opportunities, or check on their wellbeing, were not included in these figures. This volume of participant-staff member interaction was quite impressive. It is worth noting that some research on housing services demonstrates that increased contact between case managers and housing insecure individuals is associated with better outcomes for the housing insecure (Grace and Gill 2015).

A large majority of the Section 8 recipients interviewed in the study (87%) described being pleased with the amount of contact with staff and the flexibility in types of contact. As

one Section 8 participant described,

> *I hear from (my assigned staff) for the schedule of the classes that they do, and then once or twice a month I hear about different job things. Every month, she sends, "Hey don't be a stranger, let me know if there's anything you need." So, she's always in contact, you know, "If you need anything, just call me," and I do.*

Overall, a majority of the Section 8 recipients participating in this study (72%) reported returning for services because of the warm atmosphere, the open-door environment, and past successful experiences with the workforce development staff. When staff successfully helped participants navigate one of life's challenges, and with positivity, participants were more likely to return for additional services. As one Section 8 participant summarized,

> *They (in the workforce development unit) treat you like a human being, and don't have a bad attitude. That's kind of uplifting for people. It's supportive, the way they act. It's encouraging, and they can give some of the people on Section 8 hope.*

Culture of Service

Interviews with staff members demonstrated that the director of the workforce development unit instilled a clear culture of service in the organization, and that the staff were involved in their work because of a passion for service. Staff demonstrated both an understanding of the leadership's expectations and their own intrinsic motivation to serve. In reference to their director, a staff member stated,

> *(Our director) always says we're here to serve them, and, "Never forget that's what you're here for." And again, for me, it's just like, I'm so grateful that I do feel that anything they need, I always tell them, you need child care, you need help with your resume, you need help with job placement, going back to school, tell me what it is that you need, and I will help you achieve that.*

Staff members' intrinsic reward from serving others also played an important role in the organization, as cultural shifts are rarely accomplished with top-down approaches. One staff member echoed a sentiment shared by many,

> *I love the contact, I think that I would not thrive if I had to be working in an office where I never had that human, participant contact. I think that's just not my strong skill. I think my ability to work with clients and kind of have that humanistic approach with them really helps me, and I feel like that's where I thrive the most. And that's where I try to be not only the advocate for them, but also try to educate them to be an advocate in their family, their community. In this capacity, it gives me the ability to do that.*

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A culture of service and intrinsic staff motivation were key in an environment where workload and frequency of client contact seemed to have increased drastically in the context of the organizational redesign. In contrast to the many strategies street-level workers use to cope with excessive workload and macro-level demands (Alden 2015a, 2015b; Barberis and Boccagni 2014; Brodkin and Maimundar 2010; Cuadra and Staaf 2014; Ellis 2007; Evans 2016; Hoybye-Mortensen 2015; Östberg 2014), staff describe an ongoing commitment to high-quality service to Section 8 participants. As one staff member described,

> *I do get busy. But since I love what I do, for me it's my passion to do it. There was a time when there was a lot of restructuring here ... me and one of the other ladies were here talking and she said, "It's so much, I can't do this," because you know, 500 people divided by 2 or 3 of us... And I go, "I think that as long as we're doing this because we love it, everything else should not matter." And we came to that realization that we were doing this because we love it, and not for any other reason. The amount of work, it wasn't relevant. It just didn't (matter). So that's kinda how I do it. I really want to help. And I really want them to do better.*

While intrinsic motivation and a culture of service may not be enough to sustain morale among a staff that is chronically over-worked, during a period of transition with a temporary peak in workload, staff motivation and organizational culture can provide a buffer to weather that shift.

Conclusion
In this case study, we observe a workforce development unit within a public housing authority that used a strategy of *diverging from bureaucracy* to improve its image and approachability among its desired clientele. To attract clients to its non-mandatory services, in addition to improving service quality, the organizational leadership strategically worked to form the unit's identity and image as different from bureaucracies broadly speaking, and as different from the specific public housing authority within which it resides. These efforts led to the successful revitalization of the workforce development unit.

This case has important implications for the implementation of social policy and for management practice in social service agencies. In an environment where public housing authorities and other organizations providing supportive services to the housing insecure struggle to encourage participation in non-mandatory programs (Bates and Flanigan 2018), this case offers strategies that agencies may be able to duplicate in their own efforts to increase program participation.

Some of the efforts this unit undertook may be easily duplicable by other agencies, while other strategies may prove more challenging to duplicate. Importantly, the staff in the workforce development unit were not involved in reviewing eligibility for Section 8 benefits or enforcing rules and regulations related to Section 8. These staff provided additional supportive services and incentives, rather than determining eligibility or denying services. This separation in work load within the public housing authority allowed the staff of the workforce development unit to step outside the typical power dynamics that dominate in many service provision contexts (Abramovitz 1988; Altreiter and Leibetseder 2015; Djuve and Kavli 2015; Gordon 1994; Keiser and Soss 1998; Korteweg 2003; Mead 1997, 1998; Schram, Fording, & Soss 2011). In larger agencies with sufficient staff, a redesign that removes approval power, and the possibility of punitive action, away from staff members

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providing supportive services may reduce clients' reluctance to interact with these programs.

The workforce development unit adopted a new, appealing name and relocated its offices to become physically separate from the monitoring, compliance, and eligibility-oriented activities of other parts of the local public housing authority (Abramovitz 1988; Goldberg 2007; Gordon 1994; Keiser and Soss 1998; Lieberman 1998; Schram 2005; Schram, Fording, and Soss 2011; Schram, Soss, Fording, and Houser 2009; Wacquant 2009). It also redesigned its internal space to be warmer and welcoming for participants, especially those with young children. This separation through name and space had the desired impact of leading potential program participants to see the unit as a separate and distinct organization, without some of the negative connotations of the larger bureaucracy. While renaming, rebranding, and redecorating are less resource intensive strategies, duplication of this unit's strategy of physical relocation and redesign may be prohibitive for some organizations.

The workforce development unit offered a broad spectrum of highly tailored, client-driven services, and offered these services with great flexibility in terms of time, location, scheduling, and modality. Staff members reported feeling they had license to exercise creativity and entrepreneurialism when considering how to best serve participants' individual needs (Arnold 2015). Section 8 participants experienced frequent, positive interactions with staff, which participants reported drew them back to the unit for future assistance. In spite of the high frequency of interaction, clients made clear contrasts between their experiences with this organization and their experiences with other human services organizations with which they interacted, which were more likely to mirror the compliance, monitoring, and control orientations described in the literature (Abramovitz 1988; Goldberg 2007; Gordon 1994; Keiser and Soss 1998; Korteweg 2003; Lieberman 1998; Mead 1997, 1998; Schram 2005; Schram, Fording, & Soss 2011; Schram, Soss, Fording, and Houser 2009; Wacquant 2009). Staff's entrepreneurial spirit and high level of intrinsic commitment to service play a strong role in this dynamic. In addition, these interactions were shaped by a culture of service intentionally fostered by the unit's director. Organizations seeking to duplicate these strategies would need to prioritize a commitment to service in hiring decisions and in employee training, and foster a culture of service that empowers employees with sufficient discretion to adjust program implementation in ways that best serve clientele.

While these strategies appear effective with helping to attract and retain clientele, it is important to consider the impact of frequent interaction and high workload on staff. When faced with high workload, inadequate resources, and other macro-level organizational pressures, front line workers use their discretion to implement coping strategies that sometimes are not beneficial to clientele (Alden 2015a, 2015b; Barberis and Boccagni 2014; Brodkin and Maimundar 2010; Cuadra and Staaf 2014; Ellis 2007; Evans 2016; Hoybye-Mortensen 2015; Östberg 2014). An agency seeking to duplicate these strategies would want to have sufficient staffing and resources, and appropriate intrinsic and extrinsic rewards in place, to avoid burnout of staff. Hiring staff members with a clear culture fit, and prioritizing leadership with a focus on client service, can support the success of each of these strategies, and can mitigate staff burnout during short periods of intensive workload.

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