



**Statement before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture  
Hearing on Past, Present and Future of SNAP: Means to Climbing the Economic Ladder**

Leon A. Samuels, Jr., Executive Director

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**Committee on Agriculture**  
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**Hearing: Past, Present, and Future of SNAP: Means to Climbing the Economic Ladder**  
Statement of Leon A. Samuels, Jr., Executive Director  
STRIVE DC, Inc.

Good Morning, Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Peterson and distinguished members of the Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you to discuss how **STRIVE DC'S** unique attitudinal job-readiness program helps the District's poorest residents. Many of our clients are SNAP recipients when they start the program and eventually after obtaining jobs are able to transition out of the need for the SNAP program.

**Introduction**

My name is Leon A. Samuels, Jr. and I am the Executive Director of **STRIVE DC**, a workforce development nonprofit in Washington, DC. I am here on behalf of **STRIVE DC** to describe how the STRIVE program goes beyond job preparation and job placement, and aims to change peoples' lives for the better. **STRIVE DC** is part of a national program, STRIVE International, that provides a full range of job training, career development, and supportive services to the hardest-to-employ in cities throughout the United States and in London and Israel. STRIVE centers are located in 20 states including: Georgia, New York, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Illinois and California.

**STRIVE DC** was established in 1999 in the District of Columbia to combat the high unemployment rate in the District's poorest neighborhoods. Our participants are the chronically unemployed, the formally incarcerated, at-risk young adults, recovering addicts, public assistance recipients and the working poor. Nearly all of our participants have income at or below the federal poverty line (95%).

**STRIVE DC's** programs stand out because of our comprehensive case management services and two years of follow up support. Our training is rooted in the belief that every individual has the power to change but such individuals need the tools and supports to do so. We focus on empowerment and transformation for our clients--not just their job readiness. We ensure that clients are not only ready to find a job, but also ready to keep their job.

## **Description of Services**

To address our clients' needs and provide pathways to self sufficiency and living wage employment, **STRIVE DC** offers six essential services: the CORE Attitudinal and Job Readiness Training, Occupational Skills Training, Case Management, Job Placement and Career Development, Retention/Follow-up and our Career Gear Clothing Closet.

**1. CORE/ Attitudinal Job Readiness Training:** STRIVE DC's success with high-risk populations is based on the transformative attitudinal job readiness training provided by the CORE workshop. The modality is a work-assimilated environment where participants are provided the tools to begin viewing themselves as marketable adults and not as victims. Our 3-week program takes a no-nonsense approach to preparing our clients for the rigors of the workplace, helping individuals develop the attitudes and workplace behaviors they need to stay employed.

The program creates an atmosphere that mimics the workplace, enforcing punctuality, appropriate dress, acceptance of authority, suitable comportment, responsibility for one's actions and work ethic. We require participants to dress like they going to work at a corporation: jackets, ties and slacks for the men; neat hair, modest business attire such as blouses and skirts, or pants suits, and low heels for the women. CORE also teaches anger management, interpersonal skills, proper verbal expression, and teamwork.

In class, participants learn how to write resumes and fill out applications, take orders, accept criticism and function as team members. They learn to use the computer, telephone and fax; and think in terms of job advancement and long-term careers. They must come to class 15 minutes early--as one would a job--and generally conduct themselves as model employees. If they are late to class, they are fired from our program--as employees may be fired from their jobs if they are late. (Fired participants are encouraged to re-enroll for our next scheduled training.) Participants learn by performing tasks in a simulated workplace environment, interacting in-group sessions, attending one-on-one counseling, role-playing, and mock interviewing. CORE is a proven method of increasing the success rates of high-risk individuals in subsequent skills training and employment.

**2. Occupational Skills Training:** Once participants complete CORE, they may begin a skills training program leading to occupational skills certifications.

**3. Case Management:** One of the essential services that **STRIVE DC** provides is wrap-around case management to support our clients during and after the program. **STRIVE DC's** Supportive Services team meets with clients upon intake, conducting an extensive survey of each client's background and life issues. Throughout the program, Case Managers focus on identifying and overcoming the challenges that impact participants' ability to complete training and ultimately succeed in the work place. These challenges include, among others, issues related to childcare, health care, housing, the court system, education, transportation, and emergency funds. Case Managers remain connected to each graduate during the two-year follow up period, offering referrals, help, and advice. Case management is an essential and critical support system for people who have few resources to resolve the life crises that can interfere with their ability to work. **STRIVE DC** is virtually unique in the District in providing two years of official support as well as lifetime access to job placement, career counseling, and case management services to every CORE graduate.

**4. Career Development/Job Placement:** **STRIVE DC's** Career Services Department offers career planning and job development services to each participant. The **STRIVE DC** philosophy is to encourage participants to plan for a career because, in our experience, participants who develop a career mindset begin to make long-term decisions- seeking more responsibility at their job, pursuing opportunities for on-the-job training and promotions, and furthering their education in night school. Living wages and career growth set into motion a series of positives that, when coupled with proper case management, keep a person employed and help stabilize his/her family

**5. Retention and Follow-Up:** **STRIVE DC's** retention specialist's calls working graduates every 30 days and non-working graduates every 90 days for two years. These communications establish the employment status of each graduate and provide the opportunity to offer help and guidance and to monitor progress against goals. **STRIVE DC's** intensive involvement continues even after a client is employed. Employment Specialists function in essence as an outside Human Resources department for our graduates, helping to remediate employer issues, securing supportive services for clients who are facing difficulties, helping clients perceive job growth or promotion opportunities.

**6. Career Gear Clothing Closet:** The Career Gear Clothing Closet, set up in our basement, has provided over 3500 unemployed men and women in the Washington DC region with the professional clothing needed to interview for a job. The Closet provides an important service to the community and

operates only with clothing donations. It offers another important way for participants to overcome barriers to seeking and finding jobs.

Additionally, STRIVE DC has also joined in collaboration with other nonprofits to put District residents back to work through the Workplace DC Collaborative at the Skyland Workforce Center. The Skyland Workforce Center is a project of the Workplace DC, a collaborative of local non-profit organizations that provide employment-related services. The Center's on-site partners coordinate services to connect job seekers with opportunities and supports that help them obtain and retain employment. STRIVE DC and Jubilee Jobs work together to provide work readiness training and job placement; Byte Back Teaches computer literacy, with emphasis on skills needed to search, apply and be competitive for jobs; Southeast Ministry brings GED tutoring, and Samaritan Ministry provides one-on-one employment supports, as well as entrepreneurship training. The Workplace DC Collaborative is a one-stop shop of intensive services that can help the chronically unemployed learn how to navigate the barriers that keep them from finding employment services.

STRIVE DC's 5 full-time and 2 part-time staff serve well over 1500 annually. This includes about 1,000 people who receive some kind of staff assistance applying for our program and beginning case management files, but who drop out for various reasons; prior graduates who receive our signature two years of follow-up services; approximately 100 who graduate, and more than 500 men and women who receive donated business attire. An additional 88 receive our attitudinal training at the Skyland Workforce Center.

### **Our Impact**

The STRIVE DC attitudinal job-readiness program has been able to consistently place at least 60% of its graduates in jobs and keep over 60% of those working for at least two years. In 2014, 78% of clients were placed in employment making an average wage of \$12.95 per hour and 82% of those placed are still employed.

### **Conclusion**

The STRIVE DC program provides practical guidance to applying for a job and staying employed in the professional world. At the same time it is intensive, confrontational, and sometimes emotional. But more than anything else it builds the participants' confidence in their own natural abilities and self-worth. Yet, it is important to understand that many participants have difficult home situations.

While the training addresses their attitudes and helps them look within them to figure out what they need to succeed it is not just the training that allows for the success of the program. It is the essential case-by-case management and referrals provided to participants during each phase of the program. The Retention Specialist helps clients connect to social service providers to help them overcome any barriers that may prevent them from completing training and being employed. Such barriers include the lack of childcare; lack of safe housing or dealing with substance abuse issues either their own issues or those of family members. I can attest to the services of **STRIVE DC**. I was once an unemployed client on food stamps, who was placed in a job after completing the **STRIVE DC** program. After working successfully for 6 months I was given the opportunity to give back to STRIVE DC. I served as a Job Developer after which I was promoted to Deputy Director and then with hard work I was promoted to Executive Director. I am here for the purpose of Helping DC Residents Obtain Employment and Get off Food Stamps. Thank you for you time today.