



**Main Story / 02.06.08**

## **Unity House's ROWE Project at UES-Geneva Succeeds, Will Continue**

**AUBURN** - The **Results Only Work Environment (ROWE)** pilot project implemented at Unity House's Unity Employment Services (UES) Geneva site six months ago succeeded in achieving most if not all of its projected goals, and will continue there in 2008. In addition, due to the pilot's success at UES-Geneva, Unity House is exploring the possibility of employing the ROWE concept at its other programs and services.

ROWE was introduced to the agency's UES program because its structure, including having job coaches offering services at work sites and not having any residential program requirements, was so well-suited to the ROWE concept. UES Director Sue Morley and Unity House's administration investigated ROWEs after recognizing that a standardized work schedule and work week may no longer be appropriate for some of its employees, due to demographic changes that have resulted in imbalances in employees' work and personal lives. They decided to pilot a ROWE with UES-Geneva in the fall of 2007.

The ROWE piloted by the UES-Geneva staff was a modified version of the standard ROWE gaining popularity in the private sector. That latter workday model gives employees up to 100% autonomy over their jobs and responsibilities, as long as their work gets done, as needed. Unity House's UES-Geneva office had to modify the private sector 'pure' ROWE to accommodate its need to retain its capacity to document, honor confidentiality regulations, provide continuous customer service, and maintain stakeholder relationships and other program requirements. The site's technological constraints also factored into the agency's decision to adopt a modified ROWE.

"The modified version of the ROWE we piloted at our UES-Geneva site from August 1 to November 1 in 2007 worked well for us," said UES Director Sue Morley. "Three employees there – site manager Loraine Gianfrate, employment services coordinator Sandie Case, and placement coordinator Laurel LeBoeuf – participated in the ROWE. Our survey and process data showed they had initial doubts about the feasibility and promise of a ROWE, but after learning about it and adjusting to it, they grew to like it. After the three-month trial period, there were no complaints about the ROWE, their morale including their motivation and creativity while working on a flexed time schedule rose, and their work and personal lives became more balanced. We also learned communication between the staff taking part in the ROWE and those not participating remained satisfactory. I think they perceived it after three months as pretty successful.

"Overall, it's definitely worth continuing in Geneva so we'll be doing that as well as continue to collect data and monitor the program's progress there," she said.

"It was very beneficial," said Gianfrate, echoing Morley's perspective. "You're empowered to work elsewhere and not fret over time so much. We were able to retain our core

business hours and flex time before, during, and after those core hours, while remaining accessible the whole time. It really helps balance work and personal life demands.”

LeBoeuf agreed the ROWE helped balance her work and personal needs.

“I live in Canandaigua and if I’m meeting someone in Canandaigua at 11 a.m., instead of traveling in to the Geneva office and working and traveling back to Canandaigua for the appointment, I can stay in Canandaigua and work at marketing our program and services to the job market there, and use for free the computers at the Canandaigua library to generate job leads,” she said. “Then I can meet my appointment. I save travel miles and time and still do the work required. And I can fit in a dental cleaning during the day, too. I really like working within this concept.”

Unity House commissioned the Cornell Consulting Group to assist on its ROWE UES-Geneva project upon its implementation. That team of Cornell University business students analyzes concepts like ROWE, measures their effect, and offers suggestions on their process. The Group concluded that the most suitable work arrangement for Unity House’s UES-Geneva site was a flextime option, incorporating various flexspace elements, which was essentially what was adopted at UES-Geneva and worked well for the August 1-November 1, 2007 period.