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Abby Snay's business is booming. That's not good.

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Job training centers facing deluge needing work

BY SARAH DUXBURY
 San Francisco Business Times

The safety net for job seekers is becoming strained. Retailers are closing. Financial services firms are laying off scads of workers. The city is scrambling to connect those laid off with unemployment and other services, but the pipeline is already thick with job seekers.

Job training centers — mostly nonprofits on which the city relies and helps fund — are overwhelmed by increased numbers of job seekers of all levels. At the same time, fundraising is in jeopardy.

Goodwill Industries said that it will not receive \$1 million it had counted on from foundations because declining assets have forced foundations not to fund any new projects this year. At the same time, demand for workforce training has jumped nearly 25 percent, and Goodwill has taken the unprecedented step of closing its waiting lists.

Jewish Vocational Services has seen the number of calls to the organization double in recent months, said Abby Snay, executive director of JVS. Case loads for JVS employees are up by a third; usage of its public computer center has doubled.

"Demand is dramatically rising, and we expect it will get worse before it gets better," Snay said.

The agency, which has a budget of \$7 million, will serve close to 4,000 people this year, up from 3,000 people in 2007. "There's huge need for immediate jobs," Snay said. "We're seeing people at risk of homelessness, and we're doing lots of referrals to emergency assistance at a time when the public sector is also experiencing shortfalls and cutting back."

Growing ranks

In October, the San Francisco metro area's unemployment rate was 6.5 percent. A new unemployment report coming out this week is expected to show the biggest single-month jump in joblessness since 2001.



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In 2007, 684 layoffs were reported to the San Francisco Mayor's Office of Economic and Workforce Development. Through September 2008, before the worst upheaval hit, that office had already processed 2,500 layoff notices, said Rhonda Simmons, director of workforce development for the Mayor's Office.

Simmons' office directs many of the people laid off to

Goodwill or JVS for job search support and retraining. "They are our lifeline," Simmons said.

The good news is that there are still jobs out there, Snay insists.

Since July, JVS has helped more than 400 people land new jobs, including one recent health-care position that pays \$150,000. Numerous financial services firms, including Wells Fargo and Bank of the West, attended a focus group last week, looking to backfill some positions.

But all of these organizations are stretched for funds as demand soars, and all expect next year to be even worse, with more layoffs, deeper government cuts, reduced foundation funding and uncertain private philanthropy.

Doing more with less, ever a mantra among nonprofits, is more important than ever, they say.

Shifting resources

JVS has increased the number of group workshops it is offering, cutting back on one-on-one counseling. This month, it will offer more than 30. Starting soon, Goodwill will open at night and on weekends, staggering shifts to use existing employees to staff the extended hours.

Goodwill is also directing people to its One Stop, a city-funded free resource to job seekers. One Stop opened in October, and in that first month, 500 people came through the doors. In November, 700 people came for help. One Stop can serve 1,500 people per month.

The city remains committed to its community organizations that provide job training, but it's harder and harder to translate that commitment into dollars.

"There is no economic recovery plan for the nonprofit sector right now. There is no government bailout," said Debra Alvarez-Rodriguez, Goodwill's executive director. "Yet it's the nonprofit sector that's really dealing with the wreckage of what we're seeing. All those dislocated people are coming to the nonprofit sector."