

## **XIV. TANF RESEARCH, RESEARCH DISSEMINATION, AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE**

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has been engaged in the development of a research strategy to understand the recent transformations in health and human service programs. The strategy framework highlights principal themes associated with transformations in progress: major activities, under way or planned within the Department and elsewhere, that are relevant to creating the requisite knowledge base; data, performance measures, program evaluations, and research needs; and opportunities for national leadership by DHHS.

The devolution of responsibility for health and human services to State and local organizations and the flexibility of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) offer both tremendous opportunities and unprecedented challenges in the redefinition and implementation of services to families. Even prior to enactment of PRWORA, States were at the forefront in efforts to reform welfare through the waiver process.

As policy and program design devolves to State and local levels, it is vital that these levels of government have reliable information on which to base their decisions, that there is understanding at the national level of how increased flexibility is used, and that the effects of different policy and program choices are understood. Documenting, understanding, interpreting, and facilitating the exchange of information and experiences among States is essential to promote sound decisions -- to help States avoid unnecessary pitfalls and duplicative developmental efforts -- and to help assure the well-being of families and children.

### **Research Goals**

The Department's research agenda related to welfare reform has two main goals:

- to increase the probability of success of welfare reform by providing timely, reliable data to inform policy and program design and management, especially at the State and local level where decision making has devolved; and
- to inform the nation of policies chosen and their effects on children, families, communities and social well-being.

## **Key Strategic Considerations**

Six overlapping strategies are central to achieving these goals:

- maintaining and strengthening a subset of projects begun as State waiver evaluations to provide continuing feedback on the implementation and impacts of different approaches to welfare reform during the early implementation of the TANF program;
- preserving and enhancing the ability of welfare researchers to continue their study of natural variation to understand the effects of different policy and implementation choices;
- maintaining and strengthening data collection at the national and State level;
- building on existing Federal investments such as the National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies (formerly the JOBS evaluation) and working with other public and private funders of research to obtain maximum leverage of resources for evaluation;
- creating a strong understanding of not only TANF, but also its interaction with other key program areas such as child care, child support enforcement, and child welfare; and
- creating effective dissemination and technical assistance strategies in order to ensure that policy and program design decisions are based on reliable information.

## **Funding Plan**

Section 1110 of the Social Security Act authorizes research activities relating to social services and income maintenance. These funds are used by ACF for conducting research in the areas of welfare research, child welfare, and social services. The main funding areas related to TANF are described below.

### **State Waiver Evaluations**

Prior to the passage of TANF, forty-three States and the District of Columbia obtained waivers to title IV-A of the Social Security Act, authorized under section 1115. Waiver demonstrations were conditioned on evaluation studies using an experimental design. Under open-ended AFDC funding, each demonstration represented a significant State and Federal investment. Preliminary results from these studies helped to shape current policies, many of which are reflected in the TANF statute. Continuation of these studies is permitted under PRWORA.

In FY 1997, following the passage of PRWORA, States were invited to submit funding proposals designed either to continue their waiver demonstrations and accompanying evaluation study as previously designed, or refine or modify demonstration projects and/or the design for evaluation. Twenty States were funded to complete ongoing evaluations, either as originally planned or modified: Arizona, California, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Maryland, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, South Carolina, Texas, Vermont, Virginia and Wisconsin. Three states received funding for two projects (Iowa, Minnesota, New Hampshire). All but one of these States (Wisconsin) proposed

multi-year projects. Only one of these projects (in Minnesota) will continue to receive funding by ACF in FY 2002, while nine others are in the process of completing evaluations with prior year funds (California, Indiana, Iowa, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, Ohio, Texas, and Vermont).

During 2000, nine final reports were released by six States (Florida, Illinois, Minnesota, North Carolina, North Dakota and Wisconsin), and seven interim reports were released by six States (Connecticut, Iowa, Ohio, South Carolina, Vermont, and Virginia), under this series of grants<sup>1</sup>. Final reports were also released by two States (Arizona, Iowa) in 2001 and by three States in early 2002 (Connecticut, Maryland and Virginia). These reports outline lessons learned about the implementation of welfare reform programs regarding work requirements, time limits, and enhanced earnings disregards. We expect a number of additional final State reports to be released in 2002 (California, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, Ohio).

### **Impacts of Welfare Reform on Children**

Almost all State welfare reform waiver demonstration evaluations contain child outcome measures. However, the focus of study is primarily on adult behaviors and outcomes, such as changes in earnings and welfare dependency. Child measures in these studies typically lack depth and uniformity. In FY 1996, planning grants were provided to twelve States to augment their welfare reform demonstration evaluations to focus more directly and consistently on appropriate measures of child health and well-being.

At the end of the planning phase (September 1997), grants were awarded to five of the 12 States (Connecticut, Florida, Indiana, Iowa and Minnesota) for a three-year implementation phase of the project. During this phase, impacts of different welfare reform approaches were measured on several areas of child well-being, including school achievement, behavioral problems, and health status. The effect of intervening mechanisms, such as the quality and regularity of the home environment, child care arrangements, and parental employment and income, were also examined. The child outcome data has been collected through surveys and administrative records. The participating States differ as to when they implemented their welfare reform demonstrations; therefore, the individual State studies were completed at different times. Minnesota's report was issued in June 2000, Florida's in December 2000, and Connecticut's in February 2002. Iowa's and Indiana's results are expected in by mid-2002.

ACF is also supporting a project that will synthesize the results on the impacts of welfare reform on children from these projects. The synthesis project will produce a synthesis of all five States' results by mid-2002.

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<sup>1</sup> We have included summaries of the reports published during 2000 in the appendices of this chapter. Summaries of earlier reports were included in the second and third Annual TANF Reports to Congress.

### **Moving Families from Welfare to Work**

ACF has devoted substantial resources over several decades to increasing the knowledge of how to effectively help families obtain employment and move off welfare. A major on-going research effort that ACF, the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), and the Department of Education are funding in this area is the National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies (NEWS, formerly known as the JOBS Evaluation). This effort, which studies demonstrations in seven sites, examines the impacts of various program strategies for moving welfare recipients into employment. While focusing on impacts on employment and welfare receipt, this project is also examining effects of adult basic education programs and outcomes for children. Two-year impact results for all seven sites, and two-year impacts for children were published in June 2000. A report on five-year follow-up results was released in February 2002,

### **Rural Welfare-to-Work Strategies**

As a part of our research strategy and building on previous investments, ACF is investing resources to learn how best to help TANF and other low-income rural families enter into and sustain employment. These investments will lead to increased information on well-conceived rural welfare to work strategies and lessons about the operational challenges and methods to address them that can be used by State and local TANF agencies and others. ACF's prior investments have included funding planning grants and providing technical assistance through Macro International Inc. to ten States. A number of knowledge-building products were produced by the contractor in collaboration with the grantees to inform practice across a wide range of users. A monograph, "Planning and Promoting Welfare-to-Work Experiments in Rural Areas: Some Lessons of Experience," was published in April 2001.

In FY 2000, ACF awarded a contract to Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. for a national evaluation of rural welfare to work strategies. In early FY 2001, ACF awarded grants to four States to participate in the evaluation and, together with the contractor, are continuing to identify and engage States. The evaluation will highlight promising models and determine the effectiveness and cost-benefits of varied welfare to work strategies in rural areas.

### **Effectively Serving Special Populations**

State and local TANF officials and other service providers have indicated the need for more information and guidance to develop or modify employment-focused strategies to work more effectively with TANF recipients who face difficult challenges in obtaining and maintaining employment. These include adults with substance abuse and/or mental health problems, those with physical or developmental disabilities, those with learning disabilities or very low basic skills, and women who are or have been subjected to domestic violence.

ACF and ASPE began two projects in FY 1997 that test programs designed to help TANF recipients who experience substance abuse/addiction or domestic violence. One project is assessing the prevalence of substance abuse among female TANF recipients and experimentally evaluating the effectiveness of alternative treatments. Interim results were released in January 2001 and a final report is expected to be released in mid-2002. The other project is testing the

effectiveness of strategies to address the needs of battered women on welfare as they try to enter the labor market. A report on this project is expected to be released in late 2002.

In FY 1999, ACF jointly funded a study with ASPE that examines State and local efforts to develop and use screening and assessment tools to identify TANF and/or Welfare-to-Work (WtW) recipients with barriers to employment, including substance abuse, poor mental health or illness, low basic skills, learning disabilities, and domestic violence. An interim report was released in March 2001. A final report was released in March 2002.

FY 2000 funding was used to begin a multi-year initiative to identify and evaluate programs for TANF recipients and other low-income individuals who are “hard to employ.” In FY 2001, ACF and ASPE awarded a contract to the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation to conduct a multi-site evaluation that will experimentally test promising strategies and document operational lessons from the field.

Few welfare reform studies, to date, have focused on large cities and the special experience needed in successfully implementing welfare reform in an urban environment. ACF and ASPE are also providing funding to the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation’s Project on Devolution and Urban Change, a project that will attempt to learn about the implementation and impacts of welfare reform in four large urban areas: Cleveland, Philadelphia, Los Angeles and Miami.

Further, ACF is funding two projects designed to produce and disseminate research-based information on the development and implementation of Tribal TANF programs to inform policy decisions at the Federal, State and local levels and to assist and empower Tribal governments in initiating or enhancing Tribal TANF and related programs more effectively. An interim report was released in September 2001 and another is expected to be released in mid-2002. Final reports on both projects are expected in early 2003.

### **Employment Retention and Advancement**

Over the last five years, ACF has also committed research funding to address issues of employment retention and advancement among welfare recipients. In the mid-1990s, ACF sponsored a four-State demonstration and evaluation of post-employment services to test alternative approaches to increase job retention and rapid re-employment when jobs were lost. This initiative produced useful documentation of issues pertinent to developing and operating employment retention and advancement programs. However, these demonstrations yielded small impacts on employment at only one site and no impacts on earnings. Consequently, ACF is currently supporting a new, multi-year project that builds on the prior experience and will test a new generation of approaches to promote employment retention and advancement. The goal of this multi-year demonstration and evaluation project is to build knowledge about how best to help low-income families sustain their attachment to, and advancement in, the labor market. This evaluation currently involves sites in nine States.

In addition, ACF is providing funding to evaluate a joint initiative between the Riverside (California) Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) and the Riverside Community College (RCC) that encourages working TANF recipients to enroll and participate in courses to increase

their skills. Among other features, this demonstration and evaluation will test allowing those working at least 20 hours per week to substitute 12 hours of required work activity with participation in the RCC program.

### **Assuring Supports for Working Families**

In response to findings of unexpected reductions in the proportion of eligible families who were receiving food stamps and medical assistance after implementation of welfare reform, ACF worked in partnership with ASPE, HCFA (now CMS), the Department of Agriculture, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to develop the "Supporting Families" initiative. It provides technical assistance and grants to up to 22 States and large counties to improve their enrollment and re-determination processes for Medicaid, the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), and food stamps. Under this program, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation will provide funding for assistance to 16 States or counties to work on Medicaid and SCHIP, while funding from Federal partners will provide assistance to six States or counties to work on the Food Stamp Program, Medicaid, and SCHIP.

Also, ACF and ASPE along with Federal partners within the Departments of Labor, Housing and Urban Development, and Agriculture are working together to identify strategies to help low-income families succeed in the labor market while blending work with family responsibilities. ACF and its partners have begun a multi-phased initiative to increase capacity at the State and local level to support work among, low-income families. In FY 2001, the partners awarded a contract to the National Governors Association to identify promising practices and convene senior State officials to stimulate information exchange, focus attention on the issue, and develop plans for improving their capacity to provide supports for working, low-income families. Future work may include the provision of technical assistance and evaluation of varied approaches.

### **Field-Initiated Studies**

Alone and in conjunction with ASPE, ACF has provided support for independently initiated research on welfare-reform outcomes. The goal of this activity is to build knowledge about welfare reform related experiences and outcomes for individuals and families, including economic and non-economic well-being, and patterns of use of government programs. Reports will become available in 2002.

### **TANF Data Collection**

Maintaining and strengthening data collection is critical at a time of increasing program diversity. Information on TANF family characteristics and work participation status for fiscal year 2000 has been obtained from the Final TANF Data Report. This represents data explicitly specified in the statute and implemented through final TANF regulations, published on April 12, 1999. The Final TANF Data Report provides discrete information about families currently receiving TANF and those who are no longer receiving TANF assistance, including information on demographics, income, resources, and services provided. This information enables ACF to better measure and assess State performance in administering the TANF program and track changes in the composition of the TANF population. Information on TANF family

characteristics and work participation status for fiscal years 1997 through 1999 were based on the Emergency TANF Data Report.

### **Child Care for Low-Income Families**

In FY 2000, continuation funding was provided for the national study of child care for low-income families to assess the changing dynamics of the child care system in the larger framework of welfare reform. The study will provide Federal, State and local policy-makers with information on: how States and communities implement policies and programs to meet the child care needs of low-income families over time; what factors affect child care decisions of such families and the role that child care subsidies play in those decisions; and to what extent the care provided through the family child care environment meets the needs of the parents and children. The first report, entitled "State and Community Substudy Interim Report," describes what is happening in the child care market for low-income families since PRWORA. An interim report is expected in early 2002.

### **"Leavers" and "Diversion" Studies**

In fiscal years 1998, 1999, and 2000, ASPE awarded approximately \$5.7 million in grants to States and counties to study the outcomes of welfare reform on individuals and families who leave TANF, enter TANF, apply for TANF benefits, and are "diverted" from TANF. A number of States implemented formal "diversion" programs and policies to help families avoid going on the welfare rolls. These programs include helping needy families find other resources to meet their needs, the provision of lump sum payments to address immediate need, and/or the requirement to look for employment before the TANF application is processed.

The grants were funded by a Congressional appropriation in fiscal years 1998-2000 for cross-cutting research into the outcomes of the welfare reform law. Of the 14 FY 1998 welfare outcomes grants, all 14 are studying TANF leavers, with five of the 14 grantees also studying issues of diversion. The FY 1999 welfare outcomes grants have an emphasis on TANF diversion. Six of the seven FY1999 grantees are focusing their study on the applicant population, and one grantee is studying TANF leavers. The five State and counties receiving FY 2000 grants are enhancing existing research, particularly State-specific surveys of populations affected by welfare reform, by expanding or improving data collection activities, including efforts to improve cross-State comparability.

### **Immigrants and the Organizations that Serve Them**

ACF, ASPE, CMS, and the Departments of Agriculture and Justice jointly funded a study conducted by The Urban Institute that examines the impact of changes in Federal laws on immigrant families and children. This is a large-scale study of immigrants and their communities in Los Angeles and New York City.

### **National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Grant Program**

In the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, Congress authorized the Department of Labor to award \$3 billion in Welfare-to-Work (WtW) grants to States, Tribes and local communities to promote job opportunities and employment preparation for the hardest-to-employ TANF recipients and for non-custodial parents of children on TANF. This Act also required DHHS to conduct an evaluation of the WtW grant programs. In August 1998, ASPE awarded a four-year contract to Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. to conduct this Congressionally mandated evaluation. The evaluation includes a descriptive assessment of all formula and competitive WtW grantees, an in-depth implementation and outcomes study in 11 selected sites, a cost/benefit analysis, and a separate process/implementation study of Tribal welfare and employment systems. Three reports on findings have thus far been published. In addition, a separate Tribal process/implementation analysis report was released in March 2002.

### **Dissemination, Technical Assistance, And Evaluation Support**

ACF dissemination and technical assistance efforts to date have emphasized communicating research-based findings and information on promising practices that we have identified. These findings and information focus on efforts to move welfare and low-income families toward self-sufficiency.

Beginning in 1998, ACF began sponsoring annual Welfare Reform Evaluation conferences. These conferences have brought together State evaluation and policy staff, researchers and evaluators, and other interested organizations and individuals. The conferences not only share research and evaluation findings and program experiences, but also improve the quality of welfare reform evaluation efforts so that they better inform decision-making and effectively guide program implementation.

ACF TANF technical assistance efforts have emphasized the dissemination of research based self-sufficiency strategies, when available, and the promotion of promising and /or innovative strategies that are undergoing evaluation. ACF has also facilitated relationship-building between various welfare reform stakeholders by convening conferences, workshops, and roundtables. Technical assistance has been provided through publications, meetings, web technology, and training, and by funding strategic planning and innovative initiatives.

### **Collaboration with Other DHHS Agencies**

ACF has collaborated with another DHHS component, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), for over two years on Welfare Reform issues. We have jointly funded and developed several conferences, issued joint guidance, and co-sponsored publications. During FY 2000, ACF collaborated with SAMHSA and the Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration (DOL/ETA), in sponsoring a welfare reform conference entitled "Employment Strategies for Overcoming Substance Abuse/Mental Health Barriers." The conference brought together members from the State human service, workforce development, and substance abuse/mental health communities. The conference highlighted promising models and strategies that could help TANF recipients find and keep employment.



States continue to inform us that one of their top priorities is to provide employment opportunities and services to clients with substance abuse and mental health problems. In FY 2001, ACF and SAMHSA collaborated on eight targeted technical assistance meetings (each in a different Federal Region). Each of the participating ACF Regional Offices chose among a menu of topics related to substance abuse based on the specific needs/requests of the States in their Region. Potential topics included substance abuse screening and assessment issues, outreach and marketing to support TANF families with substance abuse issues, coordination of services for clients with domestic violence and substance abuse problems, dual diagnosis/co-occurring disorder issues for TANF recipients, coordination of services for families involved in both welfare and child welfare systems, the role of substance abuse treatment in preparing clients for work, Tribal TANF and substance abuse, how to address treatment needs, drug-free housing for TANF clients and their families in treatment and recovery, and building interagency collaboration to serve TANF recipients with alcohol and other drug problems.

ACF has continued to support the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and Department efforts to improve the access of low-income children and families to health coverage. For example, in FY 2000 ACF and CMS collaborated in sponsoring a Family Independence Forum that explained a new CMS Policy Directive on removing barriers for TANF recipients who are eligible for Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). Also, when CMS issued new guidance to States in April 2000 explaining how States should ensure that families did not lose coverage inappropriately, ACF posted the information on its Web site, and ACF officials wrote to its counterparts in the developmental disability, TANF, child support enforcement, and child care communities asking that they cooperate with and support these efforts.

ACF is continuing its collaboration with the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) to ensure that States improve the accessibility of services for clients with limited English proficiency (LEP) and disabilities. ACF regional offices are also continuing their work with OCR to improve accessibility for the disabled and LEP populations. ACF disseminated OCR's guidance on prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability under TANF, as well as OCR's guidance on Limited English Proficiency. This guidance has been especially helpful to service providers and employers who are working with TANF recipients. In addition, ACF collaborated with OCR on a Family Independence Forum on providing services to TANF recipients who have limited English proficiency.

### **Collaboration with Other Federal Agencies**

ACF is also working with other Federal agencies, at the central and regional office levels, to develop policy and guidance, convene conferences and share resources. Through these collaborations, ACF models the partnerships that it promotes at the State and local levels.

During the past two years, staff from the Department of Labor (DOL) and the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) and Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) in ACF have collaborated on guidance to improve the referral process for TANF clients who might benefit from services provided by Welfare-to-Work grantees, and to provide information on service integration for the three systems. The Office of Family Assistance has also supported DOL's Workforce Excellence Network (Workforce Excellence Board). This support consisted of providing information about

exemplary practices, identifying role model organizations, and assisting in the implementation of a continuous improvement process -- particularly as it pertains to serving welfare recipients and other low-income populations under the Workforce Investment Act. Through this collaboration, ACF identified opportunities to include messages about serving welfare recipients and other low-income populations under the framework of the Workforce Investment Act

ACF collaborated with the Department of Education (ED) and the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) to provide technical assistance to State and local TANF agencies serving individuals with learning disabilities. "Bridges to Practice" was a joint initiative that engaged multiple State agencies in developing strategies to address the identification, education, training, and work needs of learning-disabled adults on TANF who have not succeeded in gaining employment

During FY 1999 and FY 2000, ACF worked with the Department of Transportation (DOT) and DOL to revise guidance on the use of TANF and Access to Jobs funds. The Access to Jobs program, which is administered by DOT, provides grants to States and localities in developing flexible transportation services that connect welfare recipients and other low-income individuals to jobs and employment related services. This guidance facilitates State and local level dialogue on developing initiatives to provide transportation to low-income families that have difficulty accessing jobs.

ACF collaborated with State TANF and housing agencies in the resolution of implementation issues relative to the Welfare-to-Work, Section 8 Voucher program. ACF issued guidance jointly with HUD on cooperation agreements for economic self-sufficiency between Public Housing Authorities and TANF agencies.

ACF has also been sponsoring technical assistance strategies at the community level. These efforts are designed to facilitate information sharing and program development. In addition to participating in conferences and working with Community Development Corporations (CDCs) and Community Action Agencies (CAAs), OFA worked with the Office of Community Services (OCS) and the National Congress for Community Economic Development to develop a user friendly publication, "Building Partnerships between State TANF Initiatives and CDCs." The book highlights how TANF funds may be used in communities to promote self-sufficiency for families and economic development.

We also intend to continue collaborations with other Federal partners and organizations like the National Governors Association on a number of initiatives designed to address special technical assistance issues in welfare reform.

### **Collaboration Outside of the Federal Government**

From our overall work plan for FY 2000, we would like to highlight several partnerships that illustrate the kinds of activities we have supported to help make welfare reform succeed.

1. Because of the amount of State flexibility and responsibility under the TANF program, State legislatures enjoy enormous opportunities to participate in the design of their programs. We feel it is important that State leaders understand the specifics of the law and have the opportunity to explore their options with other legislators in their State and across the

country. In previous years, ACF convened several regional events to accomplish this purpose. The events proved successful as forums for the sharing of information and generating new ideas. During FY 2000, ACF became a partner with the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) in convening three regional workshops to educate State legislators about key financing and programmatic issues in their TANF programs. The workshops were designed, in part, to help State legislators understand the implications of the final TANF regulations.

2. ACF has developed an effective relationship with the Welfare-to-Work Partnership and has engaged in a number of joint activities with the Partnership during the past two years. During FY 2000, ACF and the Partnership convened three business roundtables for the purpose of hearing from business leaders about the challenges and successes they have experienced in the hiring of welfare recipients. A common theme from these roundtables was that the lack of affordable, quality child care was one of the biggest obstacles to hiring and retaining workers. Transportation barriers and training needs have also presented a challenge.

One of the roundtables was held in January 2000 in Philadelphia. ACF, the WtW Partnership, area employers, and selected State legislators participated, as did all of the State Human Service Directors from Region III. The purpose of the roundtable was to explore strategies for establishing partnerships between employers and TANF Agencies and identifying what State legislators can do to increase the involvement of the business community in welfare reform.

ACF uses information received from the Partnership to inform our policy discussions and to assist in developing useful guidance for the field.

3. ACF has joined with the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) on several initiatives during the past few years. During FY 2000, ACF provided support to APHSA for their CEO Track and Senior Manager's Program for a selected group of State Human Service Administrators and other high level policy makers involved in implementation of State TANF programs. The Executive Leadership Institute has provided training on how to integrate resources and leverage resources to better equip State CEOs and senior human service managers with the knowledge and skills they need to create high performing organizations and improve outcomes in human service delivery.
4. ACF has been an active partner with the Welfare Information Network (WIN) during the past three years and has provided support for WIN's information collection, synthesis, and dissemination activities. The WIN organization has: (1) created networks to facilitate cooperation among national organizations in the development and sharing of program information; (2) established an extensive clearinghouse of welfare-related data and resources; and (3) developed a strong web site, publication series, and inquiry system to make information on welfare reform more readily available. These efforts have proven invaluable to States and communities seeking information, policy analysis, and technical assistance they need to develop and implement changes to reduce dependency and promote the well-being of children and families.

5. For several years, ACF has joined with the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) in disseminating information on the Earned Income Tax Credit. We have mailed packets of information, including brochures, flyers, and other useful information on the EIC, to all the State TANF administrators. ACF and the CBPP have also collaborated since 1997 on a Family Independence Forum to brief Federal and State staff on the Earned Income TaxCredit.

ACF worked with National Governors Association and DOL on a joint initiative to support the National Governors Association Center on Best Practices in convening roundtable workshops on job retention and advancement for low-income families. The roundtables focused on helping individuals with multiple barriers and/or very low skills to assess supports and training opportunities so they, too, can move to self-sufficiency.

### **Other Technical Assistance -- FY 2000**

#### **Peer Technical Assistance (TA) Network**

ACF has provided technical assistance through our web sites, roundtables and on-site visits that enables States and localities to share expertise and proven experiences. During FY 2000, the Peer TA Network sponsored 13 TA events covering such issues as job retention, transportation, learning disabilities, housing, domestic violence and substance abuse, individual development accounts, job development, developing rural partnerships, employer outreach, collaboration with faith-based organizations, and the experiences of welfare “leavers”. The Peer TA Network is a tool that States and localities use to learn about innovative programs and effective strategies for moving low-income families to employment and self-sufficiency. The Peer TA Network facilitates the sharing of information through its web page where it posts innovative practices, Qs & As, reports of lessons learned from each TA event, and a calendar of coming events. During FY 2000, there were approximately 313,000 hits on the Peer TA website.

OFA has provided technical assistance through other flexible mechanisms, e.g., consultant services, conferences, workshops and roundtable information on topics related to domestic violence, substance abuse/mental health issues, collaborating with faith-based organizations, systems change, service integration, and other emerging issues.

PRWORA provided an historic opportunity for Tribes to operate TANF programs that would be culturally appropriate and consistent with Tribal goals and values. Most Tribes, however, had limited experience operating employment training programs and managing cash assistance programs particularly with a fixed budget. During FY 2000, OFA joined with ACF's Office of Community Services to provide an orientation on the final Tribal regulations to the Tribes, TANF directors, and Tribal leaders. In addition, in March 2000, the ACF Regional Office in Kansas City, MO, sponsored a workshop and disseminated best practices and research findings to Tribes regarding TANF implementation.

Studies document that domestic violence presents serious dangers and challenges to many welfare recipients. Such violence is often associated with physical, mental health and safety issues that can undermine efforts to obtain employment and achieve economic independence. In

August 2000, our ACF Regional Offices in Regions I, II, and III sponsored the Northeast HUB's Domestic Violence Conference. The conference assembled key stakeholders; promoted collaborations and partnerships; identified new opportunities to work together across agency and organizational lines; discussed the most recent research and data; and exchanged information on program and policy trends, promising practices, resources, and concerns.

The ACF Regional Office in Seattle sponsored a workshop in July 2000 to provide expert advice to States on nontraditional and effective use of TANF funds. This workshop also gave States the opportunity to share best practices and inform each other of positive and negative "lessons learned" during the implementation of their programs.

In September 2000, the Regional Office in Seattle also co-sponsored a Service Providers' Workshop with the Division of Public Assistance (DPA) of the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services for TANF caseworkers and managers. The workshop theme was "Working with Challenged Clients." The agenda included training on TANF regulations, procedures, strategies, and best practices.

Family Independence Forums – The Office of Family Assistance has sponsored monthly "Family Independence Forums" as a vehicle to disseminate information on what strategies and programs are working or show promise in moving welfare and low-income families to self-sufficiency. During FY 2000, the office conducted the following monthly forums:

- November 1999 – Welfare Reform and the Faith Community
- December 1999 – Welfare Reform and Substance Abuse
- January 2000 – Job Retention and Advancement
- February 2000 – Earned Income Tax Credit (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities)
- March 2000 – Census Jobs for TANF recipients (U.S. Census Bureau)
- March 2000 – Supporting Families After Welfare Reform
- April 2000 – Homelessness (U.S. Conference of Mayors)
- May 2000 – Strategies for Teen Parents (National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancies)
- June 2000 – Medicaid and SCHIP
- August 2000 – Housing and Individual Development Accounts
- September 2000 – Limited English Proficiency

The audience and participants of the Family Independence Forums included various State TANF, child support, health, and other program and policy staff. Through these forums, States have learned about promising models and programs that can help address some of the challenges faced by low-income families trying to achieve self-sufficiency.

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## Summary 14:1 -- Research Findings from ASPE-Funded Leavers Studies: Administrative Data Findings from Interim Reports

### **Background**

Welfare caseloads have declined dramatically during the past several years. Overall, the welfare caseload has fallen by 8.4 million recipients, from 14.2 million recipients at its historic high in 1994 to 5.8 million in June 2000, a drop of 59 percent. This is the largest welfare caseload decline in history. As the caseloads have fallen there has been widespread interest in the circumstances of recipients who have left welfare. How are they faring without cash assistance? Are they working? Are they moving out of poverty? To what extent do they return to welfare? To what extent do they continue to need and to receive assistance and supportive services through other programs?

To answer these questions, ASPE awarded approximately \$2.9 million in grants to States and counties in FY 1998 to study the outcomes of welfare reform on individuals and families who leave the TANF program, who apply for cash welfare but are never enrolled because of non-financial eligibility requirements or diversion programs, and/or who appear to be eligible but are not enrolled. The 1998 grants were awarded to ten States and three large counties or consortia of counties (Arizona, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Massachusetts, Missouri, New York, Washington, and Wisconsin; and Cuyahoga County, Ohio, Los Angeles County, California, and San Mateo, Santa Cruz, and Santa Clara Counties, California). Separate but comparable studies were also funded in Iowa (with FY 1999 funding) and South Carolina (in FY 1998 and 2000, as part of a longer-term project) resulting in a total of 15 studies with findings on former recipients as of spring 2001.<sup>2</sup>

Following the devolution of welfare programs to the State level, ASPE chose a research strategy that combined local flexibility in study design with some national direction and coordination. Most of the projects used administrative data to track an early cohort of individuals who left welfare around 1996 or 1997. Projects also used a combination of administrative and survey data to track the economic status and general well-being of at least one cohort who left welfare one to two years later, after the transition from Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) to the TANF program. Projects varied, however, in the number and types of administrative data sets examined and the design of the surveys of former recipients. Final survey sample sizes varied from 277 to over 3,500 cases, response rates ranged from 23 to 81 percent, and approximate time of interview varied from six to 30 months after exit, as shown in Table 14:1. All researchers were encouraged to collect data across multiple dimensions, including employment, program participation, economic status, family structure, child well-

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<sup>2</sup> In addition to funding the Iowa leavers study in FY 1999, ASPE funded leavers studies in Texas and in Contra Costa and Alameda Counties, California, as well as several applicant/diversion studies. Also in FY 1999, ASPE awarded an additional \$837,000 for continuations and extensions of several of the FY 1998 leavers projects. In addition, \$1.236 million was awarded in FY 2000 to enhance some existing studies of welfare-related outcomes. In all, ASPE has committed over \$5 million to State and county grantees to study welfare outcomes.

being, material hardship, barriers to employment, etc. Grantees designed their own survey instruments, however, which differed in wording and emphasis. While this diversity poses challenges for summarizing results nationally, it has allowed States to meet the demands of their elected officials and program administrators for timely information on families leaving their State's welfare program.

Although each study had its own methodology, ASPE took certain steps to promote comparability across the studies. Chief among these was developing consensus around a common definition of the "leaver" study population as "all cases that leave cash assistance for at least two months." This definition excludes cases that re-open within one or two months; such cases are more likely closed due to administrative "churning" than to true exits from welfare. In addition, through national meetings and an electronic list-serve, ASPE staff facilitated peer networking among researchers, promoted the use of nationally developed questions on topics such as food security and child well-being, and encouraged standardized reporting of certain administrative data outcomes.

As of March 2001, all 15 studies identified above had released preliminary reports based on administrative data findings, and 12 of the 15 also had released reports with more detailed findings from follow-up surveys. Highlights from these reports are presented below, with a focus on outcomes in employment and earnings, recidivism and program participation, and household income and family well-being.<sup>3</sup> This summary stresses common findings for average welfare leavers in each jurisdiction, without analyzing how outcomes vary for different types of leavers (e.g., urban vs. rural, those who left due to earnings vs. sanctions). Findings are presented for all single-parent leavers in a State or county except where noted otherwise. Observed cross-state differences in outcomes reflect the diverse range of State policies and underlying economic and demographic conditions of the jurisdictions under study, as well as methodological differences in study design.<sup>4</sup> A more comprehensive synthesis report, including analysis of how outcomes differ for various subgroups, was released in December 2001.

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<sup>3</sup> Findings presented here are based on an *Initial Synthesis Report of the Findings From ASPE's "Leavers" Grants* (prepared by the Urban Institute and available at <<<http://aspe.os.dhhs.gov/hsp/leavers99/synthesis01/index.htm>>>; "A Cross-State Examination of Families Leaving Welfare: Findings from the ASPE-Funded Leavers Studies," prepared by ASPE staff are available at <<<http://aspe.os.dhhs.gov/hsp/leavers/cross-state00/index.htm>>>; as well as ASPE staff analyses of reports submitted between November 2000 and March 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Cross-state comparisons are affected by a variety of factors, ranging from State sanction policies, maximum benefit levels and earnings disregard policies, survey sample sizes, time of interview, and response rates. They are also affected by the underlying economic, social and demographic conditions of the study sites. Some observed differences also reflect methodological issues, including questionnaire design or population under study. Brief summaries of the projects can be found at <<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/leavers99/fy98.htm>>. Information on comparing survey instruments can be found at <<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/leavers99/cross.htm#comparing>>.

## **Findings**

### Employment and Earnings

#### Employment

Employment outcomes have been quite consistent across the 15 studies. Employment rates of former recipients ranged from 47 to 68 percent in the first quarter after exit according to administrative data (see Table 14:2). Moreover, employment rates remained fairly constant in the first year after exit in most study areas. This finding does not mean that the same 50 to 60 percent of leavers were employed every quarter. Some former recipients lost their jobs, while others found new employment, with the result that 62 to 90 percent of leavers had earnings at least once within the first four quarters after exit. Between 31 and 47 percent of leavers were employed in all four quarters (data not shown),<sup>5</sup> according to the eight studies reporting this statistic.

Three of six jurisdictions analyzing employment across multiple cohorts found that recipients leaving welfare in 1998 had higher employment rates – by five to ten percentage points – than those leaving in 1996 (data not shown). Two other two jurisdictions, however, found no change and one found a decrease in employment.

Administrative data do not capture all employment: quarterly earnings reported to the States' unemployment insurance (UI) programs do not capture earnings from self-employment, employment in the military or Federal government, certain agricultural employment, and jobs across State boundaries. In fact, between 57 and 71 percent of former recipients reported working at time of interview. These self-reported employment rates from survey data were higher than the rates based on administrative data in all but one study (see Table 14:2). The vast majority of leavers – 85 to 92 percent – reported being employed at least once since exit. In addition, three studies found that the household employment rate (counting earnings of anyone in the household) was nine to 15 percentage points higher than the individual rate for the leaver herself, or about 72 to 80 percent (data not shown).

#### Earnings

Median quarterly earnings of former recipients with jobs ranged from \$1,900 in South Carolina to \$3,400 in Washington, District of Columbia in the first quarter post-exit (see Table 14:3). In all reporting locations, quarterly earnings rose over the course of the year following exit.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> These individuals may not have been employed in every month, however, since UI records are based on quarterly earnings, reflecting *any* covered employment during that quarter.

<sup>6</sup> Data from the UI system are limited to aggregate quarterly earnings, without underlying information about hourly wages or hours worked in a quarter. Therefore, the data do not indicate whether increased earnings are due to wage rate increases or more hours of work. Also, since leavers without earnings in the quarter are excluded when calculating mean earnings, the earnings increases could also be due to low earners dropping out of the labor market.

Median hourly wages, as reported in survey data from eight studies, ranged from \$6.50 to \$9.00 an hour. Former recipients with jobs worked an average of 33 to 39 hours per week; median hours averaged 40 hours per week.

In sum, the studies were consistent in finding that about three-fifths of leavers were working, generally 40 hours per week, but with relatively low wages and intermittent spells of unemployment.

### Program Participation

According to data from 15 studies, between three and 21 percent of families leaving welfare returned to cash assistance within one quarter (see Table 14:4). Rates of welfare receipt rose to between nine and 24 percent in the next quarter. Rates rose very slightly over the next six months, reaching 11 to 25 percent one year after exit. Because some people return to the rolls and then leave again, the proportion that *ever* returned within the first year after exit was higher, ranging from 17 to 38 percent.<sup>7</sup>

Survey data on returns to TANF are fairly similar to the administrative data. In addition, survey data also found that at least one half of those who returned to TANF did so for a job-related reason, such as job loss or decreases in work hours or wages. Other common reasons for returning to TANF included divorce or separation from partner, pregnancy or birth of a new child, re-compliance with program regulations, loss of other income, problems with child care, and problems with health or medical benefits.

Comparisons of early and later cohorts reveal no clear pattern of returns to welfare (data not shown). As compared with earlier cohorts, recidivism among 1998 leavers was higher in three States but lower in three others. No trend was apparent in two others.

Families leaving in the 1996 to 1999 period did so before they hit the five-year Federal time limits on benefit receipt. Thus, most families had the option of returning to cash assistance as needed. Two studies, however, examined cohorts of 1999 leavers who were affected by State time limits of two years. Recidivism rates in these two States – Massachusetts and South Carolina – were lower than rates in other States, as shown in Table 14:4. Sub-group analysis in these two States indicates that families who left because of time limits were much less likely to be back on welfare at time of interview than other families<sup>8</sup>; only two percent of the time-limited families in South Carolina and eight percent in Massachusetts were back on welfare a year after exit.

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<sup>7</sup> Recidivism rates would be higher if the studies had included those who exited for less than two months. Also note that recidivism was generally lower in studies that measured it on a monthly basis than in those that observed welfare receipt over a quarterly (three-month) period.

<sup>8</sup> It was possible for some time-limited families to re-establish eligibility for welfare by qualifying for an exemption or extension to the time limit.

## Medicaid and Health Insurance

Although the majority of leavers remained off cash assistance, most continued to receive other government support. One of the most common supports was Medicaid, although rates of participation varied considerably across States. As shown in Table 14:5, between 42 and 80 percent of adult leavers were enrolled in Medicaid in the first quarter post-exit according to administrative data. In many areas, adult enrollment rates dropped ten percentage points or more by the fourth quarter after exit. Medicaid coverage varied even more dramatically in survey data, ranging from 33 percent in Missouri (measured over 2 years after exit) to 81 percent in Massachusetts (measured slightly under a year after exit). A higher percentage of surveyed leavers – 51 to 83 percent – reported Medicaid coverage for their children, as shown in Table 14:6.

Lack of Medicaid enrollment is not necessarily a problem if leavers have health insurance through employment or other means. However, only 20 to 34 percent of adult leavers reported being covered by employer-sponsored or other insurance; somewhat fewer (7 to 28 percent) reported such coverage for their children. These figures reveal that, in most States, substantial numbers of former recipients and their children were without any health insurance. The percentage of adult leavers without insurance ranged from 7 to 45 percent; rates for children ranged from 8 to 33 percent, for Massachusetts and Florida, respectively. Data in Tables 14:5 and 14:6 indicate that lack of health insurance was more prevalent in States with low numbers of leavers enrolled in Medicaid. Survey data from six States (discussed in the section on Material Hardship and displayed in Table 14:10 below) show the consequences of lack of health insurance coverage.

Some of the State variation in Medicaid enrollment can be explained by differences in survey methodology (e.g., timing and wording of surveys) or in the linking and analysis of administrative data.<sup>9</sup> Still, the observed cross-state variation is too wide to be solely attributable to measurement differences. Some variation in enrollment is likely to reflect differences in Medicaid eligibility (which is set by States) and in administrative practices, which vary across States and local areas.

## Food Stamps and Other Program Participation

Participation in other forms of government assistance was also common, though generally at lower levels than for Medicaid. Participation rates of former recipients in the Food Stamp Program, for example, ranged from 23 to 78 percent across 12 studies, with most finding that roughly one-third to one-half of AFDC/TANF leavers received Food Stamps immediately after exit (see Table 14:7). Similar rates were found in both administrative and survey data. Food stamp receipt declined in some States over time, but remained constant in others.

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<sup>9</sup> The potential for measurement variation can be seen in the fact that two studies – Missouri and San Mateo – more than doubled their initial enrollment rates from administrative data. In both cases, researchers re-analyzed administrative data and classified additional eligibility codes as "Medicaid" enrollment after noting large discrepancies between administrative and survey data.

Other commonly received forms of government assistance included free- and reduced-price school lunches (43 to 87 percent of leavers), the Federal Earned Income Tax Credit (32 to 65 percent of former recipients), housing assistance (16 to 60 percent of leavers), and Supplemental Security Income (2 to 12 percent of leavers), according to survey data from several surveys (data not shown). In addition between 11 and 35 percent of former recipients across seven studies reported receiving child support, often secured with help from the child support enforcement agency. As seen below, income from these sources can be an important component of household income.

## Household Income and Family Well-Being

### *Household Income and Poverty Status*

Total household income is difficult to measure, particularly in leaver households. Paychecks can vary from month to month, and variations in unearned income and in household composition may generate added instability. In addition, it is very difficult to document all the sources of income and resources that families may have. Nevertheless, ASPE encouraged researchers to collect survey data on this critical measure of family well-being.

As shown in Table 14:8, average household cash income of former recipients ranged from \$964 to \$1440 per month across eight studies. When reported separately, median household incomes were about \$200 lower. While not included in these cash income totals, Food Stamp benefits provided the average household with an additional \$96 to \$129 per month, according to three studies. (The value of the Federal Earned Income Tax Credit also was not included in the cash income totals).

Six of the eight studies shown in Table 14:8 asked a series of detailed questions probing for income from various specific sources, while two (Illinois and the District of Columbia) simply asked for total household income. Consistent with past research, the surveys that asked multiple income-related questions uncovered higher levels of income than the other two surveys. This pattern of variation suggests that the lower incomes found in Illinois and the District of Columbia may reflect differences in income reporting rather than true differences in income.<sup>10</sup>

Five of the studies provided information about the sources of household income. Earnings were the largest income source: the leaver's own earnings made up 45 to 63 percent of total household income, while earnings of others in the household accounted for an additional 19 to 40 percent. Cash assistance from AFDC or TANF added another three to eight percent. The final nine to 20 percent of household income came from child support payments, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and "other" income, including Social Security and survivors' benefits, veterans' benefits, workers' compensation, and financial assistance from others.

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<sup>10</sup> In fact, both quarterly earnings and hourly wages of leavers in Illinois and the District of Columbia were comparable or higher than those in the other regions.

Four of the studies with comprehensive income questions also calculated the percentage of former recipients with household income below the Federal poverty line. Estimated poverty rates ranged from 41 percent to 58 percent, depending in part on whether Food Stamps were included in measures of household income.<sup>11</sup> Many leavers with household incomes at or above the poverty threshold were still close to poverty. The Iowa study found that 63 percent of leavers had income below 130 percent of the poverty threshold. In Cuyahoga 79 percent were below 150 percent of poverty, and in Missouri 89 percent had cash incomes below 185 percent of the poverty threshold.

One study (Washington) reported an 83 percent poverty rate among a sample of recipients remaining on welfare for six months. Mean and median household incomes of ongoing recipients also were lower (data are not shown, but were \$890 and \$642, respectively) than those of former recipients. While the Washington study does not track the same group of people over time, it provides some evidence that economic status improves after exit from welfare.

### *Family Well-Being and Material Hardship*

Partly because of the challenges of measuring income, most leavers surveys also asked directly about family well-being and material hardships resulting from not having enough money. Although surveys varied in wording, they generally asked about hardships related to food shortages, housing problems, and medical hardship.

Between one-eighth and one-half of leavers (13 to 52 percent) reported some level of food hardship, according to the 12 studies with survey data (see Table 14:9). Rates of food insecurity ranged from 32 to 46 percent among the three States that measured food insecurity through a standardized six-item questionnaire. About half of these families, or 16 to 26 percent of all leaver families, were classified as food insecure with hunger.<sup>12</sup> Other States, while not using the six-item standardized scale, found similar evidence of food insecurity: 20 to 43 percent of respondents said that adults in the household cut the size of meals or skipped meals and 13 to 52 percent exhibited other signs of food insecurity, such as not being able to buy enough food. Very few leavers reported that children in their households skipped meals (three to five percent, according to two studies).

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<sup>11</sup> Poverty rates were 41 percent in Iowa (counting cash and food stamps), 47 percent in Iowa (counting cash income only), 57 percent in Cuyahoga County (counting cash and Food Stamps), and 58 percent in both Missouri and Washington (counting cash only). The official poverty measure does not include Food Stamps. Food Stamp benefits are included, however, in alternative poverty measures recommended by a panel from the National Academy of Sciences. The Panel on Poverty and Family Assistance also recommended that poverty measures take into account the effects of other non-cash benefits, taxes (such as the EITC), and work expenses.

<sup>12</sup> The six-item scale is an abbreviated version of a broader 18-question scale developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Families that answer yes to two or more questions on the six-item scale are considered "food insecure" and those that answer yes to five or more questions are considered "food insecure with hunger." National estimates of food insecurity, based on the 18-item scale, indicate that 37 percent of families below the poverty threshold were food insecure in 1999, including 12 percent who were food insecure with hunger (U. S. Department of Agriculture, *Household Food Security in the United States, 1999*). Estimates from the six-item scale are generally comparable with those from the broader scale.

Former recipients also reported problems with housing arrangements, although somewhat less frequently than food shortages. As shown in Table 14:10, the most common problems were falling behind in rent or mortgage (18 to 38 percent across seven studies), loss of utilities (12 to 36 percent of leavers across seven studies) and being forced to move (13 to 32 percent across four studies). Less often, former recipients were evicted (four to seven percent), went to a homeless shelter (one to seven percent, except one study reported 17 percent), or reported that their children were forced to live elsewhere (three to eight percent, except one study reported 19 percent).<sup>13</sup>

Studies were split as to whether housing and food shortages were greater before or after exit; some found more hardship after exit, some found less hardship after exit, and some showed little difference. None of the leavers studies reported a significant change in use of homeless shelters before and after exit, or in experiences with separations of children from the family.

Six studies also examined medical hardship, and found that between eight percent and 31 percent of leavers in the six sites reported that they or someone in their household was unable to get needed medical attention since leaving welfare because they could not afford it. Studies consistently reported more difficulty getting needed medical care after exit than while on welfare.

Finally, when directly asked about overall economic well-being or standard of living, 46 to 68 percent of families in five States reported they were better off financially after exit; 16 to 32 percent said they were the same, and 13 to 30 percent said they were worse off (see Table 14:11).

### **Conclusion**

In sum, findings across the 15 studies showed that about three-fifths of leavers were working, generally 40 hours per week. Former recipients experienced intermittent spells of unemployment and financial hardship, however, and about one-fourth to one-third returned to welfare at least once in the first year after exit in most States studied. Although quarterly earnings rose over time, total household incomes remained fairly low, averaging about \$1,400 or less per month. Health insurance coverage and receipt of Food Stamps declined for some recipients. Evidence was mixed as to whether material hardships were greater before or after exit; families generally reported that they are better off overall after leaving welfare.

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<sup>13</sup> The atypically high rates of homelessness (19 percent) and removals of children (17 percent) were from the same study, Florida. These results should be viewed with caution, because figures were imputed for the 73 percent of the sample that could not be located by telephone. The raw, unadjusted percentages, reported in an appendix, were closer to those reported by other States (4 percent homeless and 8 percent with children living elsewhere).



**Table 14:1**

## Survey Sample Size, Response Rate and Timing of Interview

Grantee & Cohort CY(Qtr)	Final Survey Sample Size	Response Rate	Timing of Interview (Mos. post exit)
Arizona 98(1)	821	72%	12-18 months
Florida 97(2)	3,548	23%	23-30 months
Georgia 99(1)-00(1)	2,935	52%	4-6 months
Illinois 98(4)	514	51%	6-8 months
Iowa 99(2)	405	76%	8-12 months
Massachusetts 99(1)	570	75%	6-16 months
Missouri 96(4)	878	75%	26-34 months
South Carolina 98(4)-99(1)	1,072	75%	12-15 months
Washington 98(4)	708	72%	6-8 months
District of Columbia 98(4)	277	61%	10-14 months
Cuyahoga 98(3)	306	81%	18-22 months
San Mateo 98(4)	438	66%	6-12 months

**Table 14:2**

## Employment Rates of Former Recipients

Grantee & CohortCY(Qtr)	Administrative Data: Employment Rates					Survey Data:	
	1st Qtr post exit	2nd Qtr post exit	3rd Qtr post exit	4th Qtr post exit	Any of 4 Qtrs	Employed at Interview	Employed since exit
Arizona 98(1)	53	51	52	50	73	58	--
Florida 97(2)	50	51	53	54	71	57	--
Georgia 99(1)-00(1)	61	63	59	59	--	69	--
Illinois 97(3)-98(4)*	54	53	53	54	69	63	85
Iowa 99(2)	57	42	39	38	69	61	--
Massachusetts 99(1)*	60	61	51	--	68	71	--
Missouri 96(4)*	58	58	59	58	73	65	90
New York 97(1)	50	49	48	48	62	--	--
S. C. 98(4)-99(1)	67	68	67	63	90	60	--
Washington 98(4)	62	58	--	--	--	59	86
Wisconsin 98(2)-(4)*	67	65	67	67	72	--	--
D. C. 97(4)*	54	58	50	52	--	60	--
Cuyahoga 98(3)	68	64	67	64	82	70	92
Los Angeles 96(4)	47	46	46	47	--	--	--
San Mateo 98(4)	55	55	55	--	--	57	--

Notes: A recipient is considered Aemployed@ if she or he has any earnings in UI-covered employment within the State, except: Cuyahoga and Los Angeles require >\$100 per quarter, Washington also counts earnings reported to the welfare system, and District of Columbia uses data from the National Directory of New Hires. District of Columbia employment rates would be 8 percentage points higher if leavers without Social Security numbers were excluded from the denominator, as they are in New York, Missouri and possibly other studies.

\* Rates are for single-parent leavers, except that Illinois, Massachusetts, Missouri, Wisconsin, and District of Columbia include small percentages of two-parent leavers.

**Table 14:3**

## Earnings of Former Recipients

Grantee & CohortCY(Qtr)	Administrative Data: Median Quarterly Earnings				Survey Data: Hourly	
	1st Qtr post exit	2nd Qtr post exit	3rd Qtr post exit	4th Qtr post exit	Mean wages	Median wages
Arizona 98(1)**	\$2,211	\$2,354	\$2,695	\$2,511	\$7.52	--
1Florida 97(2)	\$2,007	\$2,168	\$2,167	\$2,329	--	--
Georgia 99(1)**	\$2,184	\$2,319	\$2,518	--	--	--
Illinois 97(3)-98(4)	\$2,471	\$2,527	\$2,614	\$2,720	--	\$7.41
Iowa 99(2)	\$2,177	\$2,520	\$2,332	\$2,417	\$7.54	--
Massachusetts 99(1)*	\$2,645	\$2,754	\$2,977	--	\$8.46	--
Missouri 96(4)*	\$1,996	\$2,171	\$2,200	\$2,535	--	--
S. C. 98(4)-99(1)	\$1,871	\$1,807	\$1,904	\$2,148	--	\$6.50
Washington 98(4)	\$2,387	\$2,497	--	--	\$7.70	\$7.00
Wisconsin 98(2)-(4) *	\$2,272	\$2,362	\$2,278	\$2,561	--	--
D. C. 97(4) admin. data*	\$3,416	--	\$3,395	\$3,934	\$8.74	\$8.13
D. C. 98(4) survey*						
Cuyahoga 98(3)	\$2,744	\$2,489	\$2,663	\$2,754	\$7.50	--
Los Angeles 96(4)	\$3,248	\$3,156	\$3,303	\$3,290	--	--
San Mateo 98(4)	\$3,144	\$3,439	\$3,612	--	--	\$9.00

Notes: Excludes leavers without earnings in the quarter. Earnings are reported in nominal dollars.

\* Figures are for single-parent leavers, except that Massachusetts, Missouri, Wisconsin, and the District of Columbia include small percentages of two-parent leavers.

\*\* Arizona and Georgia quarterly earnings are mean, rather than median, earnings. Median earnings would be somewhat lower.

**Table 14:4**

## Percentage of Adult Leavers Receiving AFDC/TANF

Grantee & Cohort CY(Qtr)	Administrative Data: AFDC/TANF Receipt				
	1st Qtr (3 mos) post exit	2nd Qtr (6 mos) post exit	3rd Qtr (9 mos) post exit	4th Qtr (12 mos) post exit	Ever receiving within 1 yr
Arizona 98(4)	5.3	12.9	16.6	15.5	27.7
Florida 97(2)	6.5	13.9	12.8	--	26.1
Georgia 99(1)	8.4	14.4	16.4	16.0	--
Illinois 97(2)-98(4)	16.2	18.6	17.5	16.3	28.9
Iowa 99(2)	5.5	14.2	19.0	18.8	30.1
Massachusetts 99(1)*	2.9	10.0	14.3	11.4	18.8
Missouri 96(4)*	12.4	18.6	20.8	20.6	--
New York 97(1)	--	--	--	17.0	--
S. C. 99(4)-00(1)	3.4	8.8	11.7	10.9	17.1
Washington 97(4)	8.0	14.0	16.0	16.0	--
Wisconsin 98(2)-(4)*	18.5	22.1	21.8	19.7	35.5
District of Columbia 98(4)*	7.5	12.7	16.2	18.8	21.1
Cuyahoga 98(3)	21.1	24.3	25.5	24.9	38.1
San Mateo 98(4)	16.9	20.9	22.8	20.8	--

Notes: Grantees measuring program participation by month B Arizona, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, New York, the District of Columbia, and San Mateo B are likely to report lower program participation than grantees measuring participation over a three-month quarter. These and other methodological differences have a particularly strong effect on measurement of TANF receipt three months/one quarter after exit, and so differences in the first column of Table 3 should be viewed with caution.

\* Figures are for single-parent leavers, except that Massachusetts, Missouri, Wisconsin, and the District of Columbia include small percentages of two-parent leavers.

**Table 14:5.**

## Adult Health Insurance Status

Grantee & Cohort CY(Qtr)	Administrative Data:		Survey Data: Health Insurance Coverage at Interview			
	1st Qtr post exit	4th Qtr post exit	Medicaid	Employer Sponsored Insurance	Other Insurance	No Insurance
Arizona 98(1)**	54	40	39	15	5	40
Georgia 99(1)-00(1)	--	--	66	--	--	24
Florida 97(2)	55	46	--	--	--	45
Illinois 97(3)-98(4)*	58	40	47	***	21	36
Iowa 99(2)	43	41	48	14	7	37
Massachusetts 99(1)*	--	--	81	--	--	7
Missouri 96(4)*	42	39	33	25	9	32
New York 97(1)	--	35	--	--	--	--
S. C. 98(4)-99(1)	69	45	--	--	--	--
Washington 98(4)*	60	--	56	13	8	26
Wisconsin 98(2)-(4)*	80	76	--	--	--	--
District of Columbia 98(4)*	--	--	54	19	4	22
Cuyahoga 98(3)	60	46	--	--	--	--

Notes: These rates measure enrollment of the adult head who left TANF. Measures of participation by month B reported by Arizona, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, New York, and the District of Columbia B are likely to be lower than measures of participation over a three-month quarter.

\* Rates are for single-parent leavers, except that Illinois, Massachusetts, Missouri, Washington (administrative data), Wisconsin, and District of Columbia include small percentages of two-parent leavers and Washington tracks the Medicaid enrollment of both adults, not just the adult head.

\*\* Arizona data include leavers who return to TANF after one month, as well as the traditional two-month leavers.

\*\*\* Rates for employer-sponsored insurance in Illinois are included in "other."

**Table 14:6.**

## Child Health Insurance Status

Grantee & Cohort CY(Qtr)	Administrative Data:		Survey Data: Health Insurance Coverage at Interview			
	1st Qtr post exit	4th Qtr post exit	Medicaid	Employer Sponsored Insurance	Other Insurance	No Insurance
Arizona 98(1)**	--	--	51	12	8	26
Georgia 99(1)-00(1)	--	--	82	4	3	11
Florida 97(2)	--	--	57	--	--	33
Illinois 97(3)-98(4)*	--	--	53	***	23	29
Iowa 99(2)	56	55	63	11	17	20
Massachusetts 99(1)*	--	--	83	--	--	8
Missouri 96(4)*	85	86	68	14	9	11
New York 97(1)	--	34	--	--	--	--
S. C. 98(4)-99(1)	88	68	85	--	--	--
Washington 98(4)	--	--	67	9	11	13
Wisconsin 98(2)-(4)	86	80	--	--	--	--
District of Columbia 98(4)*	42	48	60	12	11	16
San Mateo 98(4)	76	59	64	--	28	9

Notes: These rates are the percentage of adult leavers with at least one child on Medicaid (or one member of a family, in Iowa, D. C. and San Mateo). SCHIP is counted as Medicaid in most surveys. As noted in Table 4, above, measures of participation by month B reported by Arizona, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, New York, the District of Columbia, and San Mateo B are likely to be lower than measures of participation over a three-month quarter.

\* Rates are for single-parent leavers, except that Illinois, Massachusetts, Missouri, and District of Columbia include small percentages of two-parent leavers.

\*\* Arizona data include leavers who return to TANF after one month, as well as the traditional two-month leavers.

\*\*\* Rates for employer-sponsored insurance in Illinois are included in "other."

**Table 14:7**

## Percentage of Leavers Receiving Food Stamps

Grantee & Cohort CY(Qtr)	Administrative Data: Food Stamp Receipt				
	1st Qtr (3 mos) post exit	2nd Qtr (6 mos) post exit	3rd Qtr (9 mos) post exit	4th Qtr (12 mos) post exit	Ever receiving within 1 yr
Arizona 98(1)	39.0	39.0	38.0	35.0	67.0
Florida 97(2)	45.0	41.0	38.0		
Illinois 7/97-12/98	33.0	35.0	34.0	33.0	56.0
Iowa 99(2)	36.0	37.0	38.0	37.0	65.0
Massachusetts 99(1)*	42.0	41.0	41.0	38.0	51.0
Missouri 96(4)*	57.0	47.0	43.0	40.0	--
New York 97(1)	--	--	--	21.0	--
S. C. 99(4)-00(1)	78.0	68.0	64.0	61.0	88.0
Washington 97(4)*	47.0	42.0	--	--	--
Wisconsin 98(2)-(4)*	70.0	68.0	65.0	63.0	83.0
District of Columbia 98(4)*	36.0	38.0	37.0	38.0	41.0
Cuyahoga 98(3)	56.0	48.0	48.0	47.0	68.0
San Mateo 98(4)	23.0	28.0	29.0	27.0	--

Notes: Grantees measuring program participation by month B Arizona, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, New York, the District of Columbia, and San Mateo B are likely to report lower program participation than grantees measuring participation over a three-month quarter.

\* Rates are for single-parent leavers, except that Massachusetts, Missouri, Washington, Wisconsin, and District of Columbia include small percentages of two-parent leavers.

**Table 14:8**

Total Household Income and Percentage of Household Income Contributed by Various Sources (Survey Data)

Grantee & Cohort CY (Qtr)	Total Cash Income: Mean(Median)	Own Earnings	Others Earnings	AFDC/TANF	Child Support	SSI	Other Income
Arizona 98(1)**	\$1,338(----)	45	40	3	3	5	3
Illinois 97(2)-98(4)*	\$964(\$800)	--	--	--	--	--	--
Iowa 99(2)	\$1,440(----)	46	35	4	6	2	7
Missouri 96(4)*	\$1,427(\$1,166)	50	20	8	6	6	8
Washington 98(4)	\$1,208 (\$1,000)	55	28	8	7	1	1
Cuyahoga 98(3)	\$1,069(----)	63	19	6	2	5	5
D. C. 98(4)*	\$1,001(\$800)	--	--	--	--	--	--
San Mateo 98(4)	---(\$1,400)	--	--	--	--	--	--

Notes: Total cash income does not include value of Food Stamps (average of \$96 in Iowa, \$100 in Cuyahoga and approximately \$129 in Arizona). Income information is based on multiple survey questions about income from various sources, except in Illinois and District of Columbia, where the survey asks one question about total household income

\* Figures are for single-parent leavers, except that figures from Illinois, Missouri and District of Columbia include small percentages of two-parent leavers, who generally have higher incomes.

\*\* In Arizona, sources of income based on a sample of leavers which includes those who return to TANF after one month, as well as the traditional two-month leavers.



**Table 14.9.**

Percentage of Leavers Reporting Food Hardships Since Exit (and While on Welfare)

Grantee & Cohort CY(Qtr)	Food insecure 1/	Food insecure with hunger 1/	Adults cut size of or skipped meals	Children skipped meals	Some other sign of food insecurity **
Iowa 99(2)	32	16	--	--	--
Massachusetts 99(1)*	43 (30)	22 (14)	--	--	--
Cuyahoga 98(3)	46	26	--	--	--
Illinois 97(3)-98(4)*	--	--	25 (24)	--	44 (51)
S. C. 98(4)-99(1)***	--	--	20 (14)	--	52
Washington 98(4)*	--	--	43 (39)	5 (4)	--
District of Columbia 98(4)*	--	--	25	--	46
Arizona 98(1)***	--	--	--	--	24 (30)
Georgia 99(1)-00(1)	--	--	--	--	13 (5)
Florida 97(2)	--	--	--	--	44
Missouri 96(4)*	--	--	--	3	26
San Mateo 98(4)	--	--	--	--	32

Notes: Figures in parentheses are percentage recalling hardship while on welfare (Arizona, Illinois, Massachusetts, South Carolina) or percentage recalling hardship among a comparison group of recipients remaining on welfare (Georgia, Washington).

\* Figures are for single-parent leavers, except that figures from Illinois, Massachusetts, Missouri and District of Columbia include small percentages of two-parent leavers.

\*\* Other signs of food insecurity include: not able to buy enough food (Florida, Missouri); food did not last (Illinois, South Carolina, District of Columbia); or not enough food to eat (Arizona, Georgia, San Mateo). Other indicators of food insecurity, such as worrying about food running out, are not shown here.

\*\*\* South Carolina survey data are limited to leavers who do not return to welfare. Arizona leavers include those who returned to TANF after one month, as well as the traditional two-month leavers.

1/ As explained in Footnote 10, families that answer "yes" to two or more questions on a six-point scale developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture are considered "food insecure," and those that answer "yes" to five or more questions are considered a food insecure with hunger.

**Table 14:10.**

Percentage of Leavers Reporting Housing or Medical Hardships After Exit (and While on Welfare)

Grantee & Cohort CY(Qtr)	Utilities cut off	Behind in rent/mort-gage	Had to move because could not pay	Evicted	Stayed at homeless shelter	Child had to live elsewhere	Unable to get needed medical care
Arizona 98(1)***	12 (18)	37 (41)	17 (21)	--	3 (4)	8 (9)	24 (14)
Georgia 99(1)-00(1)	12	18	--	4	--	--	10
Florida 97(2)	36	--	32	--	17****	19****	--
Illinois 97(3)-98(4)*	14 (26)	38 (45)	13 (15)	--	3 (4)	8 (9)	31 (26)
Iowa 99(2)	--	25	--	--	7	--	--
Massachusetts 99(1)*	26 (20)	--	--	--	2 (1)	3 (1)	--
Missouri 96(4)*	--	26	--	--	--	--	--
S. C. 98(4)-99(1)***	--	33	--	--	2 (3)	5 (5)	10 (4)
Washington 98(4)	12 (12)	--	--	7 (3)	1 (2)	3 (2)	--
District of Columbia 98(4)*	--	27 (27)	--	--	3 (5)	5 (6)	8 (3)
Cuyahoga 98(3)	19	--	26	**	**	--	10

Notes: Figures in parentheses are percentage recalling hardship while on welfare (Arizona, Illinois, Massachusetts, South Carolina, District of Columbia) or percentage recalling hardship among a comparison group of recipients remaining on welfare (Washington).

\* Figures are for single-parent leavers, except that figures from Illinois, Massachusetts, Missouri and District of Columbia include small percentages of two-parent leavers.

\*\* In Cuyahoga, seven percent were either evicted or lived in homeless shelter.

\*\*\* South Carolina survey data are limited to leavers who do not return to welfare. Arizona leavers include those who returned to TANF after one month, as well as the traditional two-month leavers.

\*\*\*\* The findings from Florida should be viewed with caution, because figures were imputed for the 77 percent of the sample that could not be located by telephone. The raw, unadjusted percentages, reported in an appendix to their final report, were closer to those reported by other States (four percent homeless and eight percent with children living elsewhere).

**Table 14:11.**

Overall Economic Well-being Before and After  
Leaving Welfare (Survey Data)

Grantee & Cohort CY(Qtr)	Better Off	Same	Worse Off
Arizona 98(1)**	68	16	15
Illinois 97(3)-98(4)*	57	30	13
Iowa 99(2)	49	32	19
Massachusetts 99(1)*	46	24	30
Washington 98(4)	60	19	21

\* Figures are for single-parent leavers, except that figures from Illinois and Massachusetts include small percentages of two-parent leavers.

\*\* Arizona leavers include those who returned to TANF after one month, as well as the traditional two-month leavers.

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## Summary 14:2 -- Implementation and Early Impacts of Connecticut's Welfare Reform Initiative

### **Background**

Connecticut's Jobs First program, a State-wide welfare reform initiative began January 1966. It was one of the first to impose a time limit on cash assistance (i.e., 21 months) on most families, unless granted an extension or exemption. The program, initiated as a Federal waiver demonstration, includes generous financial work incentives and requires recipients to participate in employment-related services targeted toward rapid job placement.

This report is part of a large-scale program evaluation being conducted by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) with primary funding from the State Department of Social Services (DSS), and funding support from the Ford and Smith Richardson Foundations and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). The study focuses on the New Haven and Manchester welfare offices – which include over one-fourth of the State's welfare caseload. This is the third publication. This report updates the implementation story, and also includes initial information about program impacts, i.e., the difference Jobs First makes relative to the welfare system that preceded it. The report follows early program enrollees in the treatment and control groups for up to two and one-half years, or slightly beyond the point when treatment group members began reaching the time limit.

### **Findings**

- The main features of the program were successfully, albeit not very intensively, implemented in the research sites. Although Jobs First group members heard a more employment-focused message, and were more likely to participate in employment-related activities than control group members, start-up problems and features of the program design resulted in intermittent monitoring of participation in these activities and a lack of reinforcement of some aspects of the program message.
- Most Jobs First group members did not reach the time limit within two and one-half years after enrollment. Of those who did, about half were granted an extension. Most cases closed at the time limit were employed and had income above the welfare payment standard. About half of those who reached the time limit and attended a time limit review meeting had income below the payment standard, and almost all were granted at least one six-month extension. Roughly one fifth of Jobs First group members were terminated due to the time limit within the report's two and one-half year follow-up period.
- Jobs First increased employment rates and earnings throughout the follow-up period, particularly for the least job ready clients. Jobs First group members were employed at a higher rate and had higher total earnings than the AFDC group. However, while Jobs First nearly doubled the employment rate for those facing multiple employment barriers, it generated almost no increase in employment or earnings for the most job ready.

- In the first part of the study period, Jobs First substantially increased both welfare and family income. However, after people began reaching the time limit, the program began to reduce welfare receipt and the income gains diminished. In the last three months of the follow-up period, the two groups had about the same total income, although the distribution between welfare and earnings was different. There is also some evidence that Jobs First may have started to leave some families worse off financially near the end of the study period.
- Jobs First is an unusual hybrid. While it has the nation's shortest time limit and a very strong work first focus, its financial work incentive is among the most generous, and many people are granted extensions when they reach the time limit. The purpose was to encourage and assist recipients to quickly find jobs and to give them a temporary income supplement. The hope was they would gain work experience and possibly build assets that would prepare them for longer-term self-sufficiency.
- The results to date highlight several emerging challenges for the program. First, staff believe the work focus may need to change as the caseload is increasingly dominated by recipients facing more serious barriers to employment. Second, with a large proportion of the caseload subject to the "one-strike" noncompliance policy (e.g., the first offense triggers a sanction), the agency needs to ensure that good cause criteria are implemented in a flexible yet reasonably consistent manner. Third, Connecticut, like most other States with dramatic welfare caseload declines, faces the challenges of promoting employment retention and career advancement among low-wage workers. Finally, the results for the welfare applicant subgroup suggest that Connecticut may want to revisit the Jobs First design in the future. The employment and earnings gains measured in this study were mostly driven by people who were already receiving welfare when the program began. In the future, most people will enter Jobs First when they are applying for benefits, many being new to the welfare system. Results indicate that the main impact is to provide additional welfare benefits to people who would have worked anyway. In addition, it is possible that the generous disregard will begin to draw some low-income families onto the welfare system.

## **Summary 14:3 -- Second Assignments to Iowa's Limited Benefit Plan**

### **Background**

The Iowa Family Investment Program (FIP) combines program changes designed to ease a family's transition from welfare to work with strict requirements that recipients participate in the development and execution of a social contract, the Family Investment Agreement (FIA). The FIA details the steps parents will take to achieve economic self-sufficiency, the financial assistance and services that the State will provide to facilitate that process and the time frame for doing so. Families which opt not to develop a FIA or fail to follow through with the self-sufficiency plan outlined in the agreement are placed on a six month Limited Benefit Plan (LBP) which leads to the complete loss of cash assistance for a six month period. After this time, participants can reapply for FIP. If participants return to FIP and again fail to meet or follow through with requirements, they are placed in a second LBP. Participants who are assigned to a second LBP are not eligible to receive FIP benefits for six months and are not given the opportunity to reconsider that assignment.

While the second LBP study was in progress, the State took steps to address the issue of LBP recidivism by making changes to LBP policy. Under the new policy, a first LBP will consist of an indefinite period of ineligibility for FIP lasting until the client reapplies for FIP and signs the FIA. A second LBP will consist of a minimum six month ineligibility period after which the client must reapply for FIP, sign the FIA and participate in PROMISE JOBS (Iowa's employment and training program) for 20 hours before benefits may resume. These changes took effect in June 1999, after the research period for this study.

Mathematica Policy Research, Incorporated (MPR) and the Institute for Social and Economic Development (ISED) conducted the evaluation using administrative data, surveys and in-depth case studies. This study follows up and complements a May 1997 study by MPR and ISED that examined FIP participants experiencing a period of no cash assistance under a first LBP assignment. The principal objective of that study was to improve the State's understanding of LBP participants, with emphasis on their financial status and coping strategies during the 6-month period of no cash assistance. The primary purpose of the second LBP study was to better understand FIP participants who had been assigned to a second LBP with emphasis on the factors and circumstances that resulted in their second assignment.

### **Findings**

The study shows that approximately 27 percent of all participants who experience a first LBP also experience a second LBP. This study also suggests that it would be difficult to identify those first LBP participants who are more at-risk of a second LBP than other first LBP participants. The policy changes implemented in June 1999 were designed to reduce LBP recidivism. Depending on the outcome of these policy changes, further steps may be desired to reduce repeat assignments to the LBP.

Most participants were assigned to a second LBP because of noncompliance with required appointments at PROMISE JOBS. Participants who failed to arrange an initial appointment most often cited a breakdown in communication between themselves and PROMISE JOBS as the reason for that failure. In contrast, participants who failed to keep a scheduled appointment with PROMISE JOBS most often cited personal and family circumstances, such as transportation problems, work and school schedule conflict, and child care problems. This study suggests that beneath these immediate reasons for noncompliance, participants often have more fundamental barriers to being able to follow through with the requirements of PROMISE JOBS such as low self-esteem, poor problem-solving skills, or the unwillingness to make employment a priority in their lives. This implies that in order to prevent noncompliance, participants and staff need to work together to identify and address not only immediate barriers but also more fundamental barriers.

The study found that while some participants experienced a decline in their standard of living after entering a second LBP, most experienced an increase or no change. Participants were more likely to be employed after entering a second LBP than before, and average total household income was higher after entering a second LBP than before. However, a substantial number of participants (one-third) experienced a decrease in household income after entering a second LBP. To help make ends meet, participants increased their reliance on social networks for access to a telephone, transportation, children's things, a place to stay, money, and food or meals. Continued access to government assistance, particularly Food Stamps and Medicaid, was also important to participants in a second LBP.



## Summary 14:4 -- Interim Process Study Report: An Implementation of Welfare Reform in Nebraska

### **Background**

**ACF awarded grant funds for an implementation and outcomes study of welfare reform in Nebraska in 1997. This interim report describes a qualitative assessment of the early implementation of Employment First in four sites conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (MPR).**

Nebraska, like other States nationwide, is reforming its welfare system. A system that previously focused on providing eligible needy families with cash assistance and other supports is now building its capacity to prepare low-income parents to work and become self-sufficient. Instead of emphasizing immediate entry into the labor market for all clients, as many States do, Nebraska's Employment First program uses an assessment-choice, case management model of service delivery which assesses clients' interests and needs and connects them with an individualized mix of opportunities and services.

Job search assistance to help clients find jobs quickly, a key opportunity offered by Employment First, is likely to be appropriate for many clients. However, other skill-building opportunities, such as work experience, post-secondary education, and vocational training, are also available to help clients who can benefit from them prepare for self-sufficiency. Sanctions and a two-year time limit on cash assistance are used to encourage client responsibility, participation, and progress.

### **Findings**

A great deal has already been accomplished in Nebraska to implement the system-wide changes that welfare reform requires. Administrators have reorganized staff, implemented new service delivery methods, and begun to develop strong community partnerships that promote service coordination. Frontline staff have reinvented their work by assuming many new responsibilities. Still, the period of implementation covered by this report represents the early stages of welfare reform in Nebraska and many challenges remain. A qualitative assessment of the early implementation of Employment First in four sites (Omaha, Lincoln, Scottsbluff, and Columbus), suggests several key findings.

- Significant progress has been made in providing case management services to clients. However, key improvements are needed to achieve full implementation of case management services to all clients.
- Group job search assistance has been implemented successfully; nevertheless, the local sites have not yet been able to fully take advantage of the flexibility that the assessment-choice model gives them to engage clients in other available employment preparation activities.

- The local sites provide a wide range of supportive services to clients in a relatively consistent way. Less progress has been made in addressing transportation, and child-care flexibility issues. In addition, case managers are facing difficulties in serving clients with more chronic personal problems, such as alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence, and mental health problems.
- Case managers apply sanctions and time limits in a manner that encourages client participation, being careful not to penalize clients when the services they need have not yet been provided. Sanctions are not always applied as strictly as policy allows, however, and case managers are uncomfortable with the discretion they have been given to determine which clients might qualify for a “hardship exemption” when their two-year time limit expires.

## **Summary 14:5 -- Evaluation of the North Carolina Work First Program - Operation of the Work First Program in Selected Counties**

### **Background**

The North Carolina Work First program was designed to help TANF parents work to support themselves and their families. The key component of Work First is the imposition of a 24-month time limit for nonexempt families receiving cash assistance. Families whose cash benefits were terminated after reaching the time limit are ineligible to reapply for welfare for three years. A month-to-month extension may be granted to families who have complied with their Personal Responsibility Contracts, but are unable to find work. Through Work First parents can receive short-term training and families can get child care and other services to assist them in becoming self-sufficient. Other policies of the program include asset and disregard changes, welfare diversion, a requirement that minor parents live at home or in a supervised living situation, and a family cap.

This report describes the operation of the Work First program in eight counties located in different regions of the State. Site visits were made by MAXIMUS, the evaluation contractor, to each of the eight counties during 1999 as part of the multi-year evaluation of the Work First program. The site visits were part of the "process evaluation" of the program, focusing on how the Work First program is being implementing and operated by selected counties.

Under Work First legislation and policy, individual counties have some degree of flexibility in how they implement and operate their Work First programs. The major goals of the site visits were to: identify innovative practices that might be of interest to State policy makers and officials in other counties; examine the challenges that counties are facing in implementing Work First legislation and policy; and determine how differences between counties in caseload trends and performance indicators may be affected by how the Work First program has been implemented in each county.

### **Findings**

The caseload declined significantly in all the counties since Work First began. However, the rate of decline has begun to level off, especially in larger counties. One of the reasons for the decline is that many of the remaining cases are the "hard-to-serve." They include individuals with severe barriers to employment. Another factor is the large number of "child only" cases remaining in the caseload. These cases are not subject to Work First time limits or work requirements. Several of the counties have begun to adopt special strategies to address the needs of the hard-to-serve cases. These strategies included creating improved linkages with other programs and services in the community and developing specialized staff positions or contractual arrangements to meet the needs of the hard-to-serve recipients.

Several of the counties had experienced a decline in the percentage of Work First recipients who were in "countable" work activities. One of the reasons was that, as previously indicated, the caseloads were increasingly made up of the hard-to-serve. These recipients are difficult to place

in jobs and have poor job retention records. Another factor in the work participation rate is that persons assigned to unpaid work experience could be required to participate for relatively few hours per week. It was expected, however, that this situation would improve when the State began allowing Food Stamp benefits to be included in the calculation of work experience hours.

The counties are using a variety of approaches to providing employment services. Many of the counties placed special emphasis on getting recipients into unsubsidized employment as soon as possible, rather than relying on such options as skills training, remedial education, or work experience. Several counties were beginning to place more emphasis on job retention services. Several of the counties had implemented special job development and employer outreach initiatives, while other counties preferred to rely on informal networking with local employers, based on previous placements of Work First recipients. Most of the counties had only recently begun to explore linkages with the Welfare-to-Work program to provide services to the hard-to-serve recipients. Several counties have instituted special initiatives focusing on the needs of recipients with substance and mental illness problems.

Staff in all of the counties were concerned about the lack of effective sanctions for non-compliance with work activity, and were looking forward to the planned changes in the Work First sanctions policy. Many of the staff expressed concerns about the difficulty of closing non-compliant cases, and it was felt that recipients often do not take the sanctions seriously and will accept a partial sanction rather than comply. In each county, workers are given discretion in determining when to apply the sanctions. Workers typically wait for a pattern of non-compliance to develop rather than sanctioning for isolated instances of non-compliance. Individual counseling will often be used to resolve non-compliance issues before a sanction is imposed.

Very few cases reached the 24-month time limit by the date of the survey. The small number of persons reaching the time limits was due to several factors. First, many recipients were motivated by the time limits and work requirements to get jobs before their benefits ran out. Second, a number of clients who were initially put on the time limits had left welfare temporarily and had not yet accumulated the full 24 months. Third, counties had difficulty absorbing all non-exempt recipients into Work First employment services when the program began. Under Work First policy, the time clock does not start ticking until employment services are provided. Fourth, in some of the larger counties, it had been necessary to add months back onto the time clock for many of the recipients because the county was not always able to provide continuous case management services to these recipients. A final factor was that families with pre-school children were initially exempt from the Work First time limits, so that, on a statewide basis, families with younger children were not brought into the program immediately.

The counties reported that relatively few cases had been processed under the Work First Diversion Assistance program, but most counties are expecting an increase because of changes in State policy regarding diversions. Under the old policy, some of the counties had been reluctant to authorize diversion assistance because of concerns that applicants might not be able to pay back the funds if they later had to reapply for welfare. The elimination of the payback requirement under the new policy is expected to result in more diversions being authorized.

In general, the counties reported few problems with the availability of adequate child care for Work First recipients moving into jobs. However, several counties have waiting lists for subsidized child care for the working poor. The availability of subsidized child care during non-traditional work hours was reported to be an issue in most of the counties. Licensed centers and day care homes provide most subsidized child care, and these providers do not generally provide services during non-traditional hours.

Counties, in general, did not see transportation as a major barrier to employment among Work First recipients, but some of the rural counties had concerns about the lack of public transit, especially during evenings and weekends. Each of the counties had undertaken initiatives to try to make transportation more readily available to Work First recipients who obtain jobs. Charlotte (Mecklenburg County) is considering placing child care centers at mass transit facilities as part of a one-stop approach. Several counties have initiatives to provide van service to Work First clients, either through the Medicaid transportation program or through other arrangements. Guilford County has an arrangement with the High Point Housing Authority to provide van service to residents of public housing projects. Some of the rural counties have car purchase and car donation programs, as well as arrangements for car repair. Avery County uses TANF funds to purchase vans. Smaller counties encourage clients to car pool or make other arrangements to get to work if they do not own cars.

None of the counties reported any major issues with enforcing the school attendance, immunization, and medical check-ups. The counties had imposed very few sanctions.

## Summary 14:6 -- Forty-two Month Impacts of Vermont's Welfare Restructuring Project

### **Background**

The Vermont Welfare Restructuring Project (WRP) is a welfare reform waiver demonstration with a time limit followed by work requirements. The program requires most recipients to participate in paid community work experience after 15 months (two-parent families) or 30 months (single-parent families) of receiving cash assistance if they cannot find work in wage-paying jobs. Participation in Reach-Up, Vermont's welfare-to-work program is voluntary until two months before recipients reach these time limits. Other policies include a set of financial work incentives requiring that minor parents live at home or in a supervised living situation and requiring parents with temporary disabilities to participate in rehabilitation and training programs. This report provides an update to the impact estimates presented in the October 1998 report entitled *Implementation and Early Impacts of Vermont's welfare Restructuring Project*. Impacts on key outcomes are presented through 42 months of follow-up.

### **Findings**

The major finding is that the work-trigger time limit was necessary for producing impacts. WRP's financial incentives alone generated no significant changes in employment or income for single families. Once single parents began to reach the 30-month work-trigger time limit, the program began to substantially increase employment rates and reduce the proportion of parents who received welfare without working. WRP changed the composition of income for single-parent families. They relied more on earnings and less on cash assistance. However, the program did not affect these families' total combined income from public assistance and earnings because the decrease in cash assistance was offset by the increase in earnings. These results do not include the Federal or State EITC, which provide additional income to many working families.

WRP's impacts for two-parent families with an incapacitated parent were generally similar to those for single-parent families. WRP did not significantly increase employment or earnings for two-parent Unemployed Parent (UP) families, but the program's incentives and changes in eligibility rules increased the receipt of cash assistance and payment amounts for these families.

The findings for both single-parent families and two-parent families are consistent with the findings presented in the 1998 report.

## **Summary 14:7 -- Early Implementation of the Welfare-to-Work Grants Program: Report to Congress**

### **Background**

Through the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 (BBA), Congress created the Federal Welfare-to-Work (WtW) Grants Program to help the hardest-to-employ welfare recipients get and keep jobs. The BBA authorized the Department of Labor to award \$3 billion in fiscal years 1998 and 1999 to States and local communities to promote job opportunities and employment preparation for those facing the greatest barriers to employment. The BBA also requires DHHS to evaluate the WtW program in consultation with the Department of Labor and to report the findings of the evaluation to Congress. DHHS has released the first report under the evaluation.

### **Findings**

This report presents an overview of WtW grantees' early implementation status and program plans, as reported in a survey of all grantees conducted in November and December 1998. Key findings include:

- Grantees are planning or beginning to provide services intended to get participants into work activity quickly, through a variety of approaches.
- Supported work activities are a major program priority. Two-thirds of survey respondents say they will help clients get unsubsidized employment, but nearly all – 91 percent – will provide supported employment activities such as wage subsidies, on-the-job training and community service as an interim step toward unsubsidized employment. This approach is consistent with the program's focus on long-term welfare recipients with severe barriers to employment and poor work experience.
- Programs are still in the very earliest stages of implementation, in part because many grantees did not get WtW funds until relatively recently. (Many grantees had received funds only shortly before the survey was conducted.) Grantees also are having difficulty recruiting participants at their anticipated pace in the early months. At the time of the survey in late 1998, 43 percent of responding grantees had enrolled clients, and these programs had enrolled an average of 64 people. For many grantees, the early pace of enrollment will need to increase if planned enrollment levels are to be achieved.
- Grantees believe that the WtW eligibility criteria are too strict. While many of the hardest to employ are being served or will be served, still more who face very similar problems could benefit from WtW services if eligibility categories were modified. Most grantees responding to the survey report that they feel the eligibility requirements for WtW are too restrictive and exclude some people from their programs who have serious barriers to employment, most notably individuals who have a high school diploma or GED but still have few basic skills.

This report is an initial step in the overall evaluation of the WtW grants program, a multi-faceted approach to understanding the impacts and implementation issues of targeting services to the hardest to employ.



## Summary 14:8 -- Rural Welfare to Work Strategies Research Synthesis

### **Background**

The *Rural Welfare to Work Strategies Research Synthesis* is one of the products developed by Macro International Inc., the contractor providing technical assistance to the ten Rural Welfare to Work Strategies projects. Rural welfare populations possess unique characteristics and face unique circumstances affecting their ability to achieve the requirements and intent of welfare reform. Although there are extensive bodies of literature both on rural matters and on welfare-related matters, there is relatively little information about rural welfare issues. This report synthesized available knowledge and developed a conceptual framework on how to develop strategies to implement and evaluate projects in rural settings based on the limitations cited in the findings below.

### **Findings**

- Current research shows the conditions that rural welfare recipient are likely to face and some ways that they differ from urban welfare recipients.
- What is most remarkable, perhaps, is the relative dearth of systematic, evaluative information about rural welfare to work strategies. For several reasons, the population and the subject have received very little attention from welfare researchers.
- The low number of welfare recipients in rural areas creates methodological challenges that evaluations cannot easily accommodate. The low figures mean that participants cannot be assigned to treatment and control groups that are large enough from which to draw statistically meaningful conclusions.
- The diversity of rural areas impedes researchers' ability to "control" for environmental conditions.
- The low incidence of rural welfare participation means that rural welfare matters are less likely to generate public and political attention than urban welfare matters.
- The resources required to produce statistically valid findings about rural welfare matters are probably substantially higher, relative to the size of the population that could be affected by those findings.
- Until ACF began the rural welfare to work strategies initiative, the Federal government (traditionally a major sponsor of important welfare-related research) had paid scant attention to welfare operations in rural settings.

## **Summary 14:9 -- Big Cities and Welfare Reform: Early Implementation and Ethnographic Findings from the Project on Devolution and Urban Change**

### **Background**

This report is the first major report from the Project on Devolution and Urban Change, being conducted by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation. This multi-disciplinary, longitudinal project examines the implementation and impacts of welfare reform in four large urban areas – Cleveland (Cuyahoga County), Ohio, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Los Angeles (County), California, and Miami (Dade County), Florida. Most welfare reform studies to date have not been in large cities, and thus have not addressed the challenges posed by high levels of unemployment and by concentrated poverty. These issues are critical because caseloads have not declined as much in cities as in other parts of the country, and also because the lessons from urban areas may be applicable elsewhere in the case of an economic downturn.

In addition, the Urban Change project brings together data from an unusually wide array of sources: longitudinal administrative data for all families receiving AFDC/TANF or Food Stamps dating back to 1992, survey data, an implementation study, neighborhood indicators, an institutional study focusing on local service providers, and an ethnographic study of a limited number of families. This will allow the researchers to capture effects that might be missed in one approach, and to improve understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each approach.

This initial report is based on the implementation and ethnographic components of the Urban Change study. The site visits and interviews were conducted during late 1997 and early 1998, at an early stage in these sites' implementation of welfare reform.

### **Findings**

The four sites were at different stages in their implementation of welfare reform. In three of the four study States (California, Florida and Ohio), the State had devolved at least some of the decisions about the implementation of welfare reform to a sub-state levels. Welfare reform has also resulted in the involvement of new organizations in the delivery of services to welfare recipients. The negotiation and implementation of both policy and administrative decisions have, in some cases, delayed the start of delivery of new services to clients. However, some patterns had emerged across the sites:

- All four States were in the process of implementing time limits. At the time of the site visits, the Los Angeles welfare department had not yet begun to inform recipients systematically about the new time limits. In the other sites, staff were delivering a strong message about the time-limited nature of welfare. Staff tended to emphasize the first time limit that clients faced, whether it was a termination time limit or a deadline by which clients must find employment, rather than the longer lifetime limits. Staff rarely mentioned extensions or exemptions, fearing that to do so would only raise false hopes.

- There has been a strong shift towards “work-first” approaches under TANF. Prior to TANF, Cuyahoga, Miami, and Philadelphia had all emphasized education and training before job search. (Los Angeles had made the shift to work-first during the early 1990s.) Since TANF, all sites have adopted a work-first approach that primarily depends upon individual job search and job clubs. Education and training are generally reserved for those participants who could not find a job during the initial job search. So far, there has been little use of unpaid work experience in these sites.
- So far, only Miami-Dade County has consistently sanctioned recipients at a substantially higher rate than before TANF. In Cuyahoga County, there was a brief wave of additional sanctions when previously non-participating clients were called in to participate in the welfare-to-work program. In the other sites, sanctions have not yet increased compared to the pre-TANF period.
- Staff and administrators at all four sites perceived the need for additional services. So far, the agencies had focused on the initial administrative hurdle of establishing a work first program and calling in almost all recipients to participate (many more than had participated in previous programs). Among the future needs identified were more staff training, improved automated data, programs for hard-to-serve recipients, intensive job development, and job retention and skills upgrading services.
- The report also contained preliminary findings based on the first round of ethnographic interviews of women living in high-poverty neighborhoods in each of the study cities.
- In general, recipients understood the basic concepts that welfare was now time-limited and that they were expected to find a job, although they did not know all the details of the policies or about the transitional benefits for which they might be eligible once they found a job. Respondents often shared some of the critical views of welfare recipients held by the general public, and said that they approved of mandatory job search requirements because it would smoke out those who were taking advantage of the system.
- Younger recipients, respondents with more limited employment histories, and recent immigrants tended to be hopeful that welfare reform would allow them to get jobs and improve their families’ lives, while those who were older and with more employment history were more cynical. They questioned whether they would really be better off, even if they were able to find jobs. Respondents in Los Angeles, who had previous exposure to job search requirements prior to TANF, were also more skeptical about the value of the program than respondents in the other cities.
- Respondents were concerned about adequate supervision of school-aged children if they went to work, as well as about the quality of child care for younger children.

## **Summary 14:10 -- Welfare Reform, the Economic and Health Status of Immigrants and the Organizations That Serve Them**

### **Background**

The Urban Institute received a grant under a cooperative agreement supported by ASPE, ACF, CMS, the Department of Agriculture and the Immigration and Naturalization Service to profile the health, employment, economic circumstances and participation in government programs of immigrants and to draw comparisons with the native population.

The study explored the effects of welfare reform on immigrant families and the organizations that serve them with special attention to both individual and institutional adaptations. The project included examination of existing secondary data with intensive data collection in two cities: Los Angeles and New York City. The grantee also conducted interviews with public and private community organizations that serve immigrants, and with immigrant families.

The final report under this study analyzed survey data collected in late 1999 and early 2000 from immigrant families. Most of the findings are consistent with other recent research findings related to poverty rates and rates of health insurance among immigrants:

### **Findings**

- More than half the people within immigrant families in Los Angeles and New York City are United States citizens, with about one-third being native, United States-born children.
- Immigrant families have relatively high rates of poverty, with recent immigrants being poorer than longer established immigrants.
- One-half of immigrant families in Los Angeles, and two-thirds in New York City, are limited English proficient (LEP), and LEP adults are nearly three times as likely to be poor as immigrants who speak English well.
- Immigrants tend to have lower incomes despite relatively high labor force attachment; labor force participation is about 80 percent for immigrant adults in Los Angeles and New York City, and 73 percent for low income immigrants.
- Similar to findings from other studies, immigrants in the two cities were less likely to have health insurance than citizens. Although immigrant adults are as likely as native citizens to be enrolled in Medicaid, they are 3 times more likely to be uninsured, because they are less likely than citizens to have job-based health insurance coverage.
- Citizen children in immigrant families are about twice as likely to have health insurance as immigrant children in those families. In general, children are more likely to be insured under the New York State SCHIP program than the California SCHIP program; the former has been in existence longer than the latter.

- Roughly one-third of immigrant families in Los Angeles and New York City are food insecure, which is about three times the level of food insecurity of native citizen families; LEP families are more likely to be food insecure than English proficient families (40 versus 21 percent in Los Angeles, and 36 versus 24 percent in New York City); about half of families where adults speak no English at all are food insecure.
- While participation of immigrant families in the Food Stamp Program declined significantly between 1996 and 2000 (by about 50 percent), the reported reasons for reduced or terminated benefits were generally unrelated to immigrant status. The most prevalent reason given was an improvement in economic circumstances. Other reasons included changes to family composition, or simply choosing to stop receiving benefits.
- Even though large proportions of food insecure immigrant families do not receive food stamps (about four-fifths in both cities), the families that do receive benefits are those most need; single parent families with children are more than twice as likely, and those with LEP adults three times as likely, to receive food stamps than other families, when controlling for poverty and immigration status.

Reports produced under this study can be obtained through the Internet at:  
<http://www.urban.org/socwelfare.htm#immigration>.