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# Welfare Reform: The Experience of Rural Pennsylvania

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# Welfare Reform: The Experience of Rural Pennsylvania

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## Introduction

This study set out to determine how families in rural Pennsylvania are doing under the welfare reform changes of the federal *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996* and specifically focused on the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.

From a caseload perspective, welfare reform appears to be successful. There were 40 percent fewer TANF recipients in July 2000 than March 1997 statewide and 55 percent fewer TANF recipients in rural counties. Furthermore, less than 13 percent of recipients who were receiving TANF in March 1997 were still receiving TANF in July 2000.

While this study did not attempt to examine why there are fewer welfare cases, it did attempt to gauge how the families that have been touched by welfare are doing socio-economically, and looked to understand families' perceptions of the challenges and barriers to leaving TANF.

## Methodology

In 2000, Dr. C. Nielson Brasher, and his team of researchers, including Dr. Philip Broyles, Dr. Deborah Jacobs, and Dr. Robert Volk of

Shippensburg University conducted the study, which consisted of three survey groups: current recipients, former recipients and caseworkers/administrators. Both recipient surveys were conducted by phone and the caseworker/administrator survey was done by mail.

The recipient surveys were limited to those families who were receiving TANF in March 1997 when Pennsylvania first implemented the federal welfare reform changes.

For the study, recipients who were still receiving benefits in July 2000 are called *Currents*, and those who were no longer receiving benefits are called *Formers*. The entire list of both *Currents* and *Formers* in rural counties was obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (DPW). For the study, counties were considered rural if at least 50 percent of the population was defined as rural, according to the 1990 Census.

From the DPW lists, a random sample of 330 *Currents* and 800 *Formers* was drawn. Ultimately, 155 *Currents* (46 percent response rate) and 286 *Formers* (34 percent response rate) were interviewed by phone.

**Table 1: County Assistance Office Respondents by County**

RURAL COUNTIES N=149				URBAN COUNTIES N=97	
Adams	3	Lawrence	6	Allegheny	12
Armstrong	2	Lebanon	3	Beaver	11
Bedford	10	McKean	10	Bucks	10
Butler	10	Mifflin	4	Dauphin	9
Cameron	1	Montour	3	Delaware	5
Clarion	13	Pike	1	Erie	13
Clearfield	9	Perry	5	Lackawanna	8
Columbia	8	Potter	7	Lehigh	15
Elk	2	Schuylkill	0	Montgomery	8
Forest	0	Sullivan	1	Philadelphia	6
Franklin	15	Susquehanna	5		
Fulton	4	Tioga	3		
Greene	2	Venango	3		
Jefferson	3	Wayne	3		
Juniata	5	Wyoming	8		

For the caseworker/administrator survey, DPW supplied staff lists from the County Assistance Offices (CAO). Caseworkers, supervisors and executive directors were surveyed. A random sample of employees was drawn from selected counties using three criteria for sample selection: the county in which a DPW employee worked, their job position, and the number of years they had been on the job. The staff list did not indicate if the employee worked with TANF recipients. Many CAO employees may not work with TANF recipients. Instead, their caseloads may include Food Stamps only recipients, Medicaid only, or other recipients who were not TANF eligible. Therefore all employees needed to be over-sampled to obtain an adequate number of usable responses.

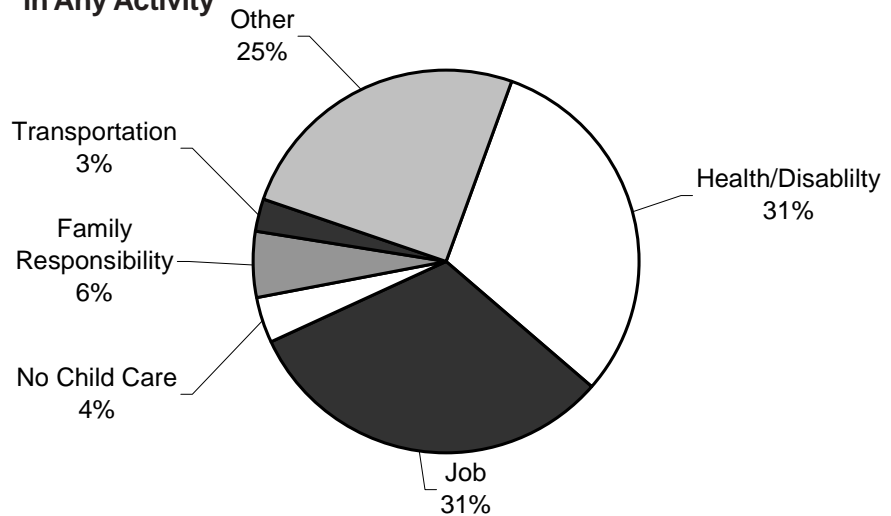
Six hundred employees, 300 from rural counties and 300 from urban counties were sampled. Respondents who did not work with TANF recipients were asked to mail back the survey uncompleted, along with a form specifying the type of recipients on their caseloads.

The 30 most rural counties and the 10 most urban counties were used in the analysis (See Table 1). Four hundred and twenty providers (80 percent) responded out of the randomly selected 520 providers. However, 166 did not work with TANF recipients and were excluded from the analysis. In all, 254 providers completed the mail survey.

### Current Recipient Results

Current recipients who were on TANF since March 1997 represent a slice of all current recipients. However, their profile is quite important because they will be the first to confront the five-year maximum

**Figure 1: Main Reasons Why Currents Are Not Participating in Any Activity**



lifetime reciprocity rule. (Note: This study was conducted before Congress proposed a regulations package in 2002 to extend the five-year lifetime limit. At the time of publication, the proposed regulations package was still being considered. Also, as of April 2002, none of the first wave of Pennsylvania TANF recipients who had faced the five-year lifetime deadline in March 2002 had been cut from the state's program.) In general, these respondents are single parents, have an average of two children and do not work. *Currents*, even just those in rural counties as in this study, are not a homogeneous group. Their individual situations and challenges are often unique.

What is most interesting about the *Currents* is that most were not participating in any "activity," which means they were not working or participating in any welfare-to-work programs. Only 28 percent were employed more than 20 hours a week and 6 percent were participating in a welfare-to-work program. In all, approximately 60 percent were not currently employed or involved in any program activity and an additional 6 percent were participating in an activity less than 20 hours per week. Thirty-one percent identified health and/or disability problems as the reason for their lack of participation while 3 percent

**Figure 2: Respondents' Hourly Wage**



cited transportation, 6 percent cited family responsibilities and 4 percent cited the lack of child-care. Twenty-five percent cited “other reasons,” which included the following: they were grandparents, in the process of getting involved, did not want to be involved, getting ready to go to school, did not know about or were not offered the opportunity, just lost a job or were looking for a job, and had eligibility issues. (See Figure 1 on page 5.)

About 10 percent worked full time and the median wage was \$6 per hour. (See Figure 2 above.)

Another important finding is that about half of the *Currents* temporarily stopped receiving TANF for more than a month between March 1997 and July 2000. (Note: This mean that on March 2002 only about half the *Currents* confronted the five-year lifetime limit. This represents about 7 percent of March 1997 recipients. This number will obviously be lower if more families stop receiving benefits in 2003.)

About 75 percent of those who temporarily stopped receiving benefits did so for employment-related reasons, such as a new job, a spouse’s job, or an increase in pay or hours worked.

Demographically, a single adult who was never married, separated, divorced or widowed headed about 75 percent of households. More than 90 percent of the single adult households were female. Sixty percent of the families did not have an additional adult in

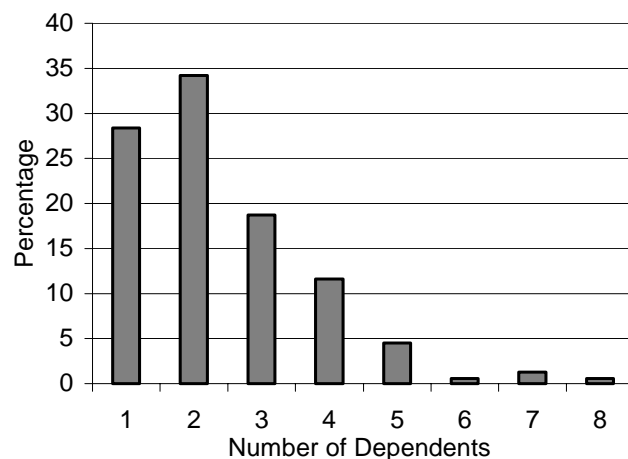
the household. Ten percent of the family heads lived with a partner while an additional 8 percent lived with a parent(s), an adult child, or other adults. In addition, 8 percent of the family heads were a non-parental relative — usually a grandparent.

On average, households consisted of 2.4 children under the age of 18. (See Figure 3

below.) About 66 percent of the families had one or two children and only 7 percent had more than four children. Smaller families make it easier from a practical and eligibility formula perspective to move off of TANF.

There was a wide variation in the distribution of children’s ages. Examining the ages of the youngest child (important for day care), the study found that 33 percent of the families had a pre-school child (ages 0-5). In 40 percent of the cases, the youngest child was grade-school age (ages 6-10). About 20 percent of the *Currents* had no children under 13, the age at which many feel that children may be left alone.

**Figure 3: Dependents Under 18 Living in Household**



Sixteen percent of families had a child under three, indicating that a small but significant number of *Currents* had an additional child since welfare reform began.

The study also found that the *Current* family heads were quite a bit older than one might think. The median age of family heads was 36. More recipients were over 40 (about 28 percent) than under 30 (22 percent). The average ages of married and divorced persons were both 39, while the average age of single persons was 31.

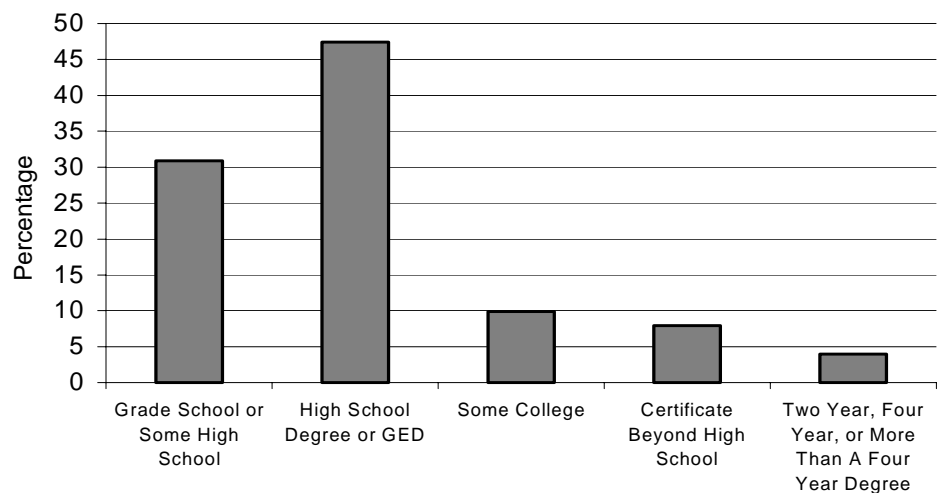
In general, the *Currents* had low education levels with about 30 percent having no high school diploma and only about 4 percent holding a college degree. (See Figure 4 above.) Most recipients reported a fair amount of work experience, however, with about 50 percent having more than five years prior work experience and only 20 percent having one year or less experience.

### Former Recipient Results

The key for *Formers'* ability to stop receiving TANF benefits appeared to be employment and support from another adult in the household. (See Figure 5 at right.)

At first glance the employment situation for *Formers* looks very encouraging. Eighty percent of all respondents reported that they have had paid work since they stopped receiving TANF and 74 percent were currently working. However, the full-time work scenario is less encouraging. Among those working, only 68 percent worked at least 35 hours per week. Therefore, only 43 percent of *Formers* were currently working full-time. Figure 6, on the following

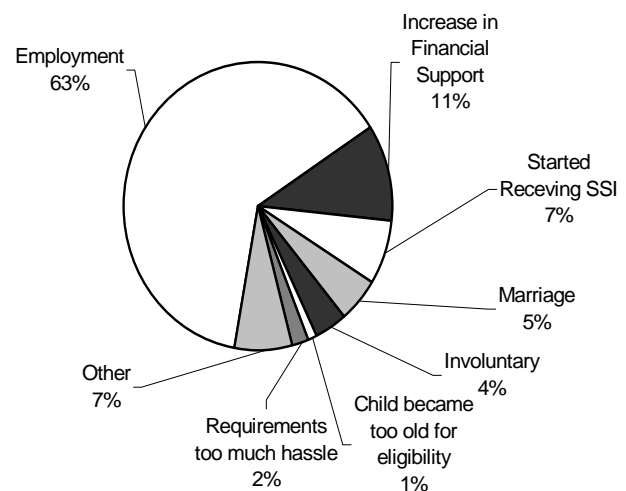
**Figure 4: Currents Educational Level**



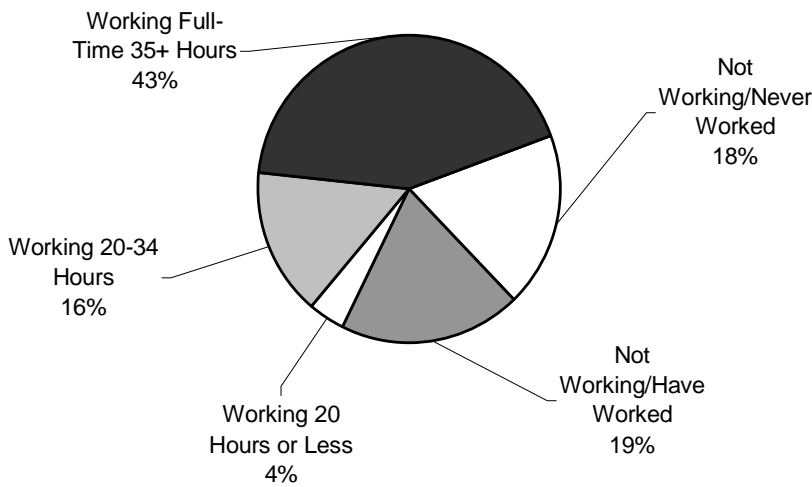
page, breaks down current work status for *Formers*.

Reasons given by those who previously worked but were no longer working typically had little to do with employment opportunities. For example, 22 percent of respondents who were no longer working reported that they were fired or laid off, 27 percent cited illness/disability, and another 33 percent cited reasons dealing with children (taking care of children, child-care problems, pregnancy.)

**Figure 5: Main Reasons Formers Stopped Receiving Cash Assistance**



**Figure 6: Employment Status (Hours are per week)**



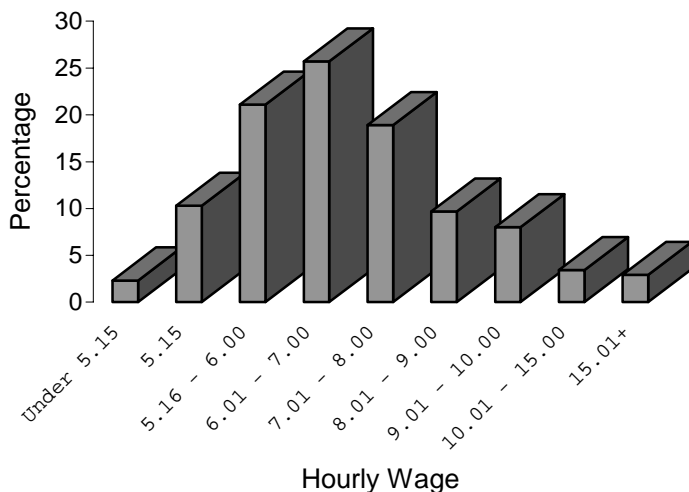
The average wage of *Formers* was \$7.37 for part-time workers and \$7.60 for full-time workers. (See Figure 7 below) However, 50 percent made less than \$6.85 and only 18 percent of all *Formers* had jobs paying more than \$2 over the minimum wage. In addition, wages were for the most part stagnant. *Formers* who had not received TANF for more than three years were making only 13 percent more than in their first job after leaving TANF. *Formers* appear, for the most part, to be stuck in low paying jobs and their wages seem to be increasing at a slow rate.

Some respondents, however, did feel that they had a decent chance for advancement. Overall, 17

percent felt their prospects were very good, and 27 felt their prospects were good. On the other hand, 22 percent were not sure and 33 percent felt their chances were poor to very poor.

As a result of low wages, family income was also low. The average reported monthly income was \$1,378 (about \$16,000 per year). Thirty-nine percent reported monthly incomes of less than \$1,000.

**Figure 7: Hourly Wages**



These low incomes meant that 55 percent of families were still under the poverty line and only 15 percent made over 150 percent of the poverty line. Consequently, 78 percent of families still relied on some form of government assistance. For example, 60 percent received medical assistance, 43 percent received food stamps, 16 percent received housing assistance and 15 percent received Social Security (SSI) and 14 percent received WIC.

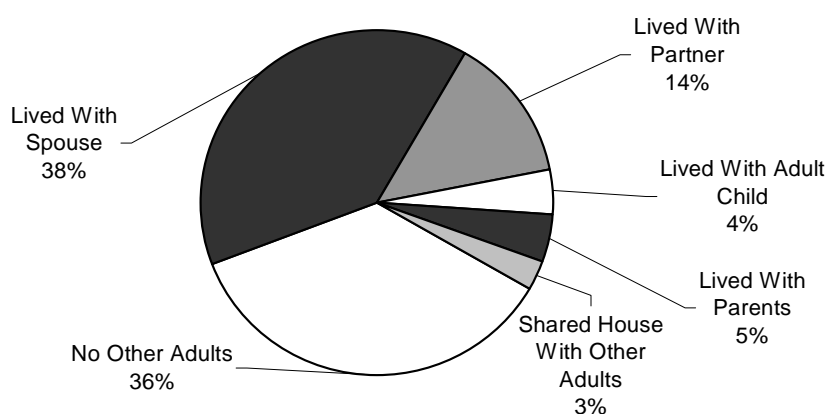
Demographically, about half the respondents had a spouse (38 percent) or partner (14 percent) living in the household. (See Figure 8 on page 9.)

Only 36 percent of the households consisted of one adult. In most cases, the other adult in the household contributed to the finances of the household. Furthermore, 40 percent received child support (as compared to 33 percent for *Currents*.) Taking into consideration another adult contributing to the household finances, child support, and SSI, only 23 percent of families did not report another income source.

Eight percent of *Formers* no longer had a child under 18 in the household. Among those with children, 27 percent had only one and 35 percent had two. Eight percent of families had four or more children.

Like the *Currents*, *Formers* had wide variation in the distribution of the ages of children. Examining the ages of the youngest child (important for day care), the study found that among those with children, 43 percent had

**Figure 8: Living Arrangements**



a pre-school child (ages 0-5.) About 15 percent of the time, the “youngest child” was 13 or older. Identical to the *Currents*, 16 percent of families had a child under three. The fact that *Currents* and *Formers* had the same percent of children, since March 1997, implies that TANF reciprocity had no bearing on the choice to have an additional child. This is contrary to the theory that TANF reciprocity provides an incentive for additional children.

The *Formers* were better educated than the *Currents*. Eighty percent had a high school diploma and 35 percent had some education beyond high school. An impressive 25 percent reported increasing their education since moving off of TANF.

With the onset of welfare reform in March 1997, 37 percent of *Formers* had been receiving assistance for less than one year and 59 percent for less than two years. Three-fourths of *Formers* left TANF within a year of the onset of welfare reform. Sixty-three percent stopped receiving TANF for employment reasons. About 10 percent of the *Formers* reported living in a different county while receiving TANF. The reasons for moving were almost evenly divided between desire for different type of house (quality of house or rent), change in family structure (marriage), or employment opportunities. The overall evidence suggests that former TANF recipients are not being forced to migrate from rural areas for job opportunities.

### **Quality of Life Measures**

On a variety of “basic need” quality-of-life factors, ranging from being homeless to having the telephone disconnected, a significant percentage of both *Currents* and *Formers* experienced difficulties. For example, 59 percent of both *Formers* and *Currents* reported “yes” to having at least one of the following problems in the past year: being homeless, being behind in rent, running out of food, or losing heat, electricity, water or telephone service. *Formers* did

better on purchasing power variables such as shopping retail, owning a home, owning a vehicle and going on an overnight vacation. (See Table 2 on page 10.) About 33 percent of *Currents* and 27 percent of *Formers* had their telephone disconnected, and most had not heard of the Lifeline program, which is designed to help families pay their basic phone bills and to ensure that low-income families do not lose their telephone service.

About 59 percent of *Formers* reported their life was better since they stopped receiving TANF assistance.

### **Barriers to Self-Sufficiency**

A majority of *Currents* reported that health/disability problems, fear of losing medical benefits, transportation, lack of work experience, lack of skills and training, and availability of jobs were barriers to self-sufficiency. Forty percent reported child-care and education as barriers. About 50 percent of *Formers* reported that fear of losing state-supported medical benefits, transportation, lack of work experience and availability of jobs were barriers to self-sufficiency. (See Table 3 on page 11.)

*Formers*, for the most part, had some form of medical assistance, however only three families reported participating in the CHIP program. Ninety-one percent had some form of health care coverage. Twenty-seven percent had private health insurance, 8 percent had health care coverage but for the parent(s) only and about 12 percent of families had health insurance only for the children (Note: These responses were self-initiated, since the survey did not ask the question directly.)

**Table 2: Measures of Quality of Life**

During the past year:	Percent Responding “Yes”		
	<i>Currents</i>	<i>Formers</i>	Difference
Homeless for more than a week	8	5	-3
Behind in rent/mortgage (more than once)	34	35	1
Heat cut off	15	11	-4
Electricity cut off	11	9	-2
Telephone cut off	33	27	-6
Water cut off	6	5	-1
Not enough food to feed household	24	25	1
Yes to at least one of the above	59	59	0
Yes to at least two of the above	33	42	+8
Primarily obtain clothes from non-retail	48	35	-13
No car, van or truck	35	18	-17
No overnight vacation	75	65	-10
Live in single detached home	40	45	5
Live in a mobile home or trailer	14	22	8
Own home	18	27	9
Average Time for Leisure Note: This is based on a 1-5 scale where 1 is no time and 5 is a lot of time	2.79	2.60	-0.19
Average Time for Children Note: This is based on a 1-5 scale where 1 is no time and 5 is a lot of time	4.28	3.89	-0.39

Most families relied on an informal network of friends and family for childcare, with only 16 percent of *Formers* and 17 percent of *Currents* using a daycare center or provider’s home. Of those who paid for childcare, 52 percent of *Formers* and 27 percent of *Currents* used a daycare center or provider’s home. Only about 12 percent of *Currents* and 9 percent of *Formers* reported receiving a government subsidy for child-care. When asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement that they are satisfied with their daycare arrangement, roughly 80 percent of both

*Currents* and *Formers* said they agreed. However, a significant minority also agreed with the statement that they had trouble finding quality daycare (30 percent *Currents* and 33 percent *Formers*).

Transportation was a major problem for many families. The need for help with transportation was the most frequent response in the open-ended part of the *Current* recipient survey. Thirty-five percent of *Currents* and 17 percent of *Formers* did not use a vehicle (car, van, truck) as their primary means of transportation. About 50 percent of *Currents* and 75 percent of *Formers* had reliable transportation, and

**Table 3: Barriers to Self-Sufficiency in Percentages**

Potential Barrier:	<i>Formers</i>		<i>Currents</i>	
	Major Problem	Minor Problem	Major Problem	Minor Problem
Disability	19	8	38	11
Health	21	8	30	11
Health or Disability	24	9	43	14
Fear Losing Medical Benefits	50	16	43	15
Child-care	28	16	20	20
Elderly-care	4	3	2	7
Transportation Problems	31	19	38	18
Lack of Education	20	18	18	21
Lack of Skills and Training	24	23	25	30
Lack of Work Experience	22	28	27	21
There are not Jobs Available	29	24	31	26
Do not Know How to Find a Job	2	8	1	11
Do not Wish to Work	5	7	3	9
Problems with Domestic Abuse	9	5	3	4
Addicted to Controlled Substance	4	4	2	2

53 percent of *Currents* and about 33 percent of *Formers* reported that transportation occasionally or often caused them problems with employment or looking for employment.

### ***Interaction with Caseworkers***

Two questions were asked concerning respondents' interaction with caseworkers. The first asked whether respondents were treated with respect by caseworkers and the second asked whether respondents felt they had a good understanding of what would happen if they no longer received TANF benefits — especially in regards to child-care, health benefits and other programs. In general, caseworkers fared well on both questions among both *Formers* and *Currents*.

Sixty-six percent of the *Formers* and 72 percent of the *Currents* felt they were treated with respect by

caseworkers. It is interesting that *Currents* felt they received more respect than *Formers*. One reason for the difference may be that *Currents* were more fearful to criticize their caseworker.

Respondents who thought they were not treated with respect often commented that the caseworkers “looked down upon them” or “they felt it was their money.” In general, respondents felt they were treated with respect but a sizable minority disagreed.

Respondents also felt they had a good understanding of what would happen with regards to other programs if they increased their earning and were no longer eligible for TANF assistance. More than 80 percent of both groups stated they had a good understanding. However, if this is true, why does such a large majority of *Currents* fear losing their health benefits?

## ***Factors Contributing to TANF Recipiency, Employment, Poverty Status, Income and Wages***

### **TANF Status**

The most important factors distinguishing those still on TANF from those who have moved off included disability status, education, employment and marriage. Those who were not disabled, were married, had at least a high school education and were employed were less likely to receive TANF. Receiving child support and living in a county with fewer per capita TANF cases also were related to not receiving TANF.

In addition, those with fewer children were more likely to be off of TANF. Those who reported child-care, fear of losing medical benefits, domestic abuse and lack of skills and training as barriers to self-sufficiency were more likely to be off of TANF. However, those who reported disability and transportation problems were more likely to continue to receive TANF assistance.

### **Employment and Wages**

The key ingredients to sustaining employment were having a high school education, not being disabled and having more children to support. Having some college education or a certificate beyond high school furthered the probability of being employed. Families with an older youngest child were also more likely to be employed.

While high school education appeared to be a key to being employed, it was not a factor in higher wages. Those receiving higher wages tended to have some college or a certificate beyond high school. Those with transportation problems also had lower wages.

### **Poverty and Income**

The two factors that were the most important to higher income and avoiding poverty appeared to be marriage (or living with a partner) and full-time employment. Those with a college education had higher family incomes. Collecting child support was also seen as helpful to a family's income.

### **County Assistance Office Employees' Perspective**

Providers cited a number of factors that hindered the ability of both former and current recipients

to be more self-sufficient. The lack of transportation, lack of motivation, lack of job skills, low paying jobs and mental health or substance abuse problems were all perceived as major barriers to self-sufficiency by 75 to 80 percent of the CAO respondents. Variations between rural and urban respondents were noted in the areas of lack of transportation (greater in rural areas) and substance abuse and domestic violence problems (greater in urban areas). Overall, executive directors were more likely than caseworkers to see transportation, domestic violence and personal or family medical problems as major barriers and they were less likely to view lack of motivation as a barrier.

The results were similar when focusing on major barriers for just current recipients. Major barriers (over 60 percent reporting) included: lack of motivation, low paying jobs, lack of job skills, mental health or substance abuse problems, and personal or family medical problems. The only variation between rural and urban respondents was noted in the area of lack of transportation (65 percent in rural areas and 49 percent in urban). Overall, executive directors were more likely than caseworkers to view the lack of transportation, job skills, jobs that match skill levels, and childcare as major barriers.

More than 50 percent of rural respondents thought that more transportation and more good jobs were needed. Urban respondents were more concerned with smaller caseloads to improve services.

A variety of reasons were given for why former recipients move back on to TANF. The most frequent responses focused on personal qualities such as lack of effective coping skills, mental health or substance abuse problems, and lack of job skills.

Ninety percent of the respondents felt that TANF reforms were at least somewhat successful. In addition, more than 70 percent of respondents thought that TANF had succeeded in getting recipients jobs and providing resources necessary for employment. About 50 percent believed TANF had succeeded in getting recipients into training programs and reducing caseloads.

## ***Policy Recommendations***

### **Treatment of Inactive Currents**

There are many *Current* families who are not participating in any work or program activity. Most of these are classified as disabled or having health problems. Enforcing the five-year, lifetime rule requires an obligation to ensure that all recipients have the best chance of becoming self-sufficient. Exempting a large number of persons from participation in any program activity does not enhance these chances. A thorough examination should be made as to the extent of each participant's disabilities. Participants who are severely disabled should receive SSI. The state does provide an advocate for this purpose. CAOs should ensure that all disabled recipients who might qualify are taking advantage of this opportunity. For other recipients, coordination should be in place with other agencies to assist in dealing with disabilities and other social problems.

The fact that so many recipients reported health/disability problems and that many providers cited "personal challenge" associated with TANF reciprocity suggests that there is a need to better coordinate with other social service agencies. (*Note:* In the last 30 years, the CAOs have been quite separate from the county level social service system. Even the organizational structure differs with the CAO staff being direct employees of the state and the county MH/MR, Aging, Substance Abuse, and Children and Youth staff being county employees. This division was strengthened in the 1970s when social services was separated from assistance payments throughout the country and CAO caseworkers were no longer required to have the level of skills necessary to assess the comprehensive needs of recipients. The consequence of this arrangement was that CAO workers had little involvement in recipients' lives except for financial eligibility and the occasional referral to another agency without active involvement in the process. With the 1996 TANF changes, however, the role of the CAO caseworkers has been extended to include more case management.)

Coordination of services among the various

agencies must occur if the recipients and returnees are to get the appropriate assistance to help them to their highest level of self-sufficiency. Many families currently on TANF have complex needs that cannot be met by the issuance of a check or the demand to attend a welfare-to-work program. Good assessment and intervention on the appropriate levels is required to help recipients achieve self-sufficiency.

An effort at just such coordination of services is being considered by DPW. Several actions might lead to a greater likelihood of success. First, an assessment process that identifies clients in need of multiple agency intervention should be adopted. This assessment needs to go beyond the current doctor's authorization of a disability that exempts the recipient. It needs to be a thorough process that identifies areas of need and can guide a plan to assist the client towards self-sufficiency. Second, agency organizational structures need to be willing to cooperate. Collaboration and cooperation across human service agencies is managed successfully only if there is recognition of the barriers and deterrents that exist to the process and if the resources are made available to accomplish efforts to overcome these problems. Third, CAO workers will need to have the skills to participate in comprehensive service planning teams for clients who become part of a multi-system coordinated effort. (*Note:* There are many recipients who have temporary need for assistance in financially supporting their children and who do not have broad social service needs. These recommendations are not a blanket effort to "interfere" in the lives of those persons. Rather, the recommendation begins with a comprehensive assessment of recipients' needs so that a customized plan is developed for each person that gives him/her a running chance at success in his/her efforts toward self-sufficiency.)

Alternative programs to the packaged "welfare to work" efforts will need to be devised to respond to identified needs. Workers have spoken about the many problems faced by recipients that need to be conquered before basic job skills can be a part of their every day lives. These problems include

mental health, health and substance abuse problems and the accompanying lack of motivation that may occur. The specialized programs could be developed with input of ideas and resources from Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Mental Health/Mental Retardation, Substance Abuse, and Children and Youth, as well as other contracted services that may be appropriate.

Because the state can exempt 20 percent of cases from the five-year rule, it should consider “stopping the clock” for families who it deems “exempt” from participation. (See *Note* on page 5.) This would not need to apply to all exempt categories. The exemption, however, may enable the Department of Public Welfare and other state agencies to ensure that child-care and transportation are provided. The state would not need to “stop the clock” for those exempt persons who refuse to cooperate in any way. This might help give the state more leverage in encouraging participation from exempt persons who could be helped by non-work related social services.

### Transportation

Creative efforts need to continue to address the issue of transportation for recipients and former recipients in rural areas. For example, Pennsylvania took a step in the right direction by allowing TANF recipients to have a car (no matter what the value) count against the asset limit.

More effort needs to be made available to help in repairing vehicles, purchasing vehicles and helping persons obtain a drivers license. Under TANF guidelines, states have the options of aiding with repairs, insurance and facilitating the donation and repairs of old vehicles. Currently the state offers \$750 for repairs and purchases of vehicles. This has proven very valuable in many cases. However, in some cases it is not enough (especially for car purchases), and few discernible efforts have been put into helping with insurance payments. TANF also allows eligible individuals to receive no-interest loans to lease or purchase cars. In revolving loan programs,

recipients are given the money needed to buy or lease a car and then pay back the loan with no interest. The program also allows for private or public social service agencies to lend money to buy or lease cars to recipients, who then pay back the money in small, affordable payments.

### Wages

If the goal of welfare reform is to promote self-sufficiency of recipients— and not just to reduce TANF cases – then DPW should be encouraged to focus its efforts to finding and promoting career opportunities, and not just jobs, for its clients. Assuming no new influx of high paying jobs will be coming to rural Pennsylvania and the minimum wage will remain the same, the challenge is to have persons maximize their earning potential. The best way this can be done is through skill training and education. Therefore, the state should increase efforts to provide education and skill training to *Current* and *Former* TANF recipients. In addition, studies of job training for welfare recipients suggest that the biggest problem facing newly trained employees is available jobs that fit their training. Thus, agencies and employers need to join a partnership that provides training for real existing jobs, such as with the local or regional Workforce Investment Boards.

There are numerous ways the state could help facilitate education. One way is to provide child-care and transportation for those involved in an educational activity. While the state is allowed to pay for these expenses, some recipients reported that they did not receive assistance.

A second is to encourage education and training while working in a paid or unpaid job. In the skill areas, this can be done by a greater use of on-the-job training and government-subsidized employment. In the education area, DPW could help facilitate employment with flexible work schedules to allow for education. More work could be done in contracting and coordinating with trade schools and community colleges to come out into the rural areas to provide training.

Finally, recognition should be made of the value of obtaining employment with advancement potential over simply obtaining a job.

### **Child-care, Child Support and Medical Assistance**

Child-care was not as large a problem as the researchers expected. However, there are still areas of concern. Efforts need to continue to be made to facilitate more daycare and licensed providers. An in-depth study should be considered to examine the positive and negative implications of so many unlicensed providers caring for children. In addition, efforts need to be made to ensure all families who are eligible for government assistance in child-care are receiving aid. The state should continue or increase its efforts to collect child support. Child support was a factor in helping families move off of TANF and in increasing family income.

The state needs to be prepared to continue to provide medical assistance to families who are not eligible for TANF. The state should also examine new ways to provide for health insurance for many parents who only have government coverage for their children. Furthermore, caseworkers need to better communicate to recipients that they usually do not lose their medical coverage if they stop receiving TANF.

### **Lifeline Program**

Because a telephone is usually important in obtaining and maintaining employment, a stronger effort should be made to inform all TANF recipients of the existence of the Lifeline program. The program, mandated by the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission, is offered by local telephone providers to make telephone services affordable to low-income Pennsylvanians. A special effort should be made to contact all recipients who have lost their phone service.

## **Future Considerations**

During the 1990s and the period in which this study was conducted, welfare reform had been aided by a strong economy and low unemployment rates. That was the good news. The question at the time was, what would happen to recipients if the economy entered into recession and unemployment rates rose? The gathered data indicated that many respondents depended on one person's wages for the family's income and many respondents reported that if they lost their job, they would need to go back on TANF. Clearly, changes in economic conditions would cause fluctuations in county and state caseloads.

In late 2001 and early 2002, the economy entered into recession and unemployment rates rose.

Taking these conditions along with other events of the time into consideration, Congress responded by proposing a regulations package that would extend the five-year lifetime limit to receiving benefits. As of April 2002, however, that package was pending.

As of April 2002 in Pennsylvania, none of the first wave of Pennsylvania TANF recipients who had faced the five-year lifetime deadline in March 2002 had been cut from the state's program.

In September 2002, TANF is set for reauthorization, and all interested parties are working to let Congress know how they want TANF to work.

For example, according to *State Government News*, the publication of The Council of State Governments, the nation's governors are in the process of setting their goals, and in a proposal drafted for Congress, the governors are asking for more money and flexibility in running their welfare programs.

Advocates in Pennsylvania are working with the Department of Public Welfare to present proposals that are based on five-years of working knowledge of the program.

From these examples, it is clear that both government and private agencies are working to secure some type of program balances and flexibility for the future.

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